Julius Caesar in Western Culture
Julius Caesar in Western Culture

Edited by Maria Wyke

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This collection of essays developed out of an international conference held at the British School at Rome in March 2003. On the fifteenth of that month, as on the Ides of March every year, spring flowers were placed ceremoniously at the feet of a bronze statue of Julius Caesar that stands in the heart of Rome. Even though, for centuries, many Italians have raised a toast to Caesar on the anniversary of his murder, this particular ritual dates back only as far as the Fascist regime. The yearly adoration of the Roman dictator was originally designed to encourage in participants an equal adoration of their own twentieth-century dictator, Mussolini.

It is not just in Italian culture, however, that Julius Caesar has continued to hold court. Associated with a crucial turning point in the history of western civilization from republic to empire, the Roman statesman quickly took on monumental, almost mythic, proportions at the same time as he was elevated to the ranks of the divine. Right from the time of his own somewhat spare accounts of himself, his life (whether as founder or destroyer) became a huge resource through which to support or challenge conquest and imperialism, revolution, dictatorship, monarchy, and assassination. Either by analysis, re-presentation, or direct imitation, Caesar has been and continues to be a significant term in western culture.

The essays collected in this volume seek to examine important aspects of Caesar’s role in western culture across a wide chronological range and diverse media. While retaining a strong focus on Julius Caesar, individual chapters are often interdisciplinary and cross-cultural. Ranging over the fields of history (religious, educational, military, as well as political), archaeology, architecture and urban planning, the visual arts, and literary, film, theatre, and cultural studies, the chapters examine the
Caesars of Italy, France, Germany, Britain, and the United States in particular. The objects of analysis vary, from Caesar’s own commentaries on the Gallic wars composed in the 50s BCE to a cinematic narrative of the defeat of Vercingetorix released in 2000, and on to Caesarian analogies for George W. Bush and his “American empire” that achieved global prominence early in the twenty-first century.

Such diversity is, however, tightly framed within the book’s various sections. *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* opens with an introduction which investigates those early writings of Caesar’s life that stamped him with historical importance and came to dominate all his subsequent reception. In contrast to his own confident self-presentation in his commentaries, the classical biography of a Plutarch or a Suetonius turns Caesar into a dramatic moral problem: Is such a life the right one to live? Should such a life be terminated? The first section of our collection, “Literary Characterization,” then remains with the classical and late antique period to broaden our opening concern with writing Caesar, and to look beyond the dominant historiography at other constructions of the dictator (whether as victim, hero, or villain).

The second section, “The City of Rome,” explores Caesar’s reception from the Middle Ages to the High Renaissance and shifts attention from writing to the materiality of the memory of Caesar. It investigates the importance of place in the original affirmation of Caesar’s power, the perpetuation (as well as the loss) of the memory of Caesar’s monuments and the corresponding monumentality of his person, and the ritual reenactments of Caesarian triumphalism through the urban landscape of Rome in order to authorize and celebrate the power of both emperors and popes.

The central section of the volume, “Statecraft and Nationalism,” moves beyond material memory and ritual imitation in the city of Rome to explore Caesar’s new crucial function in discourses of government, nationalism, and empire. Advancing from the early modern period through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on into the new millennium, these chapters explore Caesar’s place in the national identities of France, the United States of America, and Italy by analyzing the discourses of popular culture and pedagogy as well as those of political science and oratory. Caesar’s twin receptions here come to the fore – as both model and anti-model. Reproduction of his excessive ambition will drive nations to civil unrest or damaging imperialism. Reproduction of his strong leadership and thirst for conquest will render nations firm, powerful,
and glorious. The act of reading or even watching Caesar can, variously, stimulate a distasteful bellicosity in individuals, educate them in the cruelty of conquerors and the heroism of resistance, forge a civic or national spirit, and shape a cultivated person.

The final two sections return to reconsider the same time spans as the central section, while focusing on different (but interrelated) aspects of Caesar’s reception. “Theatrical Performance” begins with an investigation of the ambivalent politics of Shakespeare’s hugely influential play and moves on to consider more controversial stagings of Caesar as a Superman or political and military genius. It explores the performance history of Caesar as progressively interlocked with discourses of monar- chism, republicanism, colonialism, and fascism, and draws attention to the ways casting, performance, or audience expectation affect understanding of the Caesars who appear on stage.

The final section, “Warfare and Revolution,” considers the pragmatics of being Caesar for the modern general or statesman, while also returning us to the volume’s initial interest in Caesar’s own writings as crucial to his later reception. From the late sixteenth century, to be Caesar on the battlefield began to require not the direct adoption of his military strategy and tactics but the more abstract imitation of his extraordinary courage, leadership, and ingenuity, while, in the political domain of later centuries, the writings of Caesar could be used to legitimate recourse to revolution, and the crossing of modern Rubicons. Thus *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* explores the strikingly direct impact of Caesar on the modern history of western culture.

The volume closes with an Afterword by the editor that examines a new and immensely topical role for Caesar in the political discourses of the early twenty-first century. Critiques of American empire and the imperial presidency of George W. Bush, prompted by the invasion of Iraq, have regularly drawn on and transformed anew the rich reception history of the Roman dictator outlined in this volume.

Great thanks are due to the Leverhulme Trust whose generous award of a Major Research Fellowship allowed me to begin my own research into the reception of Julius Caesar and to initiate the conference which led to this volume. The Director of the British School at Rome, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, generously provided a superb setting for the conference as well as warm hospitality. His assistant, Sarah Court, organized all the administrative aspects of the conference so smoothly as to leave me free to concentrate on the more academic and social matters, while Maria Pia
Malvezzi proved adept at tracking down a version of Enrico Guazzoni’s *Cajus Julius Caesar* (1914) suitable for screening at the event.

I owe a special debt of gratitude also to Christopher Pelling, who kindly agreed not only to be a plenary speaker but also, subsequently, to read and comment on all the essays submitted for inclusion in this volume. It is a better book for the attention he has been kind enough to pay to it.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this collection to Jonathan Walters and Dominic Montserrat, good friends of mine and lovers of the classics, who both tragically died during the course of its preparation.
Part I
Introduction
The conference from which this book was born took place in spring 2003, just after the Second Gulf War had begun. It was impossible for speakers and for audience to escape from the shadows that the conflict cast: issues of tyranny and freedom, of preemptive strikes, of empire, of slaughter, of deeply contestable questions of right and wrong were in all the participants’ minds. Julius Caesar had always been an equivocal figure, as this volume will make very clear. Within a few generations of his death the elder Pliny would admire the extraordinary range of Caesar’s ability, but still doubt whether the Gallic campaigns were really so glorious, “so great a wrong to the human race, even if a necessary one” (tantam etiamsi coactam humani generis iniuriam, NH 7.91–2). In the spring of 2003 similar ideas were in the air: cartoons figuring the American president as Caesar were appearing in the press, and they were not friendly ones. Yet that is itself testimony to the lasting immediacy of Julius Caesar, for the man has always been a way of thinking about the present as well as the past. It is human nature to seek lessons from the past to illuminate the present; it is even more inevitable that the issues of the present create the filters by which we understand the past. The essays in this volume help us to see this, as in one period or culture after another the two perspectives of the first century BCE and of a later society come together. And doubtless we contributors are often writing about the present day too; such is the nature of scholarship, for good and for ill.

Let us take Shakespeare. At the beginning of the second act of Julius Caesar, Marcus Brutus is musing. There are all sorts of pressures on him
Christopher Pelling

to act in order to remove a tyrant, to act in defense of the freedom that was his and the Romans’ life-blood.

It must be by his death . . .

Consider all the things that Caesar might do unless he is stopped now:

so Caesar may;
Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent’s egg
Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell . . .

( Jul. Caes. 2.1.10, 27–34)

– a stark conclusion. So he must be removed, not for what he is, but for what he may become.¹ This is a preemptive strike, and it is a strike in the cause of freedom. One sees too why he must persuade himself like this. It is partly a matter of his family. This is a duty inherited from an earlier Brutus, the first Brutus who overthrew the first tyrant: this is a debt that has now come down to Marcus.

No audience at the beginning of the twenty-first century could avoid the contemporary resonance, as George W. Bush turned again to Iraq and continued in the path of his father a decade before. No audience, either, could avoid noticing that this language of preemptive strikes is rather different from that of the other characters in the play, most of whom are offended enough by what Caesar is already. Nor could any audience avoid having their response to Brutus affected, probably indeed directed, by their views of the present. Not that everyone will be sensitized by current events in the same direction. Some theatregoers will be more inclined to give Brutus the benefit of the doubt: the cause is not ignoble, the man tries his best, he does not take this course lightly, and who can be sure that he is wrong? Others will find Brutus’ perception wildly askew. He and others readily believe that, once the tyrant is removed, freedom will be restored, and all will be well. But will it be so easy? Once the tyrant is removed, will that simply be the answer? A shrewder judge than Brutus, Mark Antony, foresees what will happen, with the killing not ended, but
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Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar,
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quartered with the hands of war . . .
(Jul. Caes. 3.1.265–8)

The consequences are shattering. Does not the man who most believes in the rhetoric of freedom see things just a little too simply?

Those may be the natural thoughts of theatregoers now, and any director will have ideas abut how to exploit them. Readers of this book in ten or twenty years’ time will be able to reflect on whether they are still the thoughts then. Responses in the past, as well as those in the speculative future, may give us pause, making us wonder if Shakespeare himself is quite so simple about this as a politically engaged modern audience may be: for the stage-history of Julius Caesar suggests that most directors and most audiences have thought that, basically, Brutus was more right than wrong.² It is even clearer, though, that this play has always had a way of being highly relevant to the present, whenever the present has happened to be. There was the 1937 production of Orson Welles, with Caesar looking like Mussolini; there was the 1968 version with Caesar resembling General de Gaulle – a weak old man, but the conspirators quail before him all the same; there was the 1980s presentation of a Caesar recalling Fidel Castro (played in Miami, and there again the audience’s pre-existing views distorted the moral balance of the piece); there was the 1993 production in London when Julius Caesar was played by a prime-ministerial-looking woman.

That was doubtless already the case when the play was first performed. Shakespeare’s Caesar is so very frail, there in his night-gown, deaf in one ear, collapsing in the assembly, humiliated as he tries to race Cassius across the river: and this was after all when Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne for fifty years, when a succession crisis was looming, when there was a vigorous intellectual debate about the strengths and weaknesses of Republicanism.³ Some of that again sounds rather contemporary to a modern British audience: the different perspectives do have that way of coming together.

Nor is it just Shakespeare’s play that has found contemporary resonances in Caesar’s story – and in particular Caesar’s death. For it is regularly the death which makes the story especially absorbing and thought-provoking, and at times, for instance for seventy-five years after
the British civil wars, so provocative that it was hardly possible to talk about it at all: regicide was too hot a theme. Even the best-connected could not do it. Around 1716 the Duke of Buckingham revised and expanded the Shakespearean material into two plays, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* and *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus*: they were never performed. And we can find several cases around that time when disaffected authors took their censored plays and performed them in Italy.\(^4\)

There were other ways of dealing with the delicacy of regicide. Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*, put on in London in 1724, switches the king who is to be killed: the victim here is the Egyptian king Tolemaeo, infantile, sulky, feline, with angular music to match. Everyone seems to think that killing him is a good idea: his sister Cleopatra, his right-hand villain Achilla, Pompey’s widow Cornelia, her son Sesto, and Caesar himself. It is not so much a whodunnit, it’s a who’s-going-to-do-it. And the theme of justifiable regicide is put into a safe and distant world, far away in Egypt: a mixture of regicide and good fun.

But death, regicide, is still what Caesar’s story focuses on first: and that is even true for those who found the other aspects of Caesar’s life inspiring, particularly those people who liked to present themselves as following in Caesar’s pattern – the first strand in Caesarian reception, *how very like myself...*, and one of which we shall see a good deal in this volume. Normally this strand is a matter of propaganda and projection, but one can see a more reflective element too. When one reflects on a historical figure, one needs more than slogans, and one usually needs more than a single, straightforward idea of “great general” or “world-conqueror”: above all, one needs a narrative. Narratives have beginnings and endings – indeed, one reason that life-narratives work particularly well is that the beginnings and endings are unusually clear-cut. And the question of Caesar’s end, and what it means, becomes a critical issue.

Take Napoleon I, the great Bonaparte.\(^5\) His précis of Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* shows not merely interest, but also considerable critical thought (the military observations are still very much worth reading); that thoughtfulness is even clear in its version of the first words, “all Gaul was divided into *four* parts” – not in fact one of the great mistranslations of all time, for Napoleon knew that Caesar was not including in his “three parts” southern Gaul, already a Roman “province.” For Napoleon too it was the end that mattered most in the story, as the emperor was stirred to fury by Caesar’s assassination. For him it was a “cowardly and impolitic” deed.
Judging Julius Caesar

(not quite the “foul” deed that it is for Shakespeare’s Antony: Napoleon, the man of statecraft, thinks politically). It was an “absurd and calumnious charge” that Caesar was aiming at monarchy: he could not possibly want monarchy, any more than his successors could for six hundred years; he did not wish to rule in any way other than as consul, dictator, or tribune. Why want to be king? Absurd, for kings thronged the vestibules of Roman magistrates. And it was equally absurd to think that he wished to become king of the provinces, for would the East feel any more respect for a Roman king than for their own princelings of the past? . . . Who is Napoleon talking about there? About Caesar, or about himself – the great man of Europe, but the man who had ruled a country which had removed its kings so disrespectfully? And the man who had ruled as first consul, then as emperor, and who in his final days expressed his wish that his bloodline would spend as little time as possible at the court of kings; let them marry and live in Republics, especially in the United States of America? 7

For in those days the hearts of the two great radical and revolutionary nations beat closely together. In spring 2003 Julius Caesar could also be a way of thinking about how history could change.

Telling the Story

So once one starts turning Caesar into a story rather than a slogan, the death becomes central: that was already the case in the ancient texts. But it works differently depending on whether it is told as a Brutus story or as a Caesar story. As a Brutus story, concentration on the death naturally becomes an issue of right and wrong: is this really the right thing to do? One can figure that in terms of regicide and its justifications: we have seen a little of that already in more modern versions. The ancient way was to see it in more personal terms, as a question of ingratitude. When Brutus and Cassius had been treated so well, could it ever be justifiable to turn against their benefactor?

The greatest charge they lay against Brutus – that he was saved by Caesar’s favor, was allowed to save as many of his fellow-prisoners as he wished, was regarded as his friend and was favored above many others, then became the assassin of his savior . . . (Plutarch, *Comparison of Dion and Brutus 3.4*) 10

——— 7 ———
Country or friend? That issue is there immediately after the killing, and not just with Brutus and Cassius. There is the letter of C. Matius in autumn 44 BCE, when Cicero has gracelessly criticized him for grieving for Caesar:

I am well aware of the criticisms which people have levelled at me since Caesar’s death. They make it a point against me that I bear the death of a friend hard and am indignant that the man I loved has been destroyed. They say that country should come before friendship – as though they have already proved that his death was to the public advantage. But I shall not make debating points. I acknowledge that I have not yet arrived at that philosophical level. It was not Caesar I followed in the civil war, but a friend whom I did not desert, even though I did not like what he was doing . . . (C. Matius to Cicero [Oct. 44 BCE], Fam. 11.28 = 349, trans. Shackleton Bailey)

So: friendship ahead of cause. There he is, the anti-Brutus, deciding the other way: and in this dilemma, it is already clear that the tyrannicides do not have all the best tunes.

If it is made a Caesar story rather than a Brutus story, then the death shapes it differently: it comes at the end rather than in the middle, and, if there is a moral to be drawn, it no longer focuses on Brutus’ own dilemma. Once it is a Caesar moral rather than a Brutus moral, the point becomes rather different: This is what happens to people like that. One way or another, Caesar had it coming.

“One way or another . . .” – and the ways can indeed vary, with different sorts of moral interest. Let us start from Aristotle, who in the Poetics firmly declares that there is nothing tragic in the case of a good man who is simply struck down (ch. 13). That depends on what we mean by “tragic,” of course. If we are looking for a “tragedy of Caesar” himself, then Aristotle has a point. If we decide that the assassination was not a good idea, that it was all a vast moral mistake, then Caesar’s own story stops having much ethical interest: it is not usually a tragedy when a person is destroyed without having done anything to deserve it, it is just a pity. But there may be wider points to make, just as there were wider points with the downfall of the Hector of the Iliad or the Iphigeneias or Andromaches of tragedy, points about the ways of a pitiless world, the circumstances that overwhelm a good person and leave him or her nowhere in this life to go. If it was in this way that Caesar had it coming, that reflects on the political climate more than on the man himself.
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There is something of that in the account of Appian.\(^{11}\) It is not that his Caesar is particularly likeable: his ambition is catastrophic, even if it is a feature he shares with Pompey (2.77.320–4); he does make some misjudgments in power which give his enemies their chance (2.108.453–109.454). But this Caesar is still uncontroversially a great man, a match for Alexander (2.149.619–154.649), and his murder is an “impiety” (2.118.494). His dictatorship had cowed opponents, and all faction stopped until Brutus and Cassius killed Caesar, driven by envy for his great power and yearning for the ancestral constitution. They cut him down in the Senate-house, this man who had been the biggest friend to the people and the most experienced of rulers. Certainly the people immediately missed him most intensely, and they went round scouring the city for his murderers . . . (Appian, BC 1.4.16–17)\(^{12}\)

Not that it was just the fault of Brutus and Cassius: indeed, the conspirators do not come off at all badly in Appian’s portrayal, even if their cause is misguided.\(^{13}\) The reason Caesar falls is more because of the growth of strife, the divided Senate, the jealousies gathering against him, the degenerate mongrel mob (2.120.503–7) who will not do anything to preserve their champion but then turn against the Senate too. That is a point about the development of Rome, and the character of Caesar plays a function within that greater story. “What had to happen to Caesar was what had to happen” (2.116.489). It is a pity that he is destroyed, but if the story is told this way it is Rome’s tragedy more than his own.

What Aristotle looks for in his ideal tragedy is, famously, the case when someone is destroyed who is better than us rather than worse, but nonetheless falls because of some *hamartia* of his own. This is not the place to enter the old debate whether *hamartia* “really” means moral flaw or simply error or miscalculation; nor even to suggest that it is untrue to Aristotelian conceptualization to phrase the issue in those terms. But as it happens that debate is useful here, for both the “moral flaw” and the “miscalculation” are possible ways of telling Caesar’s story.

First, the “moral flaw”: *the bad man* – or more specifically *the bad tyrant* – *brought low*. This may be a matter of punishment for presuming to be tyrant in the first place, or just for taking up arms against his country: that is an emphasis one can already see at the time of the events themselves, especially in *de Officiis* and – even before Caesar’s death – in the philosophical works which Cicero dedicated to Brutus.\(^{14}\) Or it can be
more what we get in Suetonius, a commentary on Caesar’s acts in power. After listing many good qualities and great achievements, Suetonius’ transition to the final scenes reads: “nonetheless Caesar’s other deeds and words outweigh [those good things], so that he is thought to have abused his power and to have been justly cut down” (Diu. Iul. 76.1). This, then, is the fate of the bad tyrant – morally bad; and Caesar, despite all Suetonius’ admiration for his good qualities, still counts as bad rather than good. There is more to it than this, and Suetonius’ moral tinge is in part a transitional device to move into those bad actions; the wording anyway concerns the appropriate verdict to pass on his killing – “so that he is thought . . . to have been justly cut down”¹⁵ – rather than explaining the motives of the killers. But the moralistic emphasis is undeniably there,¹⁶ and in what follows we do move closer to explanation, with a stress on the unpopularity that came from precisely the acts which count as “abuse of power” – excessive honors, arrogant verbal outbursts, insults to Senate and magistrates, and so on. This is a useful technique in the first of twelve Caesar-lives, introducing categories for judging and analyzing Caesar’s successors as well as Caesar himself:¹⁷ so there is already an eye on the future too, just as the future will so often turn an eye back upon Caesar. But for the moment the justification question – “was assassinating the tyrant the right thing to do?” – is not developed to become a moral issue: it is not problematized in the way that it is when part of Brutus’ story. What is problematized in Suetonius is whether Caesar aimed at tyranny all his life or whether he was driven by circumstances or his enemies to extreme steps (Diu. Iul. 30), a matter more concerned with the Rubicon than the Ides, and one that – at least in Suetonius – is not explicitly connected with his fall.¹⁸ Nor is there any discussion of whether Caesar was corrupted by power or just revealed a lifelong disposition, the sort of problem that interested Tacitus in treating the last days of his Tiberius (Ann. 6.48.2–51.3). Now that Suetonius has made the moral emphasis dominate, questions of understanding Caesar’s mentality in his final days are less important. It is humanly difficult to condemn and to understand at the same time.¹⁹

Or the story can be told as one of the mistakes of rule: Caesar falls not for being a bad tyrant but for making mistakes. Sometimes what counts as a “mistake” here is different from what would count in the more moralistic register. Take, for instance, his mercy, sparing those enemies who eventually did him down. Is that good or bad? Morally good, surely, however double-edged the concept of “mercy” or “clemency” might be
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(for one Roman citizen should not regularly be in a position to be clement to another): when the senators decreed a temple to “Clementia Caesaris” in 45 BCE, they were celebrating a positive quality, and Caesar’s own supporters followed their lead in parading his Clemency on a coin of 44. But it was also debated practically as early as Cicero whether that sparing was not seriously ill judged, and contributed to his downfall. That is an important emphasis in Nicolaus as well: for him Caesar’s mistakes were a matter partly of clemency, partly of lack of political perceptiveness. The lessons there were highly relevant to Augustus too.

Caesar’s mistakes also interested Cassius Dio. (Dio is interested in the tyrannicides too, and finds them guilty of both ingratitude and shortsightedness; but there is more analytic vigor when Dio approaches it from Caesar’s side than from theirs.) But here the mistakes are different ones. Pompey was wiser, seeing the dangers of envy (40.51.1) and the risks involved in bestowing too many honors on oneself (37.23); Caesar is much less careful (41.54.1, 43.45–7, 44.3–11). Nor does he realize how tactless it is to turn the Parilia into a celebration not of Rome’s birthday but of Caesar’s own successes (43.42). In one way Dio’s Caesar understands the way Rome is going, for his actions and honors prefigure some of the features of the principate (and Dio is even clearer than Appian that the principate is a good and necessary thing); but Caesar hurries Rome down that path too soon, and he suffers for it. Nor is this Caesar well equipped to play the imperial role. This Rome is already on the way to the hypocrisies and disingenuousness that typify Dio’s vision of the principate; Pompey had not been bad at playing enigmatic and disingenuous games (e.g., 39.24–6), nor had Caesar himself, once (e.g., 36.43.4, 38.1, 38.15–16) – but he cannot play them so well now. When he pretends to be grieved by Pompey’s death, his hypocrisy is so transparent that people laugh at him (42.8.2–3); when he makes a reassuring speech, people do not trust him until they see the words backed up by actions (43.18.6); when he pretends to be offended by the offer of the title of king, he does not behave in a way that makes people believe him (44.9.2, cf. 10.4, 11.3). It may be surprising that someone who has always been so shrewd should now make these mistakes, but Dio does not spend much time asking why – not, for instance, giving much more attention than Suetonius to asking whether power has corrupted Caesar, or whether he has just been lucky in getting away with so much up to that point. But mistakes there are, in plenty. As with Suetonius, too, that presages the treatment of the principate, where Caesar’s successors will face similar
challenges and perils, and we yet again have that eye to the future. For Dio the principate works best when it retains a façade of liberty and preserves the citizens’ self-respect: the reason that Augustus did so well was because “he mixed monarchy and democracy” (56.43.4) – precisely the knack that Caesar lacks. But if Augustus will do better, many later emperors will do worse.

That is partly because ruling is so very difficult, such a difficult thing to do that even the most gifted of humans, even a Caesar, may fall into traps. The challenges that face such a man, and the dangers he runs if he fails, were all too familiar: they were familiar from earlier discussions of kingship and of tyranny, familiar too from narratives of abuse of power and glorious tyrannicide – and, especially in Rome, in those tales of how that earlier Brutus drove out the arrogant house of Tarquinius Superbus. They figured in literature of the time, for instance in some passages of Cicero’s Pro Marcello (however exactly that work is taken); they doubtless figured in more straightforward political discussion too. Such reflections could easily be gloomy ones, telling once again on the sad state of Rome as much as on the individual. “If Caesar for all his genius could not find a way out, who will find one now?” That is Matius again, talking to Cicero less than a month after the Ides (Cic. Att. 14.1 [355].1). Those less loyal to Caesar would doubtless add that Caesar himself had a certain amount to answer for in creating that sad state, whether one simply blamed his lifelong ambition or included in the indictment the friendship given him by others, Pompey included. “It was not their enmity, it was their friendship, that destroyed the state”: so said Cato, we are told (Plut. Pomp. 47.4, Caes. 13.5), and other sharp judges said something similar (Caelius in Cic. Fam. 8.14 [97].2).

Such thoughts form the background to a particularly interesting ancient treatment of Caesar’s fall, that of Plutarch. This time Aristotelian tragic categories prove less illuminating, though it may be that Greek tragedy itself, not Aristotle’s analysis of it, provides a few closer analogies. Plutarch’s Caesar does not make too many mistakes: opinion does turn against him, but most of the time – the Lupercalia incident may be an exception – he treads quite carefully. But he is trapped by his own past.

Caesar then crossed to Italy and traveled to Rome . . . He was met by popular disapproval. That was partly because some of his soldiers had mutinied and killed two former praetors, Cosconius and Galba, but Caesar had ventured no harsher punishment than to call the men “citizens” instead of
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“soldiers”: he had then given each of them a thousand drachmas, as well as parceling out a large part of the Italian countryside in land-grants. Dolabella’s madness also started tongues wagging against Caesar, and so did Matius’ avarice; so too did Antony’s drunken excesses, and Corfinius’ ransacking and rebuilding of Pompey’s private house, as if it was not big enough already. The Romans did not like all this. Caesar himself knew what was going on, and it was against his will. But he had no choice. The political conditions forced him to make use of the men who were willing to be his agents. (Plut. Caes. 51)

So the real mistakes are made by his friends, people like Mark Antony: yet in the past they built his power, and he cannot forsake them now. His army too built his strength, and they have become both unpopular and discontented: he cannot forsake them either. The other source of his strength had been his popularity, and the people are turning against him too. The same characteristics both build a person’s greatness and then, under the pressure of circumstances, destroy him. That is a typical Plutarchan pattern: it is true of the boisterous good spirits that build and destroy Antony, or the military stiffness of a Coriolanus, or the charm of an Alcibiades. And this Caesar can see what is happening. He knows he is going into danger on the morning of the Ides, but he also knows that he has no choice but to go on, otherwise the friends and the people will turn against him even more. This is not a fate that befalls him because he has been so bad, or because he is making a mistake. If anything, it is what happens because he has been so great. Perhaps one could develop a more sophisticated argument that this sort of treatment reflects Aristotle’s underlying insight, that a great man’s fall must be both caused, not a bolt from the blue, and caused in such a way as not to compromise the audience’s engagement with the victim; but Plutarch does this in ways which are different from, and subtler than, anything that Aristotle could mean by hamartia.

Treated like this, any “moralism” has to be a little different. It cannot simply be a matter of the actions of Caesar in power – “serve him right” for being a bad tyrant or a mistaken tyrant: for he does what he has to do, following a course of action that his whole past career has committed him to. So any moralism would have to surround his whole life: is it or is it not a good thing to devote yourself to power? That, in fact, is a version of the moral debate that is treated trenchantly and one-sidedly by Cicero in de Officiis 3.81–5 and that echoes still in Seneca: we shall see traces of
that debate later in this book in authors as diverse in time and place as Julian and Montaigne. There is indeed some of that in Plutarch’s *Life*. Caesar gave up the chance to become the greatest orator in Rome because he devoted his life to becoming first in power instead (*Caes. 3*); it is his “lust for kingship” which leads him astray in his one clear set of mistakes in power, at the Lupercalia (60.1); and at the end the question whether it was all worthwhile is raised explicitly:

He had sought dominion and power all his days, and after facing so many dangers he had finally achieved them. And the only benefit he reaped was its empty name, and the perils of fame amid his envious fellow-citizens. (Plut. *Caes.* 69.1)

Was it, indeed, all worthwhile? That is another question which can be raised by Caesar’s career, particularly as his personality is so wide-ranging: the man of letters and the intellectual, not just the warrior; the reorganizer of the calendar, not just the ruthless politician; the visionary as well as the thug. His could have been one of several Lives, and that existential choice of his, and its questionability as well as its overwhelming consequences, is yet another way of doing Caesar.

There are other ways still; most strikingly of all in the ancient texts, there is Lucan’s way. But what we have seen already may suggest some reflections on Lucan too – not least that the fundamental issue may be that existential choice to be the man of brilliant, shattering, destructive power: the choice to be “Caesar.” At first sight, though, Lucan is still the great exception: for where is Caesar’s death? We never reach it in the narrative. Yet that only confirms how important the death is in shaping the story. Christine Walde in this volume has good reasons for a reading more favorable to the charismatic Caesar than other readers find, but the very debatability of the issue is striking. If the Lucan narrative had ended with Caesar’s death, that would have shaped it unequivocally in one direction: that is what happens to people like this, the final victim of this lightning-bolt of destruction will be the man himself. If it had reached Philippi (and there are many proleptic suggestions of events after the Ides), and even more if it glanced forward to Actium too, that would look like a different story, one of the death of all that Pompey and Cato fight for, one where Caesar alive is only the breaking of a storm that goes beyond any individual, however mighty: a more unequivocal nod to Rome’s pitiful story, not just Caesar’s. Nothing could make clearer the
paradox that closure is intimately connected with beginnings and causes: one needs to know the end of a story to understand what sort of story it is. Had Lucan lived, perhaps the story would indeed have gone on to make its own shape clearer; but more likely this equivocality is precisely the point. Every reader needs to decide what the relevant end is. The death of the great man? Or of freedom? Or the path to Nero, so clearly indicated at the beginning of Book 1? Or to the present, whenever the future reader’s present turns out to be? It is all of them, of course; if different readers shape the story differently, and even more if the same reader shapes it differently in different moments or moods, that generates an internal discord which mimics the civil discord of the theme. And if we feel the charisma of Caesar at the same time as knowing that the better cause is on the other side, that itself reenacts the fragmented confusion which underlies and explains the theme – which indeed is the theme. Stanley Fish suggested that the reader of Paradise Lost reenacts original sin when finding Satan so much more fascinating than God;34 does Lucan’s reader reenact Roman national sin? Is it indeed part of that fragmentedness that we all shape the story for ourselves, that the text no longer has power but to bewilder? Epic is typically teleological;35 Vergilian epic was especially so, a birth of a nation story. Yet Lucan’s subject is the death of a nation, or at least of a cause. Teleology can only stutter when there are so many different ends to come.

Verdicts on Caesar: Writer and Commander

That leads to the other aspect of this introductory chapter and of this multifaceted man – Caesar as “writer,” as man of letters, as the teller rather than the subject of a narrative. For it is indeed that narrative, with its artful rhetoric of third-person authority,36 which has guided so much of later generations’ response. As commentarii, the works might affect incompleteness and provisionality, providing only the raw material for others to write the material up properly;37 but there does not seem much incompleteness or provisionality about the story they tell, that tale of Caesar’s enemies utterly vanquished. If Lucan’s text disorients because of its plurality of ends, Caesar’s text stands out for its firm direction. The path is to victory, and no reader could be left in doubt; by the end the military job is done, and it is hard to think that the literary job is not done as well. The writer shapes and controls the narrative as firmly as
the commander shaped and controlled events (H. Fränkel [1960], 311 – [1967], 186–7); his style “may march along, orderly as a legion, setting out intelligibly and with intelligence the course of action” (F. E. Adcock [1956], 71–2).

Such analogies between act and text appeal to our logocentric age even more than they did fifty years ago to Fränkel and Adcock; the relation between Caesar the writer and Caesar the general already intrigued Montaigne. A Gaul besieged in Alesia or a Roman in Corfinium might not have viewed Caesar in quite so clever a way, and their first thought about their enemy would not have been about his narrative style. Yet Roman culture was rhetorical as well as militaristic, and modern scholars are not the first to make verdicts on Caesar the literary figure that interact with verdicts on Caesar the man of power. Caesar “spoke with the same spirit as he fought” (Quint. 10.1.114); when he wrote De Analogia while on campaign, he was concerned with declining nouns (declinare) rather than dodging weapons (also declinare), with aspirates rather than blowing (aspirare) trumpets (Fronto, de bell. Parth. 9). Both those passages and Adcock’s too are quoted by Christina Kraus, and Kraus also looks at the three first judgments which we have on Caesar’s commentarii, all delivered within a decade or so of their publication, one by Cicero, one by Hirtius, one by Pollio, and all quoted by Suet. Diu. Iul. 56. I shall follow her lead here; most of my points are different from those of Kraus, but the two papers may complement one another. These three verdicts have things in common (especially the first two), but they say something different too, and those differences all point to themes of interesting potential.

First, Cicero:

They are wholly admirable (I said): they are nude, upright, and attractive (uenusti), with all rhetorical adornment stripped away as if it were clothing. He desired to give others the raw material to draw on if they wanted to write history; but perhaps this was a fool’s favor, for it would be a fool who will wish to apply the curling-tongs to that material. He put sensible people off writing, for in history there is nothing so attractive as a pure, splendid brevity. (Cicero, Brutus 262 [46 BCE])

Brutus is a history of orators, so it is hardly surprising that Cicero concentrates on the stylistic elements. It is not quite that Caesar could have been writing about anything at all: these are “the commentaries
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that he wrote on his own achievements.” But there is no attempt to relate the style of the writing more sharply to the style of the achievements. There may well be some innuendo about the style suiting the man’s well-known sex-life – this true descendant of Venus (note *uenusti*). But whatever you do with nude, upright, and attractive men, you would be unwise to deploy them in the front line against the Gauls.

There is something familiar about all this. We have been here before, some fifteen years earlier, with Cicero’s own *commentarius* on the affairs of 63. He tried that work on Posidonius, wondering if he might be the one to write it up:

Posidonius has already written to me from Rhodes that when he read this *ébauche* of mine, which I had sent him with the idea that he might compose something more elaborate on the same theme, so far from being stimulated to composition he was effectively frightened away. The fact is, I have dumb-founded the whole Greek community, so that the folk who were pressing me on all sides to give them something to dress up are pestering me no longer. (Cic. *Att.* 2.1 [21].2 [60 BCE], trans. Shackleton Bailey)

Posidonius is often credited here with a charming way of waving away an uncongenial task, and Cicero discredited with such total vanity that he missed the point completely, taking Posidonius’ compliment at face value. If so, then that may still be relevant for Cicero’s own similar compliment to Caesar: he treasured Posidonius’ words so long, and so unaware of any possible irony, that he thought they would do nicely now for Caesar. But surely Cicero was not so dense. He has just said in that letter that he has used up Isocrates’ entire perfume-cabinet on this work, along with the little scent-boxes of his pupils and some of Aristotle’s rouge (2.1 [21] 1): this was no crude, unliterary draft. Is he not playing exactly for the compliment that Posidonius gives him? Both men know the polite game they are playing, and he is laughing *with* Posidonius, not laughing at him or being laughed at by him. If Cicero knew the polite rules in 60, he knows them in 46 too, and he knows that Caesar knows them too. He too pays Caesar the compliment that he knows is appropriate for *commentarii* as finished as this, and again there is a suggestion that the “provisionality” is just a pretense. And he pays the compliment with the appreciation of a literary equal. As in *Pro Marcello* where he gives advice, so here where he gives praise, Cicero parades the assumption that he is distinguished enough to bestow what Caesar is
accomplished enough to appreciate. That is a compliment both to Caesar and to himself.

In 46 as in 60 BCE, then, this is a literary game, with the author and the critic dancing their polite pirouettes around one another. Cicero thought other things about Caesar too, and many of them were not so complimentary. One need only think of all those anguished remarks in the letters as well as, once again, de Officiis. But for the moment those are in different compartments. If the rest of Caesar’s achievement is recalled at all, it is to suggest Cicero’s ability to set that aside; if Caesar “put sensible men off writing,” this is not because they dared not write as they wished about an autocrat, it is simply because he was such a good writer. This is Caesar and Cicero as men of letters, as polite, urbane, sophisticated players with generic convention. That world is a world apart, not related to Caesar’s world of action. One remarkable thing about Caesar is that he spanned both: and that range of Caesar’s brilliance is the first strand here for later writers and readers to sense. 47

Hirtius, on the face of it, seems to be saying more or less the same, and is presumably echoing the words of the Brutus, published just two years or so before.

Everyone agrees that there is nothing composed by others, however laboriously, which is not outdone by the elegant simplicity of these commentarii. They were published to prevent the knowledge of such great deeds from vanishing; but they are so approved by everyone that an opportunity seems to have been snatched from other writers, not given to them. And our admiration is even greater than that of others, as other people know how well and faultlessly [emendate, an interesting word, as “faults” can be factual – mendacia – as well as stylistic] he completed them, we know too how easily and swiftly he did so. (Hirt. BG 8 præf. 4–6)

“Easily,” “swiftly” (facile, celeriter) – the words, of course, which are so often used of Caesar as man of action, not just as man of letters. Here we do have that extra idea intimated, that Caesar’s own literary achievement is not so world-apart but shows the same characteristics as he showed on the battlefield: a version of Fränkel’s and Adcock’s point, in fact. And one might take it further, suggesting that Hirtius’ own diffidence in that preface – how can I possibly be so bold as to compete with Caesar? – is mimetically carried through in the narrative of Book 8, where the operations, so many of them carried through by Caesar’s lieutenants, are felt
as much less mighty and momentous than those of the climactic Book 7, and the style is less impressive too.\textsuperscript{48} That might particularly be true of the very last chapters of the book, with the transition into the narrative of the Civil War and the return to the grimy maneuverings of Caesar’s opponents at Rome. The decline in the style and the achievement is not Caesar’s fault, it is theirs: his sort of story has to decline into mere mopping up, because their petty jealousies are taking him back to Rome. So – however far we pursue that train of thought – Hirtius is intimating a closer link between book and achievement than we saw in the Cicero passage on which it is modeled. It also gives an emphasis very different from Cicero’s projection of literary equality, and a strand that we will again see from time to time in this volume: we lesser mortals (as opposed to the \textit{how very like myself} of a Napoleon) – the admiration expressed by those who use the majesty of Caesar’s achievement to point to the hollowness of their own day, or circle, or selves.

The third immediate judgment is that of Asinius Pollio, that historian of the late Republic who is so renowned, respected, and lost. If Cicero said what the literary man would say and Hirtius said what the lesser-man follower would say, Pollio says what the factual historian would say:\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{quote}
Asinius Pollio thinks that the \textit{commentarii} were composed with insufficient care and insufficient respect for truth [in Suetonius this is placed just after the Hirtius quotation, and picks up on that one sort of “fault,” \textit{mendacia}, suggested by that Hirtius word \textit{emendate}], given that in many cases Caesar was too rash in accepting things which had been done by others, and in many cases too gave false versions of things done by himself, perhaps deliberately or perhaps through slips of memory; and Pollio thinks that he would have rewritten the work and corrected the mistakes. (Suet. \textit{Diu. Iul.} 56.4)
\end{quote}

Where would Pollio have said this? If it comes from the \textit{Histories} at all rather than (say) a letter, it probably formed part of some sort of preface, perhaps a “second preface” introducing his own account of the Gallic Wars.\textsuperscript{50} If so, it is building up his own credibility, contrasting his own reliability with even the most authoritative of his sources. That fits the Pollio we know, or can reconstruct, from elsewhere. Autopsy was the key.\textsuperscript{51} He was there, so he knows.

There is more to this than there may seem. Those mistakes were “perhaps deliberate” (\textit{consulto}) or “perhaps from slips of memory”: it is hard
to think that any audience would regard those two possibilities as equally likely, not once the idea of deliberate falsification has been raised. What then of the notion that “he would have rewritten the work and corrected the mistakes”? Are we to take that seriously? It is tempting to think not: if the falsification was deliberate, it was because Caesar knew exactly what he was doing, and wanted the record to be one of continual glory – *his* glory. And if it is irony, it is biting. Pollio would be projecting his own inability to say what he really meant. That would tell a story not merely about the times when Caesar had to tell lies, but also about the times Pollio is living in now, when he has to wrap up so elaborately his criticism of Caesar. This is not, evidently, a time where you could “say what you think,” that ability to *quaesentias dicere* which Tacitus thought the mark of a fortunate time (*Hist.* 1.1). The autocracy that came out of Caesar’s wars has taken away total free speech. The boldness of Pollio is in making that clear.

Yet perhaps there is no irony after all. Perhaps Pollio means it: Caesar would indeed have corrected them, even if the falsifications were originally deliberate. And why? Because falsification was not needed any more, it had served its purpose: those partisan days had receded, and – again in those terms used by Tacitus – one was free to “feel what one wished” (*sentire quae uelis*). Caesar no longer needed to pretend once his enemies were crushed, and Pollio could now speak the truth as well. Yet that too is chilling. Which, indeed, is worse – a world where the domination of Caesar’s spirit means that one has to conceal one’s true thoughts, where the freedom for which Caesar’s antagonists fought had vanished; or a world which has changed so much, where that freedom was so distant that no one cared any more about those issues which only a few years before had required such rhetorical manipulation? Either way – perhaps indeed both ways, for why should not Pollio mean his suggestions to be double-edged? – the legacy that Caesar left and the way he had changed the world directed the way one would tell his story, and the frankness or the obliquity which that story would now demand.

This too is a theme that will recur in this volume. We found how difficult it was to talk about Caesar without injecting contemporary reflections: difficult for Shakespeare, difficult for producers of Shakespeare, difficult for anyone looking at Shakespeare when Saddam Hussein was being ousted for what he might become. Killing Caesar, for Shakespeare as for Brutus, is no closure: the story has a long way to run, driven by Caesar’s spirit still. As early as Pollio, there are hints that one cannot talk
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about Caesar without an eye to what came after, and the way one tells the tale tells something about that aftermath too. Sometimes that eye to the future is more about empires that Caesar may not have caused, but for whom his story is still emblematic, whether the great ruler is called Tsar or Kaiser or simply Elizabeth or Napoleon or Mussolini or Julius II or Sixtus V. Sometimes it is more a matter of causes, as it was for writers under the Roman Empire and all those later Caesars – and by the time of Trajan it was common to think of Caesar, rather than Augustus, as the first emperor. Much earlier than that, there is a little of both the causal and the emblematic strand already in Nicolaus of Damascus. Caesar and his assassination did much to create the world in which Augustus had to operate, so that his assassination appropriately takes up so much of what is going to be a Life of Augustus; and the tale of assassination emblematizes the dangers which threaten Augustus too, but which Augustus will deal with more shrewdly. We shall see more of that in the next chapter.

Shakespeare’s Mark Antony knew that Caesar’s death could never be the end of the story. Caesar’s spirit would continue to range, and its tales would be those of fury and civil strife, of havoc and revenge (Jul. Caes. 3.1.254–75). In this book we shall also see tales of glory and conquest, of celebration as well as of menace and disquiet. A lot of history was at stake on the Ides of March: not just Rome’s history, but later history too.

NOTES

1 Cf. Syme (1939), 56.
2 On this stage-history see Daniell (1998), 99–121, from which I draw the examples in the text.
3 There are times in Shakespeare’s play when Elizabeth is particularly close at hand. Notice especially Porcia’s “I have a man’s mind, but a woman’s might” (2.4.8): would not a contemporary audience recall, as we do, Elizabeth at Tilbury only eleven years earlier, “I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king – and of a King of England too”?
4 See Kewes (2001) and (2002): as Kewes brings out, the regicidal suggestions came all the easier because James I had adopted Caesarian imagery for his self-projection; parallels between the British monarchy and the Roman Empire continued to permeate literary and artistic production under Charles
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I. (I am most grateful to Paulina Kewes for advice and help with this paragraph.)

5 More on Napoleon below in the chapters of Pucci, 190–1, Hemmerle, 285–91, and Wintjes, 277–8. In other moods and times, Napoleon had his reservations about Caesar too: Hemmerle, 286.


7 As Marchand reports in his preface to Napoleon I (1836).

8 Cf. Toher on Nicolaus of Damascus, below, 30–1.

9 On this see Rawson (1986), esp. 102–3 = (1991), 489–90, and succinctly Griffin (1976), 188 and n. 4.

10 Except where stated, all translations are my own.

11 My treatment here of Appian, Dio, and Plutarch overlaps with a paper in which I discuss how each of these accounts presses on any generic boundary that may exist between biography and history: Pelling (forthcoming). Fuller exemplification of several points may be found there. Needless to say, my discussion here is simplified as well as abbreviated, and none of these authors limits himself to a single explanatory strand: I have tried to bring out the dominant emphasis in each, not the only one.


13 As Rawson (1986), 110–12 = (1991), 497–500 notes: cf. Gowing (1992), 163–80, esp. 179, “[i]n another age, Appian might have been executed for his characterizations of Brutus and Cassius.” On the deficiencies of their cause, cf. esp. BC 4.133.560 of the Philippi campaign: “they said, both in Pompey’s day and now, that they were doing all this not for themselves, but for democracy [or possibly ‘the Republic’] – a name that is fair, but never does any good”(ὑπὲρ δηµοκρατίας, ὁνόµατος εὐειδοῦς μέν, ἀλυσιτελοῦς δὲ αἰεί): cf. 2.111.462–3 and Dio 44.2.1. For Appian’s enthusiasm for monarchy see esp. Proem 7.22, BC 1.6.24, 4.16.64; Gowing (1992), 15, 35–6; Swain (1996), 250; some reservations at Sion-Jenkis (2000), 140–2.

14 On this see the outstanding discussion of Strasburger (1990), esp. 89–91 = 495–7 on de Officiis. Cicero’s language in that work is very strong: e.g., 1.27, “the recklessness of C. Caesar, who turned all human and divine laws upside down because of that primacy which, misguided as he was, he had fixed as his goal”; 3.19, the killing of Caesar judged “most beautiful,” and defended in terms of honestas (integrity) as well as utilitas (expediency); and esp. 3.81–5, Caesar’s “most foul and disgusting parricide of his country,” foedissimum et taeterrimum parricidium patriae.

15 The phrase iure caesus has legal connotations of justifiable homicide, and goes back to the Twelve Tables: cf. Dyck (1996), 426 on Cic. de Off. 2.43. The same legalistic nuance should be sensed at Cic. Att. 15.3 [380].2, Phil. 2.87 and 13.2, and Sen. Ben. 5.16.6, Caesar as iure caesus or iure interfectus. Compare
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too the famous judgment of Scipio Aemilianus on the death of Ti. Gracchus, Cic. Mil. 8, de Or. 2.106, de Off. 2.43; Livy, per. 59; Vell. 2.4.4. As those and other passages (e.g., Livy 24.24.9; Val. Max. 6.2.3; Sen. Q.N. 1.16.1; Tac. Ann. 14.43.4) show, the legal phrase is often iure caesus uideri: hence the existimetur in Suet. is important too, drawing attention to the public view of matters.

So rightly Botermann (1992), 188–9, tracing how the categories in this section demonstrate “die Rechtmaßigkeit der Ermordung.”

So Lambrecht (1984), esp. 63–77, stressing particularly but not only the link with Diuus Augustus.

Christopher Gill has several times, and with different and developing approaches, discussed this problematic combination of moral evaluation and empathetic understanding. In his early papers he drew a distinction between a “personality-viewpoint,” more concerned with differentiating individuals, and a “character-viewpoint” that was more inclined to judge persons morally and subsume them to a class: see esp. Gill (1986) and (1990). In Pelling (2002a), 321–9, I explain why in my view this distinction is more illuminating for biography than the more elaborate ones Gill drew in his 1996 book, and Suetonius’ Diuus Iulius is one of the instances I discuss.

The coin depicts the temple: Crawford, RRC 480/21. Cf. Toher below, 35–6. On the difficult issue of Caesar’s clemency, in particular its possible double edge, see also Walde below, 50; Jal (1963), 464–8; Raafflaub (2003); 60–3, Pelling (2005), 277–8 and n. 5; and esp. Griffin (2003), 159–65.


Toher brings this out in this book, 33–9.

Note esp. 44.1.2, 2.5 on the short-sightedness; 41.63.5–6, 43.41.1, 44.13.1, and 14.2–4, 48.1.1 on the ingratitude. Cf. Fechner (1986), 113–17; Gowing (1992), 163–80.

On this see esp. 44.2, 47.39.4–5, 53.19.1, 54.6.1, 56.43.4–44.2; Millar (1964), 74–6; Manuwald (1979), 9–12; Rich (1989), 95; Gowing (1992), 25–8, 35, 164, 179; Sion-Jenkis (2000), 130–1, 142–53. That need not exclude some feeling for what was lost with the Republic’s fall, 47.39.2–3, 53.19.2; nor some reservations about particular features of the imperial system, Manuwald (1979), 21–5. Fechner (1986), 96–128 gives a particularly balanced view of all this.

Or so I argue in my forthcoming paper (see n. 11 above).

Though notice the brief indication at 44.3.3, Caesar may have fallen into the common human pattern whereby people become conceited (χαυνοτέρους) when they are given excessive honors and flattery. At 44.8.2 Caesar’s arrogant reception of the Senate is assigned “either to some heaven-sent misdirection (θεοβλάβεια) or to some excess of joy”; “joy” too at 44.6.1.

There may be a similar futuristic perspective in Dio’s description of Caesar’s opponents, in particular the striking portrayal of Cato as “a lover of the
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people” (δήµου ἐραστής, 37.22.2–3, cf. 43.11.6). Lintott (1997), 2517 n. 81 suggests “that Cassius Dio devised Cato’s character as an ideal, so that he could portray any imitations under the Principate as perversions. Since, according to Dio (65.12.2), Helvidius Priscus’ vice lay in pandering to the mob in his opposition to monarchy (basileia), it was necessary to depict Cato as a lover of the people.” As Lintott notes, Brutus and Cassius are similarly δηµερασταί at 47.38.3; also Catulus at 37.46.3.


29 In particular, Otanes’ attack on tyranny in Herodotus’ constitutions debate (3.80), especially when it is seen in its Book 3 context (Pelling [2002b], stressing such passages as τυραννὶς χρῆµα σφαλερόν, “tyranny is a slippery thing,” 3.54); Aristotle’s reflections on the overthrow of tyrannies in the Politics (1286b16–20, 1315b11–39, 1316a25–34); Plb. 6.7. See, e.g., Ryffel (1949), esp. 23, 167–8, 192–3; Lanza (1977), 34–7.

30 I develop this theme further in Pelling (1997a).

31 De Officiis: above, 9 and n. 14; Seneca: Griffin (1976), 184–5.

32 For Julian, see Long, 65, 75, 77; for Montaigne, Mackenzie, 139–40, 141–2, 144–5.

33 Thus Masters (1992), 235: “the possible endings of the poem might have made Lucan anything from a Stoic asserting the glory of suicide, to a revolutionay preaching the glories of a tyrannicide, to an imperial mole celebrating the glories of a role pacified.” Ahl (1976), 306–26 discusses the difficulties of interpretation which each choice of ending might imply: he favors Cato’s death and “the paradox of triumph in defeat” (324). Henderson (1998), 183 resists the interpretative urge to tie the poem down to any one historical moment that needs to be reached. Masters himself argues (216–59) that the text is complete as it stands, ending more or less at the same point as Caesar’s own BC: “a strange, unconventional end, to be sure, pointing as it does to its own inconclusiveness, avoiding as it does any kind of resolution, but one which in being so preserves the unconventional premises of its subject-matter: evil without alternative, contradiction without compromise, civil war without end” (259).

34 Fish (1967).

35 “To the victors belongs epic, with its linear teleology,” Quint (1993), 9.


37 Besides the passages quoted in the text cf. esp. Plut. Lucull. 1.4. But “affect” is the right word: any pretense along those lines was often thin, and anyway different commentarii doubtless had different textures. See in particular Rüpke (1992); Marincola (1997), 181–2; Flach (1998), 105–8; Scholz (2003), esp. 179–80.
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Though these days we put it in less friendly terms: “the insufferable third-person mock-remoteness of his power-driven prose”; “the loyal Caesarian Hirtius’ mimetic project of marching behind Caesar in filling out the record of his campaigns”; “But the writing Caesar twins with the written Caesar in their shared manner of swift, forceful, precise, pointed application to the matter in hand, customized rhetoric indistinguishable from impassive dash”; “Caesar is The One, the same, in the field and on the page. His meanings must prevail, as before”; “Rhyming writer–reader relations with officer–men rapport”: Henderson (1998), 38; (1996), 272, 277, 279, 288 = (1998), 50, 56, 59, 68. Henderson completes the triangle by playfully mimicking Caesar’s third-person domineering Blitzkrieg style in his own criticism.

Mackenzie, below, 135–9.

So Powell (1998), 114: Kraus (2005) takes this much further.

So e.g., Bömer (1953), 237.

Cf. Bömer (1953), 236–8; Marincola (1997), 54–5 and n. 81, 182.

Not, then, “grovelling” (Gotoff [1985], 2 n. 3).

Not that this compartmentalization need be without political edge. If Brutus is seen as any sort of “obituary notice” on the rhetoric of the free state (cf. Douglas [1966], xi, and the more qualified view of Gowing [2000], esp. 58–9), there may be regret that the only register for judging such literature is stylistic. If such a point is sensed, it moves this passage closer to the suggestions I shall find in Pollio’s remark; but Pollio’s barb is sharper. Similarly Strasburger (1990), 30–1 = 436–7 finds anti-Caesarian edge in the Brutus but contrasts its civilized tone – “als ein ritterlicher Angriff, mit sozusagen noch offenem Visier” – with Cicero’s more strident works of 45–44 BCE. For Strasburger the courteous tribute to Caesar’s style is genuine, but it is expressive that it is only style, not statesmanship, that is praised.

Powell (1998), 113–15 here has some interesting observations, wondering whether there is a “hint of derision” here; he is cautious about that possibility. So am I.

That again is particularly clear in Montaigne: Mackenzie, below, 144–5.

That may be so even if (as Christina Kraus puts it to me) Hirtius’ style is also more elaborate, with longer sentences and more complicated syntax, and less like commentarii-form. That too may be appropriate as the events recede from the immediacy of action-narrative and enter historiography proper.

I again owe to Kraus this way of looking at it.


On this see Llewelyn Morgan (2000), esp. 58–9 on the present passage. If Morgan is right to relate Pollio’s criticisms to Thuc. 1.22.2–3, the criticism is even more pointed: it is Pollio, not Caesar, who matches up to Thucydidean
standards of accuracy. “This is stern criticism of Caesar by Pollio, and only slightly softened by the conciliatory final sentence,” says Morgan: if my argument here is right, the final sentence makes it even sterner, and can be added to the instances Morgan collects where “Pollio displays an acute awareness of the new limitations on élite activity” (67).

52 Though in the case of the popes there is a causal element as well, as they are figured as successors as well as superior rivals of the emperors: see the chapters of Santangeli, Temple, and especially Osborne.

53 On this see Sion-Jenkis (2000), 54–9; Geiger (1975); Pelling (2002a), 253; Long, below, 65–6.

54 Many thanks for very useful comments on earlier drafts to Christina Kraus, Llewelyn Morgan, Mark Toher, Judith Mossman, Miriam Griffin, and especially the editor.
Part II
Literary Characterization
The Earliest Depiction of Caesar and the Later Tradition

Mark Toher

Julius Caesar is the most widely known figure of Roman history, but the allure of Caesar is not simply a popular phenomenon. Over the last 150 years the greatest scholars of Roman history have presented portraits of the man and his era. Theodor Mommsen saw in Caesar and his career the final achievement of the Roman Republic and he depicted him as the climactic figure of the era in his *Römische Geschichte*, a work that earned its author the Nobel Prize for literature in 1902. Matthias Gelzer produced what is still considered by many the best biography of Caesar. Written originally in 1921, Gelzer constantly revised and updated his portrait throughout the rest of his career, and the sixth, revised edition of his biography was published in 1960. In a similar way, Andreas Alföldi, although he never attempted a biography, maintained a deep and abiding interest in Caesar, and he published two monographs on him and issues related to his career. In his last years Alföldi was working on a detailed study of Caesar and the year 44 BCE. His project remained unfinished at his death in 1984, and yet it still yielded two large posthumous volumes. Christian Meier’s biography of 1982 inverted Mommsen’s depiction and the hero of the Roman Republic became the subversive embodiment of a failed political system. Sir Ronald Syme was at work on a monograph entitled *Caesar* when he died in 1989. It would have been “an escape from biography into history” that characterized Caesar and his assassins in the context of the Roman governing class.¹

Nevertheless, despite the consistent treatment of Caesar by the best professional historians, the most evocative depiction of Caesar is found not in a book of scholarship, but rather on the stage of Shakespeare. Yet
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the Caesar of the dramatist is “not a little disquieting” for those familiar with the dynamic hero found in the ancient biographical tradition of the early second century CE and still prevalent in many modern accounts. Relying on a translation of a translation of Plutarch, Shakespeare presented an assertive, almost bombastic Caesar, but one whose physical frailty belied his claim of courage and his reputation for strength, and so exhibited vulnerabilities that foreshadowed his murder.

Danger knows full well
That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
We are two lions littered in one day,
And I the elder and more terrible.
(Jul. Caes. 2.2.44–7)

So proclaims the Dictator. But we are informed by Cassius that this Caesar almost drowned in a swimming challenge that he had initiated. “Help me, Cassius, or I sink,” he cries to his future assassin (1.2.100–15). The rescue of Caesar by Cassius reduces the great man to the image of the aged Anchises borne out of Troy on the shoulders of Aeneas. Casca reports that at the Lupercalia Caesar succumbed to an epileptic seizure (1.2.247–53), and in a subtle juxtaposition, after yet another assertion of his own unique courage, Caesar in dialogue with Antony admits to the failing of his hearing:

Such men as he [i.e., Cassius] be never at heart’s ease
While they behold a greater than themselves,
And therefore are they very dangerous.
I rather tell thee what is to be feared
Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar.
Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf . . . (1.2.228–33)

As Syme noted, none of these episodes that illustrate the frailty of the Dictator has warrant in Shakespeare’s ancient source. They are his own invention, and so of some significance. Dramatic genius reduces (or elevates) the conquering hero of the ancient biographical tradition to his human dimension, and renders him vulnerable to mortal enemies.

But Shakespeare was not the first author to characterize Caesar through the context of the conspiracy against him and his assassination. The earliest extant depiction of Caesar by an ancient author uses the same strategy.
Nicolaus of Damascus, a personal friend and an exact contemporary of Caesar’s successor Augustus, wrote a biography of Augustus that goes under the title βίος Καίσαρος, excerpts of which are preserved in a Byzantine encyclopedia of the tenth century CE. The longest excerpt (23 pages of nearly continuous, verbatim text in Jacoby’s edition) offers a full account of the conspiracy against Caesar and his assassination and so preserves the earliest extant depiction of Julius Caesar by an ancient writer. The technique of characterizing Caesar through his assassination, although dramatic by its very nature, has claim to historical validity. Had Caesar survived or evaded assassination and lived on to die of a lucky Parthian arrow-shot, or had he succumbed to disease while on campaign in the East, the assessment of his achievement could have been somewhat different. In such a scenario, one could argue a career of unfulfilled potential, and comparisons with Sulla the Dictator, he who (in Caesar’s judgment) did not know his political ABCs (Suet. Jul. 77), but did use his dictatorship to restore legitimate government to Rome, and with Pompeius Magnus, the Conqueror of the East, would support the contention. It was Caesar’s assassination that lent his career its aura of tragic greatness, and this goes some way toward explaining his enduring fascination for scholars and laymen alike. For an American of the era, the presidency and assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the professional and popular reaction to it, provide the obvious parallel. Caesar, the most charismatic figure of his time, a literary artist and dynamic statesman and general, cut down suddenly at the height of his powers by those closest to him, and the terrible events that ensued – it all redefines our view of a career that was not all that extraordinary by contemporary standards of military achievement and great statesmanship as set by Pompeius and Augustus. As with Kennedy and Dallas, the Ides of March loom in any consideration of Caesar, and so the conspiracy against him and his assassination provide an appropriate context for representing the character of the man.

Nicolaus’ depiction of Caesar is of interest for two reasons. He wrote over a century before Caesar’s ancient biographers Suetonius and Plutarch, and he could have consulted those who were themselves witnesses to the years of Caesar’s dictatorship. As the earliest extant account of the conspiracy against Caesar and his assassination, Nicolaus’ Βιος presents the only evidence for the early tradition on Caesar (or at least a different tradition), before time and perspective created the heroic and tragic figure that emerges from the biographical tradition at the beginning of the
second century CE. Furthermore, for at least a decade Nicolaus occupied a high position at the court of Herod the Great as one of that king’s most valued “friends” (φίλοι), and his greatest service to the king was as his envoy to Roman authority. In this capacity it seems that Nicolaus developed a personal relationship with Augustus. The Princeps named a favorite date after Nicolaus because the taste and color of the fruit reminded him of the sweet disposition and ruddy complexion of his friend from the East. It can only be speculation, but it may have been to Nicolaus that Augustus confided his candid assessment of Herod and his murderous domestic history: he would rather be Herod’s pig than his son. Nicolaus’ career as “friend” and envoy of Herod and his relationship with Augustus afford his account the perspective of an “outsider.” While clearly familiar with the nature of politics and society in Rome, Nicolaus stood apart from them. His account is not circumscribed by the traditional characteristics of Roman historiography as formed by the senatorial class. His personal experience with conspiracy at the highest levels of power in Jerusalem equipped him with a perspective on Caesar’s conspirators and their victim that went beyond the reifying notions of tyranny, libertas, and defense of the res publica that dominate in the extant sources of the second and third centuries CE. While Nicolaus’ account is factually much the same as those in the later sources, his characterization of Caesar and the conspirators is different. And that difference, it will be argued, is due to Nicolaus himself as opposed to a lost source that Nicolaus may have followed.

The question of Nicolaus’ source(s) for his work on Augustus has no clear answer. While we know of a number of contemporaries who composed accounts of Caesar’s assassination and the events of the following two years, the most important lost sources available to Nicolaus and later writers would have been the autobiography Augustus published in the late 20s BCE, the history of Asinius Pollio (a partisan of Caesar but impartial in the civil war between Octavian and Antony) that covered the years from 60 down to (most likely) 42 BCE, and the history of Livy, who delayed publishing his account of the year 43 (and possibly that of the ensuing years) until after the death of Augustus in 14 CE (Livy, per. 121). While the pro-Augustan bias detectable in the later biographers and historians must go back at least in part to the Princeps’ autobiography, occasional parallels in narrative structure and wording in these same sources, and a more favorable depiction of Antony in Plutarch and Appian, seem to show the influence of Pollio on all these authors. It is generally
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acknowledged that Nicolaus used Augustus’ autobiography, and it is likely that his work on Augustus reflects themes and episodes that he found there. But analysis of Nicolaus’ use of sources in his universal history reveals a narrative technique that was quite independent of his sources, and as will be seen below (38–41), there is good evidence that Nicolaus applied the same independent technique in his life of Augustus. Furthermore, even those who claim that Nicolaus followed Augustus’ autobiography closely must admit there are a number of episodes in Nicolaus’ work that could not have been in the work of the Princeps.

Attempts to detect and identify other sources in Nicolaus tell us little of significance about either those lost sources or Nicolaus’ work itself. The fact that the work of Nicolaus is the only extant account in the tradition before the biographers and later historians and the fact that Nicolaus was a writer who could operate quite independently from his sources make it futile to assign various episodes or singular aspects of his account to his “sources.” For the purposes of this essay, it is sufficient that Nicolaus preserves aspects of an early tradition on Caesar (whether wholly original with him or derived from others), and consideration of this earliest depiction of Caesar by an “outsider” provides perspective on modern attempts to reconstruct the “historical” Caesar from the evidence in the later biographies and histories.

Nicolaus anticipates Shakespeare’s strategy of depicting Caesar with mortal foibles. His Caesar is excitable in a distinctly un-Roman way. When Caesar learns that Octavian is critically ill, he rushes off from dinner without his shoes. In ancient Greek literature running about shoeless is characteristic of distraught women. More significantly, Nicolaus’ Caesar is indecisive and passive. On the morning of the Ides, he cannot decide whether to enter the Senate. His friends advise against it, but Decimus Brutus cajoles Caesar and leads him by the hand into the fatal meeting. Nicolaus says that the Dictator simply followed in silence. Caesar was also politically inept due to his years away from Rome on campaign (ἄπειρος πολιτικῆς τέχνης διὰ τὰς ἐκδήµους στρατείας), and Nicolaus ascribes the success of the conspiracy to the fact that Caesar was by nature straightforward in character (ἁπλοῦς τὸ ἦθος) and unsuspecting (ἀνύποπτος): he failed to see that those honoring and praising him were in fact conspiring against him. Rather than fate, which plays a dominant role in the story of Caesar’s downfall in the later sources, in Nicolaus it was more the character of the man himself that led to his assassination.
Nicolaus’ depiction of Caesar is in significant contrast to the fairly consistent characterization of Caesar that emerges from the biographical genre at the beginning of the second century and which seems to have been adopted by the historians Appian and Dio. That Caesar is a dynamic hero of almost tyrannical ambition, who is perceptive and cynical enough to realize that the honors voted him in his last year were not due to the good will of those who proposed them. As Plutarch says (Caes. 58.2), each success only increased Caesar’s desire for more ambitious undertakings; it was in his character to do great things and seek constantly for fame. In the later sources on Caesar the only reasonable explanation of how a conspiracy could succeed against such a great man was fate itself. Yet his confidence and courage – his θάρσος – were such that even the portents and omens of the gods held no terror for him.

Nicolaus’ depiction of an imperceptive victim susceptible to manipulation is highlighted by contrast with Nicolaus’ elaborate analysis of the conspirators and their motivations. Nicolaus’ discussion of this issue is the best found in any ancient source, and once again it differs significantly from the assessment found in the later authors.

The later tradition is quite consistent in presenting three factors as crucial in the formation and execution of the conspiracy: resentment of Caesar’s honors and his status; the fear that Caesar planned to make himself king; and the central role of Marcus Brutus as an initially reluctant conspirator urged on by Cassius and others to undertake his ancestral obligation of tyrannicide.

In Nicolaus, Caesar does not seek the honors given him. Rather, they are proposed by his enemies to provoke jealousy and resentment against him, but the Dictator is too imperceptive to see this. The issue of Caesar’s kingship does arise in Nicolaus’ account, but only in so far as it is others who try to get Caesar to accept the title and crown, which he consistently resists (F 130.69–75). Nicolaus also differs from the later tradition in that he does not focus on the individual role of M. Brutus in the formation of the conspiracy and the attack on Caesar. Instead he presents the conspiracy as the product of two groups. First there are the high-ranking and powerful men, the δυνατώτατοι, whose careers were adversely affected by Caesar (F 130.59–60), and it is this group that is led by the two Bruti and Cassius. But just as important is a second group who joined in the conspiracy out of loyalty and admiration for the δυνατώτατοι.

The grievances of the conspirators in Nicolaus are more varied and complicated than in the later tradition. In Nicolaus there is no evidence
of men driven to tyrannicide by republican ideology and the threat of Caesar’s kingship. Some are resentful of the power of Caesar, especially those who aspire to it themselves (F 130.60 and 64), but just as many proclaim loyalty to republican government only as a pretext for personal complaints. Many had lost relatives, property, and office through Caesar’s victory in the civil war. They were out for vengeance. Nicolaus knows nothing of the moral drama of Brutus’ evolution into a conspirator that is found in the later sources. In Nicolaus, it is the reputation of Brutus’ gens more than the man himself that moves some to join the conspiracy (F 130.61), and again, it is more often alleged as a pretext than as a real motivation. Furthermore, despite the fact that Nicolaus describes in detail which of the assassins attacked Caesar and how, M. Brutus plays no significant role in the actual attack on Caesar. By contrast, Brutus is the central figure in the drama of the attack in the later tradition, where either Caesar despairs of his life and veils his head when he sees Brutus with his dagger (Plut. Caes. 66.12 and Brut. 17.6; Appian 2.117/493), or he addresses his dying words to Brutus: καί σὺ τέκνον – “you too, my son.”

In Nicolaus, the significant grievance of all the conspirators is resentment of Caesar’s clementia. Among the former Pompeians, from men of the highest station like Brutus and Cassius to common soldiers, all resent having received as a gift or grant from Caesar what would have been theirs (and more) if they had been victorious in their war against him (F 130.60 and 62–3). Conversely, those men who had been loyal to Caesar from the beginning resent the fact that former enemies enjoyed gifts, salaries, and positions that were equal to or better than their own. Some of the earlier sources do mention Caesar’s practice of clemency as an ingredient in his downfall, but only because Caesar had failed to eliminate his future murderers when he had the opportunity.

Nicolaus’ focus on resentment of Caesar’s clementia among the conspirators may reflect a contemporary explanation of the conspiracy that faded in the later tradition, since, at the time, Caesar’s vaunted clementia was novel, and provocative. In Roman political culture, a superior exercised clementia toward an inferior, and clementia was a term rare in Roman politics before the end of the Republic, when Cicero adopts it in his letters and speeches to describe Caesar’s practice. For most of Roman republican history, clementia was the virtue that the Roman state and its generals exercised toward a defeated foreign enemy. But under Caesar, clementia became the virtue of an individual who exercised it toward his
fellow citizens, a practice that went against republican tradition. Caesar himself was aware of the resentment his clementia provoked, and he quotes Pompeius’ complaint that life and citizenship were meaningless if they were seen as bestowed by the favor of Caesar (quid mihi, inquit, aut vita aut civitate opus est, quam beneficio Caesaris habere videbor, BC 3.18.4). The strange logic of Cicero also reflects the contemporary controversy over clementia Caesaris: if the conspirators who killed the man who spared them had attained so much gloria for their deed, then they had received no beneficium from Caesar in the first place.

Nicolaus is unique in explaining the conspiracy against Caesar through his clementia and the resentment it aroused among both its recipients and his allies. Although Plutarch does present an anecdote that illustrates such resentment on the part of the assassin Ligarius (Brut. 11), the later sources explain the conspiracy through ideological opposition to kingship or tyranny and the individual role of Brutus. Nicolaus, however, focuses on an interlocking set of motives that ultimately find their origin in ambition and revenge to explain the variety of men who came together to murder Caesar. The difference between Nicolaus’ analysis of the conspiracy and that in later sources is encapsulated in the later tradition’s explanation of why the conspirators decided not to kill Antony along with Caesar. The idea was dropped, we are told, because to kill Antony would have suggested that the liberators acted out of selfish motives of ambition and desire for power, which is to say, just the motives that Nicolaus ascribes to the conspirators. In the later tradition such a base motive is only assigned to Cassius by Plutarch – Cassius was full of resentment against Caesar because the Dictator had stolen some lions of his at Megara (Plut. Brut. 8) – and the base motive of Cassius is mentioned only to contrast with the lofty ideals of Brutus.

Nicolaus’ account of Caesar and his assassination differs from the later tradition in other significant details. His explanation of Caesar’s political inexperience as due to his concentration on military affairs echoes a contemporary criticism of Caesar. Cicero pleaded with Caesar both publicly in orations and privately in letters that he not go off on another extended campaign until he had restored orderly government at Rome. And Caesar apparently hinted in some letters of his own that he intended to stay in Rome and do just that. In fact, the five and a half months that Caesar spent in Rome from October of 45 to March of 44 had been his longest residence in the capital since his consular year of 59. But these hectic months seem to recall Alexander’s final months in Babylon.
were spent less in restoring stability to Rome than in preparation and planning for a new military adventure, one that might have been intended to rival the accomplishments of Alexander himself.\(^{29}\) And we know what Nicolaus’ friend Augustus thought of Alexander. He marveled that the Macedonian conqueror did not understand that the greater task was the ordering and administration of the realms he had won rather than the actual conquest of them (Plut. \textit{Mor.} 207D). The hard-working Princeps could well have leveled the same criticism at his \textit{divus pater}. In attributing Caesar’s deficiency in the political arts to his concentration on his military campaigns, Nicolaus connects with a contemporary criticism of Caesar that seems to have disappeared in the later sources on his dictatorship.

Cicero, who may have been an eyewitness to the event, says that Marcus Lepidus, Caesar’s \textit{magister equitum}, was moved to tears of shame by Antony’s attempt to crown Caesar during the festival of the Lupercalia, just a month before the assassination (\textit{Phil.} 5.38 and 13.17). Nicolaus also has Lepidus present near Caesar during the festival and says that Lepidus resisted the crowd’s urging that he crown Caesar (F 130.72). The later sources do not mention Lepidus at all at the Lupercalia. It seems that these writers eliminated or did not know of this detail that detracted from what became the primary focus on Antony and Caesar during the festival. On the other hand, the later tradition seems to have added details that Nicolaus did not know about. Later writers say that immediately after the assassination Antony disguised himself in servile costume and hid in his house.\(^{30}\) Although Nicolaus says that certain men did leave the city in disguise (F 130.95), he says nothing about Antony in this connection. It is a significant omission. In Nicolaus’ life of Augustus, Antony is a villainous figure, as might be expected, and one must assume that if Nicolaus had known such a disparaging story about Antony’s conduct on the Ides he would have readily incorporated it into his account. Its absence suggests that the tradition on Caesar’s assassination may have been evolving and inventing details and anecdotes even after the Augustan era.\(^{31}\)

Nicolaus provides a glimpse into the formation of the tradition on Caesar at an early stage, before the conspiracy and his assassination had been reduced to a simple confrontation between implacable ambition and resolute tyrannicide. It is a perspective that calls into question the ready acceptance of the heroic Caesar of the later biographical tradition, and brings us back to a time when that characterization of Caesar, even if
it had even been invented by then, may have been only one of a number of possible characterizations. Therefore it is worth considering how Nicolaus might have arrived at his depiction of Caesar and what perspective it can provide on the uniform later tradition that forms the basis for modern accounts of Caesar.

Nicolaus’ presentation of Caesar as the imperceptive victim of ruthless and cunning enemies seems to have been his own invention, not something he derived from a lost source on Caesar and his assassination. Conspiracy against a weak and imperceptive ruler by more ruthless and ambitious rivals seems to have been a motif in Nicolaus’ universal history. In his account of Syrian history, an effeminate king inspires a virile commander of his army to conspiracy (F 2). In his account of the history of Sicyon, Nicolaus describes Isodemos, a ruler who is driven from his position and his city by his more intelligent and ambitious brother, in terms that are very similar to those he uses of Caesar in his life of Augustus. He says that Isodemos was simple and guileless (ἁπλοῦς τὸ ἥθος καὶ ἄκακος, F 61). And in his account of Cyrus’ rise to power, Nicolaus tells the story of a clever, courageous Persian who murders an unsuspecting but faithful companion of Cyrus so that the victim might not inadvertently reveal the dream that portended Cyrus’ rise to the kingship (F 66.16–19). Furthermore, the motif of a vulnerable king who becomes the object of conspiracy by those closest to him is prominent in the Herodian books of Josephus’ Antiquitates Judaicae, and it is generally agreed that Nicolaus’ account of the reign of Herod would have been a main source for Josephus. In light of this evidence, it is hardly likely that Nicolaus simply adopted a characterization of Caesar from another source and so explanation of his depiction of Caesar is to be sought in his own experience.

Nicolaus spent at least ten years as a close associate of Herod in Jerusalem, where conspiracy and murder were endemic in domestic and political affairs. As a close advisor to the king, Nicolaus was involved in the worst of it. Herod prosecuted and executed three of his sons for conspiracy on two different occasions in 7 and 4 BCE, and twenty-five years before that he had executed his beloved Mariamme, the mother of two of these sons. Nicolaus advised Herod in 7 BCE against executing his victims (Josephus, AJ 16.371–2), but in 4 BCE he joined the king in prosecuting his son Antipater for conspiracy before a Roman council (Josephus, AJ 17.99–131). The murderous domestic situation of the increasingly paranoid Herod would have given his advisor much experience.
in the motive and formation of conspiracies against autocratic authority. Based on this experience, Nicolaus apparently came to the conclusion that a significant factor in the generation of conspiracy was the perceived weakness of the individual who was the target. In a similar way, Nicolaus’ analysis of the various interests and motives of the different groups that came together to form the conspiracy against Caesar also indicates personal experience with such plotting. Certainly his analysis which focuses on ambition and resentment is more in accord with Roman culture and politics than the fantasy of the later tradition, where anonymous letters left at Brutus’ tribunal and pasted on statues of his ancestors become a critical factor in the formation of the conspiracy. 34

In depicting Caesar and his assassins Nicolaus had an advantage as an “outsider.” In his analysis of Roman politics and Caesar’s assassination, Nicolaus was unaffected by such parochial Roman concerns as libertas, the res publica, or even dignitas – all concepts which were inescapable for an author writing in the Roman historiographical tradition as it had been formulated by the senatorial class. When the prism of kingship, the nostalgic glory of the res publica, and the noble act of tyrannicide are removed, the assassination of Caesar could be seen for what it was – or at least what Nicolaus saw it as – a crude, violent play for power within the Roman governing class, but one that went badly awry. It is interesting to note in this regard that Nicolaus was deeply learned in Greek philosophy (cf. FF 132.2 and 138), and yet eleutheria and such other Greek concepts as supposedly infected philhellenic opponents of Caesar are utterly lacking in Nicolaus’ account of the conspiracy against Caesar and his assassination.

Christopher Pelling (in this volume) notes that it is impossible to talk about Caesar without interjecting contemporary reflections or without considering what came after. In the case of Nicolaus his depiction of Caesar is an excursus within a biography of Augustus, and so it is literally set within the context of what came after. As is well known, the illegal and violent triumviral career of Octavian gave Roman historians pause for years after. 35 But it was not so for Nicolaus, a man who had defended the violent career and illegal acts of a Roman client-king to the Romans themselves. As the unwitting victim of ruthless enemies in Nicolaus, Caesar appears for the first time in one of his most familiar roles, that of a foil to another character, in this case as a foil to Octavian himself. A significant theme in Nicolaus’ biography is the evolving perception of Octavian as he confronts the ruthless intrigues of Antony.
and others who would deny him his rightful succession to the power and position of his murdered pater. Unlike Caesar, the young heir was able to perceive the insidious plots against him, and so took drastic action to avoid the fate of his murdered father (F 130.130–1). For all his achievements on the battlefield, Caesar was unable to survive at Rome and so failed to stabilize and extend the empire as Augustus did (cf. F 125.1).

Despite the fact that Nicolaus’ account is essentially the same with regard to the facts as the accounts in later authors, Nicolaus’ depiction of Caesar and his assassins – his imperceptive victim surrounded by calculating and resentful enemies – suggests that the dynamic Caesar of the biographical tradition is, at least to some degree, a construct of these Roman parochial interests. This in turn leads to the possibly disturbing conclusion that our “historical” Caesar as derived from the later sources is pretty much an image itself. The very consistency in the later tradition of the uncomplicated depiction of Caesar as a dynamic, tragic hero and of Brutus as a tortured idealist is prima facie evidence of this. Such tableaux in the biography of Caesar as Sulla seeing many Mariuses in the teenage Caesar or Caesar, the governor of Spain, weeping in self-reproach over the accomplishments of Alexander suggest more the invention of image than evidence of historical fact. Nicolaus’ account of Caesar and his assassination lacks the epochal tone of the later tradition. His vulnerable Caesar and ruthless conspirators do not personify the crisis that Caesar’s career introduced into the political culture of the late Roman Republic. Nicolaus’ own experience taught him that even the worst autocratic rulers could be managed, and his cultural outlook easily accommodated a rex. Furthermore, there is his chronological perspective. If we are to accept one generally held view, Nicolaus wrote his biography of Augustus in the late 20s BCE, just a little over twenty years after Caesar’s assassination, and much too early for contemporaries to perceive the full significance of that event for Roman history. Octavian had only just become Augustus, and while clearly the victor over all challengers, how long that would remain the case could not be foreseen then. An adulatory biography by a loyal and experienced friend might usefully contain an extended representation of the Realien of conspiracy and assassination for the benefit of the new Princeps. It is impossible to assess the specific roles of such figures as Pollio or Livy in the formation of the tradition concerning Caesar. But whatever those roles were, it would
take time, much time, before the course of Roman history revealed the momentous significance of the events of the Ides of March. Only then would it be possible for the Roman historiographical tradition to formulate a coherent moral portrait of the culmination of the republican epoch in which the ongoing and destructive confrontation between Roman aristocratic ambition and *libertas* became personified in Caesar and his assassins. If Shakespeare wrote in reaction to the depiction of the ancient biographical tradition on Caesar, Nicolaus wrote before it had been formulated. To this outsider, writing much closer to the events and himself very close to those who benefited from them, Caesar was a victim of his own military ambitions and of the ambitions of those closest to him. Hardly a hero, and his murderers hardly noble. After all, in such circumstances even Herod himself had been able to survive.

**NOTES**


2 Quotation from Syme (1988), 702.

3 Ibid. In Plut. *Caes.* 60.6–7 Caesar attempts to excuse his failure to rise to meet the Senate embassy by claiming falsely that his illness (*νόσος*) had left him unsteady and incapable of standing to address a large crowd.

4 Caesar’s own writings are deliberately indirect and limited in their self-depiction, while Cicero’s letters, essays, and speeches offer no consistent characterization and rather reflect Cicero’s immediate reaction to events or, as in *Pro Marcello, Deiotaro*, and *Ligario*, simple expediency. This early depiction of Caesar by Nicolaus has been neglected. The portion of the *Bios* that contains the conspiracy and assassination of Caesar was only published in 1849, and so became an object of study during the high period of *Quellenkritik*. Even today, scholars tend to look through Nicolaus’ text to get back to his sources (cf. n. 13 below) rather than consider his account in its own right; cf. Toher (2003a), 139.
At least in the judgment of Cicero ([Brut. 227] and [Pro Rosc. Amer. 141]), and in a speech attributed to the assassin Brutus (Appian, BC 2.138.574). Sallust ([Cat. 11.4]) had a different view.


On Nicolaus as Herod’s envoy: fragments 135 and 136.5–7 and 11 in Jacoby (1926); Josephus, AJ 16.31–57, 271–99, and 335–52, 17.93–132; on the naming of the fruit: Athenaeus 14.66, p. 652 A; Plutarch Mor. 723d; and Suda s.v. Νικόλαος Ἀμασκηνός. Augustus’ comment on Herod is preserved in Latin in Macrobius Sát. 2.4.11, but the original statement must have been in Greek involving a pun on the terms for pig (ὑς) and son (ὑίος). In addition to his political career, Nicolaus was also a prolific author. His universal history in 144 books is the longest known from antiquity. He also wrote an ethnographical treatise, an autobiography, and at least six works on the philosophy of Aristotle. Reference will be made to these works by the fragment (F) numbers in Jacoby (1926), where Nicolaus is author no. 90.

For example, in F 138 of his autobiography Nicolaus claims that he was criticized in Roman society for neglecting his social obligations to concentrate on philosophy.

Gaius Oppius, L. Calpurnius Bibulus, M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, and P. Volumnius all gave accounts of events in the years 44–42 BCE. Their works are completely lost, and so are their roles in the formation of the historiographical tradition.

On Pollio and Livy in this regard, see most recently Pelling (1979), 84–5 and Gowing (1992), 39–50.


E.g., Nicolaus’ praise of M. Brutus and his gens (F 130.59, 61, and 100), Octavian breaking out into Greek lament (τὸ πένθος) on hearing the account of the retrieval of Caesar’s body from the Curia Pompeia (F 130.51), or being put in a panic by clamoring soldiers (F 130.117); for other passages, cf. Steidle (1951), 136–7 n. 4.

To cite just recent discussions: in addition to the autobiography of Augustus, Dobesch (1978) posited two other anonymous sources that Nicolaus used, one that presented events in chronological order and another that arranged them topically (“anordnende”). Working from Dobesch’s thesis, Scardigli (1983) then identified Pollio as a second source for Nicolaus, although she maintained that Nicolaus wrote his work in defense of the Princeps against the history of Pollio.

Cf. West on Hesiod, Op. 345. This description by Nicolaus is all the more remarkable in light of the pride that the Dictator took in wearing distinctive red boots, a privilege of his descent from the Alban kings.
The Earliest Depiction of Caesar and the Later Tradition

15 A detail that Plutarch (Caes. 64.6) preserved in the later tradition.


17 On Caesar’s ambition: Plut. Caes. 69.1, also 4.3–4 and 6.3; Ant. 6.1–3; Suet. Jul. 30.5; his perception: Dio 43.15.1.

18 On fate as the explanation for the success of the conspirators and Caesar’s assassination, cf. Plut. Caes. 63.1 and 66.1–3; Appian, BC 2.116.489; Florus 2.13.94; and Dio 44.18.4; Caesar’s lack of superstition: Suet. Iul. 81.4 and Appian, BC 2.116.488.

19 Resentment of Caesar’s honors and status: Suet. Jul. 76.1; Plut. Caes. 57.2–3; Dio 44.1–3; Caesar’s kingship: Suet. Jul. 80.3; Plut. Caes 60.1; Appian 2.111.462–3; Dio 44.14; role of Brutus: Plut. Brut. 8–10, 13 and Caes. 62; Dio 43.45.4 and 44.12–14.1.

20 F 130.67; Plutarch (Caes. 57.2–3) and Dio (44.7.3–4) also mention Caesar’s enemies proposing honors for him to make him hated, but only as a subsidiary aspect of the larger issue of Caesar and his desire for extraordinary honors.

21 Suetonius (Jul. 80.1) also mentions groups within the conspiracy, but he does not elaborate on their motives.

22 Cf. Suet. Jul. 82.2 and Dio 44.19.5 on Caesar’s final words. Nicolaus’ subordination of Brutus’ role in these events cannot be ascribed to bias, for he twice speaks favorably of Brutus. He says that no Roman of his time received more praise and that the people honored Brutus because of his ancestry and his humane character (ἐπιείκεια); cf. F 130.59 and 100.

23 Cic. Att. 14.22.1 and Vell. Pat. 2.57.1; also Plin. NH 7.93 and Appian, BC 2.146.611.

24 That clementia was exercised by a superior toward an inferior with regard to punishment or vengeance, cf. Sen. Clem. 2.3.1–2. On the novelty of Caesar’s practice: Weinstock (1971), 236–9 and Treu (1948), 217; but it would be going too far to say that Caesar’s exercise of clementia was seen as an expression of tyranny; cf. Konstan (2005).

25 Phil. 2.5. An echo of the conspirators’ resentment may be detected in Velleius Paterculus: 

cum libentius vitam victor iam daret quam victi acciperent

(2.52.6) and [Caesar] incautus ab ingratis occupatus est (2.57.1). On resentment of Caesar’s clementia, cf. Syme (1939), 51 and (1988), 706, and Raaflaub (2003), 61. Plutarch (Cat. Min. 64.7–8) was aware of the issue of resentment of Caesar’s clementia in so far as it related to Cato. It is true that Caesar himself avoided the term clementia, but this may not necessarily be due to negative connotations in his case; cf. Griffin (2003), 159–63.

26 On Plutarch’s limited interest in Caesar’s clementia, cf. Pelling (2005), 278–9: “[T]he moral and practical questionability of Caesar’s clemency was not the sort of theme that interested Plutarch about pity at Rome . . . the issue was simply too parochial in time and space.”
27 Appian 3.33.129; also Vell. Pat. 2.58.2, Plut. Ant. 13.3 and Brut. 18.2–4; and Dio 44.19.2.

28 Cf. Pro Marc. 28–9 and Att. 13.31.3 and 13.7. Indeed, Caesar had barely started the job; cf. Cic. Pro Marc. 25. Depending on its date and authorship, [Sallust] Ad Caesarem Senem (esp. 12.4–6 and 13.1–7) may also reflect this contemporary concern.

29 At least to judge from Plutarch’s description of it (Caes. 58.6–8). Appian (BC 2.110.459) ascribed the campaign to the Dictator’s need for physical therapy and respite from Rome.

30 Plut. Ant. 14.1; also Brut. 18.6; Appian, BC 2.118.496; and Dio 44.22.2. Plutarch (Ant. 5.4) reports that Antony as tribune used the same disguise to escape Rome just before the outbreak of the civil war. Accounts of Antony’s escapes in servile or plebeian clothing might have been inspired by irony because anecdotes described Antony’s victims during the proscriptions using the same ruse to escape; cf. Appian, BC 4.48.205 and Dio 47.10.2–5.

31 Antony remained a subject of interest for early imperial writers not least of all because of their high estimate of Cicero and his Philippic orations; cf. Gotter (1996), 19 n. 38.


34 Plut. Caes. 62.7; Brut. 9.6–7 and 10.6; Appian, BC 2.112.469 and 113.472; Dio 44.12.3.

35 It was a subject full of danger for the historian: periculosae plenum opus aleae (Horace, Carm. 2.1.6), and Livy did not publish his account of the year 43 BCE (and possibly the years after) until Augustus was dead (Livy, per. 121). Even then, the young, studious Claudius omitted the triumviral years in his Roman history, on the advice of his grandmother Livia, the widow of Augustus (Suet. Claud. 41.2).

36 On this theme in the Bios, see Toher (2003a), 150–4.

37 Syme (1944), 95; also Strasburger (1968), 14–15.

38 There is little evidence or consensus on when Nicolaus composed his biography of Augustus. Based on internal evidence in the text and the publication of Augustus’ autobiography in the late 20s BCE, Jacoby and others have put composition of the Bios in those years. Yet a reference to the northern border of the Roman Empire as within the Rhine River (F 125.1) may indicate a date in the last years of Augustus’ rule, and the conventions of the genre of ancient biography argue for a date of publication after the death of Augustus.
Both friend and foe of the emperor Nero, Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39–65 CE) was the first to recognize that Julius Caesar was the stuff charismatic literary heroes are made of. But the nephew of the philosopher Seneca was certainly not the first to be lured by his glamour. Poets who were roughly Caesar’s contemporaries, among them Cicero and Furius Bibaculus, immortalized him even in his lifetime. Though hardly a fragment of their epics survives, we can surmise by the titles (*Bellum Sequanicum, Bellum Gallicum, de Expeditione Britannica*) that they praised Caesar as a hero conquering territory for the Roman Empire in Gaul and Britain. And as Suetonius reports (*Iul. 56.5*), Caesar himself during the campaign in Spain composed a poem of unknown contents with the title *Iter*.

More than one hundred years later (approximately in the years 60 to 63 CE), Lucan fills a gap in this poetic reflection on Caesar and adds an epic on his greatest military achievement: the Civil Wars. Along with Sallust and Cicero, with his *Bellum Civile* (or *Pharsalia*) he created an image of Caesar that still captures the imagination, covering the full scale from virtue to vice, from human depravity to uncanny godlikeness. His Caesar has been fascinating and – most of all – irritating readers and scholars ever since. Of course, their strong reactions only mirror the poet’s own fascination and irritation with the ancestor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

**Caesar in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile***

The *Bellum Civile* is one more demonstration that the Romans were at a loss with Caesar. Authors of the first century CE, such as Pliny the Elder
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(Plin. NH 7.91–9) or Tacitus (Agricola, 13.1, 15.4) attest, too, that Caesar still remained an object of admiration, fascination, and simple wonder. Even a century after his assassination, Caesar’s actions could not be labeled simply as good or bad; at least one had to allow that the famous imperator and ancestor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty was still exerting a prolonged effect on the course of Roman history – whatever that meant. But was it really only Caesar who destroyed the Roman Republic and with it, once and for all, Roman libertas? The answer to this question depends on the individual’s attitude to the Principate.3 Certainly among the senatorial families of early imperial Rome (once very powerful, now painfully deprived of dear privileges), opposition to the Caesares was an eagerly embraced tradition. Yet, it is highly doubtful that under the reign of Nero genuine supporters of the Republic still existed. In truth, the wind of change after the Civil Wars, so welcomed in the time of Augustus, had now subsided. But what were the political alternatives? It was in this atmosphere of hope, ambivalence, and lack of political creativity that Lucan wrote his Bellum Civile. If we leave aside his personal quarrel with Nero – we have no convincing testimony that he was a “republican” – his Bellum Civile emerges as a potent fantasy about the lost, justly vanished Roman Republic.

Though Lucan’s epic is very much in line with certain features of Roman epic in general (such as thematic concentration on Rome, discussions of legality, emphasis on divination and portents), it is innovative, even audacious in different respects. Nonetheless, it also stands in the wider context of a long Roman tradition of myth-making, which as a powerful equivalent to Greek mythology would play a crucial role in the political landscapes of Europe in the centuries to come.4

The interplay of different modes of processing current and past events in works of literature is an outstanding feature of Roman culture: next to prose (commentarii, historiography, and biography) there existed several genres of poetry: shorter poetic forms and, prominently, historical epic and dramatic performances (or praetextatae). In the division of these genre-based forms of reenactment, the latter differed in their temporal and spatial outreach, the epic being the master genre with longest durability. They all served as mediators in the collective imaginaire of Roman society by perceiving historical events and protagonists in terms of fictionalization, reviving historical figures and reenacting historical events, but at the same time setting them at a distance from reality too. Yet, by selecting and rearranging facts, they created secondary realities not to be measured by
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modern standards of historiography. The role of literature in Roman society has yet to be defined more clearly, but these genres certainly had a function in the complex mechanisms of collective memoria. But we can also observe the reciprocal influence of life and literature: in public, Roman politicians – among them very prominently Caesar – drew heavily on strategies of self-presentation that required a sort of self-fictionalization which implemented both literary and “theatrical” clichés.5

It is highly probable that Caesar was both immortalized in mediocre historical epics and figured in the dramatic genre of praetextatae.6 Nevertheless, the Bellum Civile stands out among these “poetifications” of history, not only due to its canonic quality, but also because Lucan claims as a literary subject which will arouse eternal interest (7.205–13, 9.980–6) not a heroic feat of Roma aeterna on the path to world power, but the internal war of 49–48 BCE between Pompey and Caesar. Eclipsing the complex ideological controversies of the late Republic, Lucan focuses on the escalating conflict between “great” men, the generals Pompey and Caesar, and the moral depravity of the greedy, envious, and aggressive Roman populace and their corrupt magistrates. As Lucan tells us, there is more than one reason for a war which was useful to many (1.182). Readers find a colorful panorama of a prosperous state inevitably in decline, outlined with all the strategies of poetry and “anti-rhetorics,” and elevated to such an abstract level, that it could serve as a point of reference and quasi-historical source for later times when information was sought on the origin and development of civil strife.8 Lucan’s fame persists because his principal character is Julius Caesar, the most famous person from classical antiquity.

Lucan’s Caesar

In the construction of his characters, Lucan reduces the given features of any historical personality to some remarkable traits on the verge of caricature and paints them in minute detail. Caesar, whose life provides a high degree of natural fiction to begin with, was molded by Lucan into a polarized, energetic male character with an immense unfulfilled potential. Among the influences on his construction are such mythic characters as Agamemnon, Achilles, and Aeneas, historical persons such as Alexander, Hannibal, Scipio, even Pompey and Augustus, and fascinating literary-historical male archetypes of the first century CE such as Sallust’s Catiline
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or Propertius’ Mark Antony. He appears in the standard situations of epic and tragedy: meeting a deity (1.183–203), in a sea storm (5.497b–702), visiting a grove (3.399–452), at a banquet (10.155–331), addressing the soldiers before a crucial battle (e.g., 7.235–336). The real vita is substituted and enriched by a poetic vita in a web of intertextual allusions and contexts with a dynamic of their own. Consequently, the borders between fiction and reality are blurred past recognition. An outstanding example of this is Caesar’s touristic detour to the once magnificent, now derelict, landscape of Troy (9.950–99) that is not confirmed by any other testimony. To take this passage as proof that Caesar actually visited Troy (and therefore inaugurated the habitual visits there by the emperors from Augustus onwards) misses both its poetic function and a well-composed lesson of memory and its media, since it shows the advantages of poetic memory over lieux des mémoires. Caesar, scolded by his eager tourist guide for treading on holy ground (although he does so unwittingly), is confronted with the effects of time that have left hardly any remarkable traces of the scenery of the Iliad. The narrator’s comforting apostrophe to Caesar, that he should not be distressed by other people’s envy of his fame because together author and subject will gain immortality as did Achilles and Homer, is unsettling, given that the source of this fame is the Civil War battle at Pharsalus. Even more strikingly, however, readers have to come to terms with several breath-taking temporal and intertextual vertigoes, as Lucan seems to address the Caesar of 48 BCE, who did not know either Vergil’s Aeneid or the ideological use his adoptive son Augustus would make of Troy. With this device, Lucan fashions himself as the Roman Homer (self-assuredly leaving aside his great predecessors in Latin, Vergil and Ennius) and marks Pharsalus, not Augustus’ Actium, as the crucial turning-point in Roman history.

Any of the Lucanian episodes concerning Caesar forms an emblematic part of his collective memory: the Rubicon (1.213–32), the march on Rome (3.71–103a), Caesar in the Grove of Massilia, Caesar’s tears when he is presented with the head of Pompey (9.1004–108), Caesar at Pharsalus (7 passim), and Caesar and Cleopatra (9.1004–10). Even if readers of the Bellum Civile remember these episodes very clearly, because of Caesar’s mostly unexplained motivations, they are open to various and contradictory interpretations. This effect is enhanced by the fact that we see Caesar through the eyes of a biased narrator.

Lucan’s invention of a Caesarian myth coincides with an emphasis on the peculiar perspective from which it originates. The subjective narrator
Caesar, Lucan’s Bellum Civile, and their Reception

– a survivor of the Civil Wars with a restricted knowledge of Rome’s future – describes the actions of Caesar and other protagonists and comments on them. This creates a complicated reader–text relationship, because readers are confronted with dissonant meanings: the statements of the protagonists are realized in such a way that the meta-level of intertextuality weakens or even contradicts the surface meaning.9

The ambivalent narrator, suspecting Caesar to be capable of every possible evil deed, is the ancient equivalent of Hegel’s proverbial manservant, who lacks the appropriate standards to judge a great man. Therefore he falls short of understanding the necessity of historical process and Caesar’s crucial role in it, given that Lucan’s Caesar is a sort of Hegelian Geschäftsführer (or “manager”) des Weltgeistes. The narrator’s hateful contempt, however, also verges on admiration. The meek, half-hearted eulogy of Pompey, the praise for the unlikely Stoic sage Cato, the exaggerated, bizarre denigration of Caesar renders it more and more difficult to believe the narrator: all the more so because he sometimes changes his outlook within a few lines or even seems to forget his reservations against Caesar. On one occasion, the narrator finds fault with the gods, who apparently favor impious Caesar (e.g., 3.447f.), but he never tries to understand why (there might be a deeper reason considering the decrepit state of the Roman Republic). Next, in a rhetorical tour de force, he takes Caesar’s side and threatens that the traditional gods – as a just reward – will lose their clientele once Caesar is deified (7.454–9). Readers, who know that in reality Rome by no means ceased to exist after Pharsalus, but emerged out of the Civil Wars even more powerful, are forced to see Caesar’s role in the epic in light of his later divination. Just like Vergil, Lucan confirms Rome’s greatness as the will of fate, since its total destruction is only a literary prediction. In spite of all the denigration and execration of the ensuing Principate, the fall and eventual transformation of the Roman Republic attains a destined quality that in reverse could be construed as justification for a change of constitution that is indispensable for Rome’s survival.

Today, an impressive mechanism of Nachträglichkeit cements one particular reading of the Bellum Civile, because the poem’s gloom and general pessimism appear to anticipate the topos of the Fall of Rome developed in late antiquity and subsequent times.10 Such associations with the topos of Rome’s Fall and the later, secondary republicanism inaugurated by the humanists, on which the evaluation of Caesar necessarily depends, now obscure the original context of the epic, leading to
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a change in its meaning over time.\textsuperscript{11} We should therefore watch our responses as readers with caution and not identify too easily and habitually with an anti-Caesarian stance, especially when history and epic description differ: for instance, it is considered to be to Caesar’s discredit that in Lucan’s epic he does not accept Massilia’s wish to remain neutral and consequently sacks the city (3.298–374). However reproachable Caesar’s reaction might be, this evaluation is based on modern notions of neutrality not valid for classical antiquity, as for example Thucydides’ discussion of the Melian dialogue and other testimonies show.\textsuperscript{12} The historical constellation of Massilia was different in any case (there were Pompeians in Massilia), and what would Caesar’s alternatives have been in Lucan’s \textit{Bellum Civile} and in real life? (Does Caesar have any proof of the Massilians’ sincerity? Do we?) Accepting Massilia’s offer to spend a night in town without his soldiers would have been mere stupidity. On second glance, the protestations of the narrator appear shallow, and Caesar emerges as a competent, though violent, war leader.

The constant destabilization of the epic’s sense is obvious, especially in regard to the \textit{clementia Caesaris}: whatever the motives of the historical Caesar may have been, his \textit{clementia} was definitely progressive, looking beyond post-civil war society.\textsuperscript{13} Lucan’s narrator and some of his protagonists hardly consider the \textit{clementia Caesaris} to be a gift (2.511–25, 3.122–40), but the contrast between the severe invectives and positive responses from some other protagonists (4.337–64, 7.720–1) make us think that Caesar has a point: \textit{clementia} cannot easily be converted into a tyrant’s nasty trick. If we do not want to brand Lucan as inconsistent, we could try to take this dissonant inconsistency as a starting-point for a balanced interpretation and accept that throughout the epic the inevitable nature of civil strife is emphasized. This cannot but lead to the question of which frames of interpretation we should choose.

A good guide to interpretation is the proem, in which the protagonists of the Civil War (Pompey, Caesar, and the \textit{populus Romanus}) are introduced through comparisons: Pompey is equated with a venerable old oak (1.135–43) and Caesar with lightning (1.151–7). Regarding Caesar, this first comparison introduces a \textit{leitmotif} as he is frequently likened to and associated with winds, storms, and other natural phenomena.\textsuperscript{14} Lucan’s literary technique here profits from poetic strategies, “Stoicisms” now deprived of their original context,\textsuperscript{15} and the common practice of explaining historical events in terms of nature.\textsuperscript{16} This becomes evident when Lucan is read against the foil of Seneca’s \textit{Naturales Quaestiones}. In
his chapter on winds (5.18.4), Lucan’s uncle quotes the historiographer Livy, who had remarked that Caesar had in common with winds and storms the ambivalence of utility and destruction inherent in every divine action: one could not decide whether he was more useful or more destructive to the Roman state. Problems of textual criticism call into question whether Livy really meant Caesar, or rather Caesar’s model Marius. Recently, Luciano Canfora has reasserted the identification with Caesar, which seems convincing with regard to Lucan’s concept of Caesar. Even if Livy did not refer to Caesar, however, we get an idea of how Lucan’s metaphors and comparisons taken from natural phenomena might be understood by his Roman readers as expressions of the historical and political process without necessarily demeaning Caesar.

In Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, Caesar emerges as both destructive and useful at the same time, as a godsend, a godlike higher force even, who (through destruction) brought about the change of constitution necessary for the survival of Rome. This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that after the proem, when events begin to unfold, Caesar (the conqueror of Gallia) is established as the hero of the epic, who, when standing on the banks of the Rubicon, already has a master plan in mind for the civil war to come. Lucan has taken care to endow this famous scene with all the heroic qualities ancient epic could provide. This strategy of creating a super-epic moment could have led to relative univocality. Yet, on the contrary, readers can have recourse to different intertextual models to guide alternative interpretations. Caesar’s encounter with Patria in a liminal situation (at dawn, on the banks of a river) is the only episode of the *Bellum Civile* in which a divine being appears. Caesar is the first Roman to be confronted with an omen, the larger-than-life image of Patria mourning over the civil strife to come and asking Caesar and his soldiers (1.191: *viri*) to refrain from civil war. At first, paralyzed by this sudden apparition, Caesar reacts appropriately, even piously, with the apotropaic gesture of a prayer to the tutelary divinities of Rome, Jupiter, Vesta, the Trojan Penates, and Roma herself whose soldier he says he is and will be. And without delay he crosses the Rubicon: the step from imagined civil war to its realization has been taken. This episode is as grandiose as it is confusing: is Patria identical with Roma? Is she a vision visible to Caesar and his troops? Is she only a dream, even a fallacious dream, of Caesar’s? In any case, Caesar seems to interpret this omen by proxy, taking its negative contents (mourning) to denote his future success. This can be inferred from the fact that, later in the poem before the battle at Pharsalus,
he reminds his soldiers that he had been promised both battle and victory at the Rubicon (7.254). A dream vision would explain why it is only Caesar who answers Patria, but such an interpretation would leave us in doubt about the public/non-public nature of his prayer. If instead one opts for an apparition, readers are left with the question why the soldiers’ reaction is missing from Lucan’s poem. This could be neutrally dismissed as narrative focalization on the hero or turned to Caesar’s discredit as indicative of a cold-blooded usurper, who suppresses any possible resistance on the part of his soldiers. But at this early stage of the epic it is impossible to mark Caesar as the arch-villain of the conflict. On the contrary: his ability to cross the Rubicon could mean that not only is he Roma’s darling, but his prayer for support and victory has found favor with the gods.

Caesar’s decisive act of crossing the Rubicon is compared to the pounce of a lion that, having been provoked for a long time by the Moors, gathers up all his rage and attacks them without considering his own well-being (1.205–12). With this comparison we are referred to the other party involved: Pompey and the Senate. The comparison with the lion turns out to be one of the most elucidating comments on the explosive atmosphere that escalated into the Civil War, when – as even the narrator concedes – by cunning abuse of Roman political institutions, Pompey tried to block Caesar’s political career (compare the expulsion of the tribuni, 1.262–7). As the noble lion, Caesar had to react to preserve his dignity even at high personal cost.\(^{20}\) The fatum that will bring about the end of the Republic has found its resonance and support in the personal motivation of the protagonists and in the general anomie. Yet only Caesar has a positive vision of the Rome to come. Cato fantasizes about its death (2.295–303); Pompey seeks the favor of the Roman populace and wants himself to be courted and flattered by Rome (8.322–7, 2.537–40, 7.1–44), but leaves the city to Caesar without hesitation. After Pharsalus he even suggests that Rome should be handed over to the Parthians, for it would be better that the city be seized by foreign mercenaries than prosper under Caesarian rule (8.322–7).

Caesar’s special relationship with Roma is confirmed by events after he crosses the Rubicon, when we see him marching on Rome. In anticipation of Caesarian Gewaltexzesse (“excesses of violence”), the Roman populace panics. In this episode, readers have two frames of reference: they know that Caesar did not sack Rome, but they have also witnessed
that, in the epic, General Laelius had affirmed Caesar’s infinitely loyal
soldiers would not hesitate to devastate the capital on his bidding (1.383–
8). In spite of his hate for Caesar, the narrator explains the hysterical
reaction in Rome as a subjective construction, as image-making caused
by the dynamic of *fama* (1.465–520): due to the over-long years of Caes-
ar’s absence from Rome, the Romans’ memory of Caesar the man is only
feeble. When they hear of his approach, they invent him anew as a bar-
baric general, fiercer and more cruel than the conquered Gallic people, who
will burn down temples and kill civilians. Yet reaction to the impending
catastrophe, imagined only out of the contorted image of Caesar, does
not differ from the reaction to a disaster (natural catastrophes such as
earthquakes or fire-storms) that really happened. And in fright, Senate
and populace alike leave the city without looking one last time at the
beauties of the *urbs aeterna*. Contrary to all expectations, Caesar enters
Rome rejoicing at the *mirabilia urbis* he has not seen for ten long years
(3.84–98).21 This is his second meeting with Roma, whom he loves too
much to destroy.

The paradox of the difference between the real man and the invented
images is encapsulated in some remarkable lines which provide meta-
poetical instruction on how to read the *Bellum Civile* (1.479f.): *maior
ferusque* / *mentibus occurrit victoque immanior hoste* (“He comes to their minds
as bigger and fiercer and more savage than the beaten enemy”). 22 Apart
from the fact that the narrator’s comment weakens his own stance toward
Caesar, in these lines Lucan the author lays bare his own strategies of
forging poetic images of Caesar, images which are only partially congruent
with Caesar the real man. Caesar is reduced to the features which are
most responsible for the fascination he still exerts two thousand years
after his death: Caesar, genius of warfare, *miles* and general of *Roma
aeterna*; Caesar, the man who would be a tyrant; Caesar, the darling and
challenger of the gods and god-to-be; Caesar, the executor of fate and
godsent destroyer of the Roman Republic, paving the way to a more
powerful political system; Caesar, who would not enjoy his victory for
long. And add to this Caesar, the good psychologist, the scientist, and
ethnographer driven by anthropological curiosity; and Caesar, the lover
of the most seductive woman in the world.

In Lucan’s epic Caesar is caught in a sort of eternal potentiality opening
up room for eternal interpretation. His task (whatever it was) remained
unfinished because he was murdered before his time. We will never
know what the world would have been like if Brutus and his fellow assassins had not succeeded on the Ides of March. So the often-quoted bon mot *victrix causa dis placuit, sed victa Catoni* (“The victorious party was supported by the gods, the vanquished by Cato,” 1.128) is certainly two-faced, because in general a literary work cannot prescribe a certain interpretation. That Lucan’s Cato, Pompey, and the Senate *say* that they fight for the Republic does not necessarily make their cause a better one, and it does not necessarily discredit the gods either. Even before his death and ensuing divination, we perceive in Lucan’s Caesar a certain godlikeness which is the *rationale* behind the fact that the gods are not introduced as acting persons in the epic. Only Caesar is confident of their existence and their support, and he is the most reliable reader of their will. He proceeds with an uncanny swiftness, rationalism, and ability to cope with dangerous and unforeseen situations, and sometimes shows unseemly coldness and cruelty. In this respect he resembles most the gods found in tragedy and epic who walk among men, such as Dionysos in Euripides’ *Bacchae* or the raging divinities such as Juno in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, or the destructive hero and god-to-be Hercules in the pseudo-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*. In Lucan, Caesar’s talents and the mystery of his violence and victory crystallize into a factor X, a factor that cannot be accounted for, and this, of course, makes him the perfect literary character.

In *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon remarked that, if Lucan had really intended to denigrate Caesar, he sometimes failed on a high level:

> Though it is not, most assuredly, the intention of Lucan to exalt the character of Caesar, yet the idea he gives of that hero in the tenth book of the *Pharsalia*, where he describes him, at the same time, making love to Cleopatra, sustaining a siege against the power of Egypt, and conversing with the sages of the country, is, in reality, the noblest panegyric.

Gundolf, himself bewitched by Caesar, insisted that Lucan was fascinated and aesthetically challenged by the powerful man, who in his unresolvable ambivalence does not fit neatly into the categories of “good” and “evil.” If we view Lucan’s epic in its literary context (the discourse about Caesar of the time) and poetic context (mythological Senecan tragedy, where we also encounter human beings who transgress their human nature), this seems very credible.
Some Glances at the Reception of Lucan’s Caesar

Modern discussions about the missing hero of the *Bellum Civile*, sometimes resolved by the affirmation that there is more than one hero and a divided focus, apparently stem from an unwillingness to grant Caesar his undoubtedly superior position. This is evident in statements such as Bramble’s in the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*: “If the Republican leaders are less convincing to us [sc. than Caesar] that is a failure of execution on Lucan’s part, or a failure of understanding on ours.” The choice he leaves us is really remarkable: either Lucan was an incompetent poet or we, his readers, are incompetent. Might there be a chance that the “incompetent” readers understood the “incompetent” Lucan perfectly well? The complex reception of the *Bellum Civile* – when simplified – shows two dominant yet contradictory lines, fairly mirroring the epic’s two voices concerning Caesar, which means praise on one side and denigration on the other, having their tertium comparationis in the fascination with an ambivalent character to which Gundolf was so obviously prey when he wrote his study of Caesar’s reception. These two lines, coinciding with the fragmented reception of the *Bellum Civile*, coexisted for a long time although with changing predominance.

(1) Over the centuries, in spite of its anti-Caesarian undertones, the *Bellum Civile* was read as a positive though ambivalent affirmation of Caesar’s grandeur as founder of Europe’s most productive political system – empire. Dante’s *Divina Commedia* is a good example of such appreciation of Caesar (while not excluding praise for Cato too). In the thirteenth-century, Old Icelandic translation of the *Bellum Civile*, *Rómvería-saga*, wherever there happens to be an invective in Caesarem, the translator adds, “This is Lucan’s personal opinion” (not historical truth).

As Tucker shows in an elucidating article on illustrations in pre- and post-revolutionary editions of G. Brébeuf’s French translation of the *Bellum Civile* (1680, rep. 1796), the epic could be used as panegyric under the reign of the Sun Kings by displaying the “heroic qualities” of Caesar (as the adoptive father of Octavian the first Roman emperor) “rather than demeaning him,” whereas after the French Revolution exactly the opposite phenomenon can be observed.

Another instructive example is the *Nachleben* of Caesar’s deforestation of the holy grove of Massilia in Book 3 of *Bellum Civile*: whereas modern scholarship – highlighting Caesar’s uncanny similarities to the Erysichthon
of Callimachus and Ovid – considers this the crime of a “mythic, cosmic monster,”30 to the philosopher Voltaire (in his Essay on Ancient Epic of 1727) it was the most brilliant scene of ancient literature, because for the first time an enlightener of flesh and blood starred as an epic protagonist, putting an end to superstition and thereby substituting human rationality for the gods. From 1864 to 1882, a Swiss poet, C. F. Meyer, reworked the episode into a series of ballads with varying titles such as Das Heiligtum. Following Voltaire, he depicted Caesar as an enlightener who is like a father to his unenlightened soldiers and paves the way for the ultimate enlightener, Jesus Christ. In a detective novel published in 2000, Last Seen in Massilia, Steven Saylor relies heavily on Lucan. Yet in his version of the deforestation31 told by a soldier of Caesar to the hero of the novel, Gordianus, we have it all: enlightenment and destruction, efficient warfare and even comic relief. Near Massilia, Gordianus is confronted with a “landscape of endless tree stumps. The forest had been razed.”32 The soldier, seeing the confusion of Gordianus, tells the story of the grove in a very Lucanian manner, but transforms Caesar into a charismatic person with a predictable bad temper. When the soldiers fear to enter the grove, “‘Caesar was furious! He grabbed a double-headed axe from one of the men, and started hacking at the biggest oak in sight . . . Caesar didn’t stop until the tree came crashing down. Everyone fell to chopping after that. Afraid Caesar might come after them with that axe!’ The soldier laughed.”33 Not being himself attracted to Caesar, Gordianus points out the nefarious nature of his action, but the soldier doubts that it was sacrilege “to cut down an old forest full of spiders and mulch.”

(2) This positive (yet ambivalent) reading of Lucan’s Caesar has now nearly vanished in favor of denigration. The shift began with Petrarch and the humanists who advocated their “secondary” republicanism. Later Lucan was quite popular during and after the French Revolution, when the epicist, modeled into the icon of a revolutionary poet, fervent supporter of the Republic, dying young, was praised for his (allegedly) correct political outlook. Among his admirers were Friedrich Hölderlin and Percy Bysshe Shelley, who considered Lucan a kindred spirit. Up to our times this image of the rebel-poet Lucan has been the decisive factor for most interpretations of his Bellum Civile and, consequently, of his Caesar. Today – with few exceptions such as Saylor’s historical novels – Lucanian scholarship seems to be the only kind of reception left.34 The “short century” (as Hobsbawm has called it) has strengthened negative
attitudes toward Caesar. It was not by chance that the first important studies on Lucan (Fränkel, Thierfelder, Gundolf, Wünsch) were written shortly after World War I, in accordance with a general tendency of that time to look for similar disasters in the history of humankind. Comparisons of the Civil War between Pompey and Caesar and the modern World Wars are common, even in our time, in historical scholarship and in novels such as Claude Simon’s *La Bataille de Pharsale* (1969), whose intertext is Caesar’s *Bellum Civile*. This comparison led to a general deterioration in esteem for the historical Caesar, starting off with Ferrero’s fervent book of 1904 and its reception among English historians. With the emergence of totalitarian systems after World War I, to some interpreters history seemed to repeat the loss of the Roman Republic and the formation of the Principate, a view which added to the negative slant on Caesar as its founder. Such comparisons can be stimulating yet, even though the Roman Empire may have shown some totalitarian traits and modern totalitarian leaders may have adopted strategies of legitimation and political self-representation from the Roman Caesars, it was far from being a totalitarian system in the sense of Hitler’s or Stalin’s. Nonetheless, this modern image of ancient Rome fits too well into the imaginaire of our time to be given up only because it cannot be verified.

As scholarship on Lucan has always depended on evaluations of the historical Caesar, easily grasped actualizations have won the day: the Civil War is fought over and over again, but now with a result different from the historical one. And this means that while the winner Caesar is condemned as a totalitarian leader in the modern sense of the word (and therefore as the moral loser), the loser Pompey takes it all. Certainly it is seen as his “merit” to have lost this one decisive war, the Civil War, but the famous Conqueror of the East cannot be reembodied as a harmless pacifist. The role of Pompey in the last days of the Roman Republic was as obscure and ambivalent as it appears to be in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. Even his supporters feel pity and shame that such a “great” man could fall so low. Not only has he no good fortune, he also lacks insight and responsibility, driven by his jealousy of Caesar. Cato turns into a genuine supporter of Pompey only after his death (9.15–18). Readers are left with the empty feeling that thinking too much about Pompey, who can be seen either as a destroyer (potentially a worse winner than Caesar) or as a martyr of the Republic, is not really worth while.

If we aim for an interpretation of Lucan in his historical context, we certainly need to differentiate between the responses of a Roman and a
modern reader. Would a Roman reader really have praised Pompey for leaving Rome or the battlefield at Pharsalus or blamed Caesar for his competence as a war leader? To a modern reader, Caesar’s tactics in quelling his soldiers’ mutiny in Lucan Book 5 may seem inhumanely harsh – the leaders of the mutiny are executed – but in the context of Roman military discipline this was the way to handle a mutiny. At least the dissonances of Lucan’s poetic condemnation of common military practice and its possible effect on Roman readers should be acknowledged and assessed.

In scholarship on Lucan, the subjective interference of modern political perspectives – however appropriate in other contexts – is not the object of reflection. Consequently we find a strange mixture of Zeitgeist, secondary Vergil scholarship, and sometimes even hypocritical admiration of the Roman Republic, altogether taken for the objectivity of classical philology. In Germany after World War II, scholarship on Lucan used the negative characterization of Caesar as an indirect comment on the recent past of the Third Reich: it suffices to quote the title of Pfligersdorfer’s seminal article of 1959: “Lukan als Dichter geistigen Widerstandes” (“Lucan as poet of subversion and resistance”). By the 1960s, German scholarship had mostly retreated from discussion of contemporary issues, which of course is no solution either, and to my mind the main reason why German classical philology has fallen into its self-chosen stupor. An embarrassing reflex (given the political involvement of the author during the Third Reich) is Viktor Poeschl’s comment on Gundolf’s Caesar in a 1981 article: it is no more than lip-service when he criticizes Gundolf’s judgment that Lucan might even have been, to a certain degree, fascinated by a man like Caesar.

A similar pattern of political interpretation occurs in American scholarship on Lucan produced over the last thirty years, heavily influenced as it has been by the experience of Vietnam, the Gulf Wars, and Kosovo. In these interpretations imperial Rome is a system only just short of the totalitarian society envisioned in George Orwell’s 1984, their image of Caesar – as a paragon of greed, violence, cunning, and inhumane calculation – is a crude mix of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini. Frederick Ahl, whose 1976 study on Lucan is still an important landmark in modern scholarship, certainly saw the obvious predominance, even virtue, of Caesar in the epic. Yet, because he is sure that Caesar is the epic’s bad guy, by the double standard of such interpretations he manages to find that everything Caesar says is wrong and depraved, even when his
arguments are sound and appropriate, while Pompey is deemed to say the right and morally justified thing even when he is showing off his incompetence or egoism. Ahl thus misses the ambivalent construction of the *Pharsalia*. To W. R. Johnson in his 1987 study, all the characters of Lucan’s epic are cynical images of misused power, Caesar being the most “funny” one as a sort of forerunner of Freud’s Schreber. In a more recent study from 1997, Shadi Bartsch compares Lucan’s Caesar to Adolf Eichmann. To reconcile herself to the apparently weak and irresponsible Pompey and his apparently weaker cause, she takes 200 pages and the perspective of Richard Rorty’s ironist: the interpretative waste of her certainly elegant aporiai is the best proof of Caesar’s overriding position in Lucan’s epic.

To come to a conclusion: Lucan’s epic provided a very influential literary image of Caesar, which is the main reason for its long-lasting reception. The perennial production of new, even contradictory meanings connected to the prevalent political situation of the poem’s interpreters and their evaluation of the historical Caesar is an indication that the *Bellum Civile* is really endowed with all the virtues of a classical text. In attempts to resolve the irresolvable ambivalence regarding Caesar (and other characters) in the *Bellum Civile*, the history of Lucan’s reception has mainly emphasized only one of two tendencies – celebration or denigration. For the time being, acknowledgment of the fascinating aspects of Lucan’s Caesar or even mere acceptance of the destabilizing ambivalence of Lucan’s Caesar no longer seem politically correct. We await with curiosity what images of Caesar future interpretation of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* will have in store for us.

**NOTES**

1 Byrne (1998).
2 Gundolf (1924), esp. 32–8.
3 Fantham (2003).
5 Wiseman (1998); Corbeill (2002).
6 Wiseman (1998), 60ff.
7 “Anti-rhetoric” identifies moments where devices of rhetoric (which aims at expressing things in the most appropriate and clear manner) are used to obscure statements or render them ambivalent. Cf. the definition of rhetoric and anti-rhetoric in Walde (2001), 959.
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8 Crosland (1930). Clearly this was the reason for early translations such as: *In Cath Catharada: The Civil War of the Romans*, ed. and trans. W. Stokes/E. Windisch, Leipzig, 1909 (Middle Irish, ca. 1250); R. Meissner (ed.), *Rómveriasaga*, Berlin, 1910 (Old Norse, ca. 1280).

9 See below on the episode of Caesar’s encounter with Patria. This is a very advanced literary technique, whose innovative potential cannot be overestimated even if pre-forms of it can be found in the different modes of myth-making and self-invention of the poetry of Lucretius, Propertius, and Vergil, and, most of all, in the subjective narrators of Ovid’s *Heroides* and his *Epistulae ex Ponto* (cf. Cicero’s reflection on how he constructed the settings for his dialogues, *Att. 4.6*). Cf. Walde (2003).

10 Rehm (1930).


13 Cf. his famous letter to Oppius and Cornelius (Cic. *Att. 9.7C*), and Griffin (2003).

14 Schönberger (1960).

15 “Stoicisms” (a term formed analogously to “Atticisms”) are uses of and references to Stoic philosophy in poetic works as a means of conveying and constructing sense. The occurrence of Stoicisms does not imply that the poetic work as a whole is to be read Stoically. Cf. Wildberger (2005).

16 Demandt (1978).


21 Cf. the positive reception of Caesar’s entry into the city in Master Gregory (sec. XII), *Narracio de mirabilibus urbis, Romae*, chapter 1.

22 This nice pun on Pompey’s name (Magnus/maior) should be kept in mind whenever the narrator or other persons inveigh against Caesar.

23 Gibbon (1788), vol. 1, 253 n. 41.

24 Bramble (1982), 536.


26 In his exhaustive study on images of Caesar in medieval France, Leeker observes a fragmentation of the epic into the episodes concerning Caesar, in which the narrator’s bias is ignored or neutralized. See Leeker (1986), 466 (index s.v. Lucan).


28 Tucker (1971).

29 Ibid., 8.

30 Phillips (1968), 300.

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32 Ibid., 12.
33 Ibid., 12–13.
35 E.g., Meier (1977), 71.
36 E.g., Syme (1939).
37 Cf. Dunnett (in this volume).
40 Cf. Der Neue Pauly, 8, 144–7, s.v. Meuterei [J. B. Campbell].
41 Sometimes Lucan scholarship consists of nothing more than issues of Vergil scholarship simply transferred to Lucan. This applies especially to the ideological stance of the poets vis-à-vis the emperors Augustus and Nero respectively.
42 Walde (2003).
43 This becomes evident especially in Ahl’s comparison of the speeches Caesar and Pompey deliver before the battle of Pharsalus (Ahl [1976], 164–6), where he fails to see the demagogical nature of Pompey’s exhortation as well as Caesar’s competence as a Roman war-leader.
44 This chapter has to be understood in the larger context of my Lucan project (2001–5) at the University of Basel, Switzerland, sponsored by the Swiss National Research Foundation.
Julian warred and ruled and wrote as a Roman emperor. His cousin Constantius II, Constantine I’s longest-surviving son, made Julian a subordinate partner in his authority in late 355 CE. From that time Julian bore Julius Caesar’s family name as part of his own, in token of his imperial status. The name Caesar doubled as his title, junior emperor and heir. Constantius sent Julian to represent the dynasty in Gaul and assist in defending the region. Gaul also lay far from any previous personal allegiances Julian, a native Easterner, might have had. Julian as Caesar succeeded better than Constantius perhaps expected. In early spring 360, his Gallic troops named him Augustus, emperor at senior rank. Constantius refused assent to the promotion. But his natural death in autumn 361 obviated the civil war Julian by then was preparing in revolt: Julian ruled as sole Augustus from 361 until he died campaigning in Persian territory in 363.

During his sole reign Julian made public his apostasy from Constantine’s and Constantius’ Christianity in both belief and policy. Julian sought to renovate Greek and Roman pagan religiosity in the empire: traditional forms of worship should secure general piety, while interpretation along Neoplatonic lines could systematize and justify multifarious cults to the intellectually fastidious, Julian among them. Julian’s strong Hellenic acculturation and his reverence for Plato both sanctioned his devotion to the traditions of classical Greek literature as well. Julian’s passionately erudite writings variously promoted his program. The dialogue he entitled Symposion, or, Kronia (now commonly known as “The Caesars”) reviews the line of Roman Caesars before Julian, beginning with Julius Caesar. Its assessments implicitly propose a way to construe Julian’s own role at the Roman Empire’s apex. Julian brings to bear both intense
personal identification and critical distance, both censorious judgment and a fractious wit.

Julian composed his symposium-dialogue of Caesars probably in 362.3 His alternative title Kronia calques the traditional Latin holiday Saturnalia into Greek. The midwinter holiday is set as the dialogue’s occasion by an introductory framing conversation (306a–307a): Julian speaks with an unnamed interlocutor who addresses him as “Caesar.” The designation signposts his personal investment in the discourse to follow. The festival invoked by the text demands levity. The character Julian pleads awkwardness. He offers a mythos, a fictional narrative, he says he learned from Hermes. He cannot say whether it is truth or whether Hermes mixed truth with invention. Julian the author, obviously, created his balky persona so as to tease up a reader’s attention to his tale, and lead out preliminary comment on it. The interlocutor encouragingly notes Plato used mythoi as vehicles for serious messages. He applauds the introduction of this tale as “both mythical and rhetorical” (τουτὶ µὲν οἶν ἡδη µυθικὸς ἁµα καὶ ῥητορικὸς ἐξείργασταί σοι τὸ προοίµιον, 307a).4 Julian thus pointedly locates his story in the tradition of Second Sophistic narrative with philosophical overtones, such as Dio Chrysostom deployed within his orations “On Kingship”: truth and divine prompting conspire, for example, in the otherwise fanciful-seeming parable Dio claims to have learned from a rural prophetess, of Heracles’ choice between Basileia and Tyrannis (D. Chr. Or. 1.56–8).5 As Julian in his turn playfully half-asserts, half-disavows truth, he displays credentials of literary authority amounting to a claim that his narrative is transcendently valid.

At the same time, the self-conscious Platonizing of Julian’s preface announces that his tale is a fabulous sketch of transcendence, rather than a precise account. Plato’s Socrates similarly distinguishes the mythos of Er from his theory of souls (Pl. Rep. 621b–c).6 Julian’s echo makes both a literarily distinguished gesture and the scrupulous point that the personalities and byplay of his prosopa are narrative conveniences: he entertains them for the sake of having a story, on a holiday piety mandates, not so as to compromise his more austere understanding of divine nature. That understanding glimmers through in hints, details that conform with Platonic religious principles.7 Thus, when Quirinus, the deified Romulus, invites “all the gods and also the Caesars” to a symposium celebrating the feast of Kronos, the arrangements for the banquet delineate a celestial hierarchy (307b–c). The couches of the gods form their circle “at the peak of heaven.” The seats for the Caesars, formerly living humans and thus
members of a more material order, are arranged “below the moon.” The setting renders eternal and spiritual verities into physical terms. Such a translation reverses Julian’s usual predilections: his intellectual creed characteristically analyzed traditional myths like that of Cybele and Attis out of their materiality (M. Th. 161b, 169d–170c). Symposion, or, Kronia, however, mediates between the qualities the Caesars showed in their lives, which transcendently continue to be identified with them after death, and the historical particularities of their reigns. Correspondingly in the preface, the professed awkwardness of Julian’s persona calls attention to the gap between intellectual seriousness and earthly festivity. But Julian as author firmly submits his surrogate to the holiday’s demands. He thus affirms their legitimacy. Even intellectual believers are bound during their lives to physical existence: Julian recognizes traditional observances like the Saturnalia accommodate this fact. They enable all worshippers to honor the divine. So too Julian’s setting for his dialogue’s main part engineers a compromise. Julian gives room to the mundane realness of Roman power within the space of his incorporeal ideals.

Julian establishes Quirinus’ connection to the embodied, Roman world by identifying him first by his human name, Romulus, then explicitly switching to Quirinus “in obedience to divine will” (τὴν θείαν πειθόµενος φήμην, 307b). Quirinus’ changed status is a matter of Roman tradition and a nicety to be respected within Julian’s careful ranking of immortal and post-mortal beings. It also establishes incidentally the very principle of promotion that becomes crucial to the narrative as it develops.

In the first third of the dialogue’s action, the Caesars arrive in historical sequence and take their places (308d–316a). Each is characterized briefly. Most excite some comment from Silenus. This relatively minor divinity plays a cardinal role in Julian’s artistic design. Silenus takes his seat next to Dionysos on the grounds he was his nurse and tutor, but his motive appears to lie in his being “amorously disposed toward” Dionysos (308c). Therefore Silenus, who keeps up symposiastic banter by chaffing at each Caesar’s claims to dignity, also inverts the erotic relationship Plato sets athwart the climax of his Symposium. The “beautiful and young” Dionysos decorously substitutes for Alcibiades, restored to youthful beauty’s natural position as object of longing. Whereas Plato’s Alcibiades famously adduces bald, snub-nosed Silenus as the physical image of Socrates (Pl. Smp. 215b, 216d), Julian’s Silenus bodies forth the sage. Silenus himself notes the resemblance (314d; cf. Ap. Cyn. 187a). In order to amuse Dionysos (308d), his impish truth-telling turns the Caesars’ traits
Julian Augustus’ Julius Caesar
to steady raillery. Julian’s transposition of Platonic paradox in the relationship of Alcibiades and Socrates forms the center of his humor in *Symposion*, or, *Kronia*. The establishing details of the setting lose attention as the dialogue focuses on the Caesars themselves, but as he jests Silenus persistently recalls and resonates against the philosophical pedigree Julian professes.\(^\text{11}\) He is both wise and foolish, both candid and intertextually inscrutable. Instrumentally, Silenus opens up the dialogue’s critique of the claims Julian’s Caesars tacitly or explicitly make to have fulfilled their position in the Roman state.

Julius Caesar enters “first.” Julian’s narrative highlights his priority, and remarks that his “love of honor” made him “willing to contend with Zeus for monarchy.” Silenus exclaims, “Look out, Zeus! lest this man from love of ruling plan to take away your kingship too. For as you see he’s big and fine, and if in nothing else, at least about the head he much resembles me” (εἰς ἡμείς πρῶτος Ἰούλιος Καίσαρ, ὑπὸ φιλοτιμίας αὐτῶι βουλόμενος ἔρισαι τῶι Δίι περὶ τῆς μοναρχίας…όρα, εἶπεν, ὦ Ζεῦ, μή σε ὁ ἀνὴρ οὕτοι ὑπὸ φιλαρχίας ἀφελέσθαι καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν διανοθῆ, 308d).\(^\text{12}\) Although the other gods pay little heed to Silenus’ foolery and turn their attention to Octavian, entering next in the parade, the reader should be given pause.

Competitiveness stands out first about Julius Caesar. It clashes with the gods’ serenity in their ordered circle as Julian describes it just a few lines before: “No one contended” (ἤριζε δὲ οὐδεὶς, 308b).\(^\text{13}\) The gods’ places are fixed by divine law. They rise, out of respect for Zeus, when he approaches, but they never upset their ranks or change or encroach on one another: “each one knows what belongs to him” (γνωρίζει δὲ ἐκαστος τὸ προσκον αὑτωι, 308c). Silenus can slip in beside Dionysos, Platonic indulgence toward desire serving the dramatic needs of the dialogue. But he disturbs nothing. Julius Caesar’s ambition threatens disruption. The precedent by which Romulus/Quirinus attains divine status suggests that the human condition, in contrast to the gods’, entails greater perfectibility; but Julius Caesar’s contentiousness is ready to strike at the top incontinently. His drive imparts momentum to the dialogue: he renews and energizes the hint Quirinus already constitutes. More dangerously, Caesar also betokens human transgressiveness. Some of his successors will be shown to have realized this potential, overshot their places at Quirinus’ symposium, and fallen.

The historiographical traditions on which Julian drew for his dialogue make Julius Caesar a somewhat surprising guest to have attended
Quirinus’ Saturnalian symposium. Plutarch’s biography of Caesar, juxta-
posed with that of Alexander in the *Parallel Lives*, was patently the main
authority informing Julian’s details. Both its place within Plutarch’s
corpus and its specific pairing are significant. The fact that Plutarch be-
gan his earlier biographies, the series of *Imperial Lives*, with Augustus
whereas Suetonius, composing his *Twelve Caesars* under Hadrian, began
with Julius Caesar, is a key reason for dating Plutarch’s *Imperial Lives*
before Trajan embraced Julius Caesar as an important military fore-
runner. But although second-century texts reflect this shift in periodizing
Roman history, later works revert to distinguishing Roman emperors
from Julius Caesar the Dictator. If Julian was not bound by contempo-
rary habits of thought to consider Julius Caesar an imperial forebear,
special significance must have recommended including him.

Aurelius Victor begins his *On the Caesars* with the inception of monarchy
on Octavian’s victory at Actium in 31 BCE (Vict. *Caes.* 1.1). The *Epitome*
shares the same point of departure ([Vict.] *Epit.* 1.1).17 Eutropius treats
Regal and Republican Rome in six books, concluding with Julius Caesar’s
assassination; he marks the resumption of civil wars in 44, after Caesar’s
death, as a dividing point at the beginning of Book 7 (Eutrop. *Brev.* 7.1.1).18
Clearly, the later Roman Latin tradition of the *Kaisergeschichte* identified
Augustus as the beginner of imperial rule.19 Caesar’s rise and assassina-
tion, by contrast, fired the final cataclysm of the Republic. The historian
Ammianus Marcellinus too distinguishes Julius Caesar as *dictator*, not
emperor (Amm. 15.11.6).20 More germanely to Julian’s awareness of Roman
history, Zosimus remarks that the civil wars of Sulla and Marius, Julius
Caesar and Pompey Magnus destroyed the Romans’ government, so
that they abandoned “aristocracy” and chose Octavian as “monarch”
(Zos. 1.5.2): if this view does not replicate the influential third-century
chronicler Dexippus specifically, it surely represents a consensus in the
Greek historiographical tradition of the later empire.21 That tradition
shaped Julian’s base of historical knowledge.22

Julian’s language reflects his divergence in *Symposion, or, Kronia* from
the currently standard periodization of Roman history. Normally he uses
*basileus* and its cognates to designate all things connected with a Roman
emperor; *arche, autokrator*, and *hegemonia* vary his terminology occasion-
ally.23 “The Caesar” identifies Julian himself four times in speech attri-
buted to Julian’s Antiochene detractors in his self-satirizing *Misopogon*
(*Misop.* 346b–c). Julian otherwise uses “Caesar” strictly to refer to the
junior imperial office (e.g., *Ath.* 270d; *Misop.* 357b; *Ep.* 40 p. 63.18), as part
of his official titulature (Ἀυτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ, Ep. 60 378c), and once to designate Augustus, once Julius Caesar, in the fragmentary Against the Galileans (C. Gal. 213a, 218b). Uniquely in Symposion, or, Kronia, “Caesar” serves Julian as a general term of reference. The change betokens a purpose. Julian introduces Julius Caesar into his succession of emperors and classes them under the name “Caesar” because Julius Caesar introduces a distinctive character into the series. His first appearance signalizes reckless love for honor and power as two facets of a will to compete – and competition will take over the banquet. Julian’s Julius Caesar goes on to lead out the contest in all the fields of imperial character Julian’s Symposion considers.

Silenus continues to banter at the Caesars as they each enter. In strong terms Apollo rebukes him for talking nonsense when he professes alarm at Octavian (παύσαι...ληρόν, 309b): his raillery sometimes points to substantive reservations, but chiefly it aims to prick any stateliness too great for the holiday. For example, Silenus whispers loudly that Trajan with his Dacian and Parthian war-trophies could tempt Ganymede from Zeus (311c). Sexual advertising facetiously transvalues conquest. The supposed rivalry centers on Ganymede’s desire, more innocuously than when Silenus charges that Julius Caesar would compete with Zeus directly; no dalliance develops, so it remains at the level of teasing. Silenus revives a contemporary gibe, apparently, when he says Antoninus Pius seems persnickety enough to split cumin seeds (312a, cf. Dio Cass. 70.3.3). Even admirable emperors face persiflage, but only a few egregiously “bad” emperors, like Caligula and Caracalla, are denied admittance.

With a few not obviously motivated omissions among third-century emperors, the post-mortal human company spans from Julius Caesar to Constantine and his sons. The gods in their all-sufficiency feel no lack of anything, Julian notes, but with Zeus’ approval Hermes proposes examining the Caesars (316a). Quirinus asks permission to bring one of them up to his side. Heracles immediately insists that his favorite, Alexander the Great, should be added to the competition and given the chance to prove himself the best. Zeus agrees. Silenus teases Quirinus with the doubt “this one Greek” will outmatch the Romans as a group; Quirinus squirms for partisan dignity. The gods decide not to match all the Caesars against Alexander, but to start from those who have already shown themselves superior. Thus Julius Caesar is summoned along with Octavian and Trajan “as the most warlike” (ὡς πολεμικωτάτους, 317b). Kronos calls for a philosopher to widen the field of consideration, specifically
Marcus Aurelius. Dionysos demands a devotee of pleasure, for the sake of comprehensiveness: he proposes Constantine as a “not unwarlike” example (οὐκ ἀπόλεµον, 318a). The litotes confirms that the gods endorse military leadership as their fundamental criterion, without controversy or even question. Julius Caesar qualifies eminently.

Hermes summons the competitors formally. Meanwhile, the lot determining the order of speaking “accords with Julius Caesar’s love of being first” (καὶ πως συνέδραμε τῇ τοῦ Καίσαρος ὦ κλήρος φιλοπρωτίαι, 319d): again Julian emphasizes this quality in him. The fortune of precedence, however, offends Alexander. He takes the next lot. His and Julius Caesar’s paired speeches argue out a miniature grudge-match. Plutarch himself probably did not weigh up this duo of parallel Lives in a formal synkrisis, but Julian followed his pairing and some of his information in setting Julius Caesar and Alexander against one another as if their military glory eclipsed all their rivals. Their two speeches jointly run a bit longer than the other four competitors’ total (320a–325c; 325c–329d). The six speeches altogether comprise a second one-third of the dialogue’s compass.

Julius Caesar leads with the one credential Julian entertains his claiming uniquely (320a):

To me, Zeus and you gods, it fell to be born (after so many men) in so great a city that she rules over more people than another city ever ruled, and the others are content even to come second to her.

ἐµοὶ µέν, ὃ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί, γενέσθαι ἐν τηλικαύτηι συνέβη πόλει, µετὰ τοσούτων ἄνδρας, ὥστε τὴν µέν ὅσων οὐ πώποτε ἄλλη πόλις ἐβασίλευε, βασλεύειν, ταῖς δὲ ἀγαπητῶν τὸ καὶ τὰ δεύτερα κοµίσασθαι.

He does not need to speak the name: Julius Caesar was born at Rome. The significance Julian accords this fact is best glossed from his other writings. Unlike many proud Hellenes of his period – notoriously the Antiochene rhetor Libanius, for example (e.g., Liban. Or. 11.129, 174; 43.5) – Julian personally embraces the traditions of the ancient capital. His doctrinal hymns, to Helios and to Cybele as the Mother of the Gods, celebrate their festivals as at Rome (Hel. 131d; M. Th. 161c). Julian details how Helios and Cybele each have involved themselves with Rome and Roman history (Hel. 153d–156b; M. Th. 159c–161b). He identifies Helios with Apollo and his worship on the Palatine. Through Romulus and Aeneas “we” are
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connected to Helios, a relation or sponsor of both ancestral heroes (Hel. 154a). Julian praises the solar principles of the Roman calendar and dates them to “our forefathers, from the most holy king Numa” (Hel. 155d). Cybele’s arrival in Rome and the miracle with which she vindicated the slandered Vestal Claudia’s virginity are attested by research and on bronze images “in powerful, god-beloved Rome” (M. Th. 161b). Julian implicates himself as he relates this tale by positing the objection of its seeming “implausible and entirely inappropriate for a philosopher and theologian”: Rome’s monuments of the legend’s historicity vindicate Julian’s own credibility along with Cybele’s power. The success and excellence of Roman government make Julian judge the Romans “Greek” in their race, piety, and the constitution of their city (Hel. 152d–153a). Thus they enjoy divine support. Julian prays for the city jointly with himself and his service to both divinity and the Roman commonwealth (Hel. 157b).

Julian’s identification with Rome is not limited to his hymns. In the Symposion, or, Kronia his Octavian boasts of having made Rome indomitable, allowing for the gods’ will (326b). Julian in Against the Galileans reminds Christians who have diverted their piety to the wood of the cross that the pagan gods have promised to sustain Rome eternally (C. Gal. 193c–194d): he materializes Christian faith in order to demean it, and advances the state as a more potent term of identity and communal self-interest. Even in a context where specifically Roman institutions serve Julian’s point only by way of example, it is with Rome that he associates himself: local custom should regulate how priests move in and out of periods of temple service, a term of “thirty days among us at Rome, but otherwise elsewhere” (Ep. Sac. 302D). Thus, although praise in panegyric could incur skepticism, it is legitimate to recognize pride even deeper than platitude when Julian ranks Rome first among cities claiming to be Constantius’ native land (I Const. 5c–6c). It is a stretch: Rome was no more than the birthplace of Constantius’ mother. Yet it is “the city that rules them all.” Its allegiance has confirmed Constantius’ royalty. Its laws all men adopt, and thus become Romans. Constantius accords Rome the highest praise by calling the city a “teacher of excellence.” For Constantinople, “to be ranked second to Rome seems to me far better than to be thought the first of all the rest” (I Const. 8c, reprised in Caes. 320a quoted above).

In Symposion, or, Kronia, therefore, Julian’s Julius Caesar boasts of being born at Rome as a legitimate claim to excellence: Julian endorses
the way the city extends Caesar’s ego. His competition’s winner-take-all format supports totalizing. Julius Caesar’s mastery of Rome entitles him to appropriate its glory. He specifies (320a–b): Rome rules the most populous dominion any city has ever known. Rome began from 3,000 citizens and within six hundred years overcame the earth. Rome is unequaled for good warriors and lawmakers. Rome has honored the gods as no others have. And his fellow-Romans, Julius Caesar avers, respect his superiority.

From this point Julius Caesar takes up the problem of comparing military achievements with Alexander (320c–321d). How much do the merits of one’s enemies measure one’s own victories? Do the skills of their generals change the challenge, or the prowess of their armies? Do frontiers make milestones in valor when they are crossed? What if the frontiers are new? Do numbers of men or cities subdued amount to glory? Do numbers of battles won? Julius Caesar raises these questions in the form of answers favoring his own side, naturally. As questions, however, they sketch a critique of the very criterion the gods’ contest of the Caesars presumes: the many possible ways to quantify military glory fail to establish a sum securely. Plutarch too applies proliferating axes of comparison to rate Julius Caesar superior to earlier Roman generals (Plut. Caes. 15), but measurement by an ostensibly unprejudiced third party appears stable. The interested, sophistic thrust and parry with which Julian portrays Julius Caesar’s argumentation implies a counterargument with its own competing claims. As he makes the judgment of his model a debate, Julian renders it dynamic and irresolvable.

At the conclusion of Julius Caesar’s speech Julian takes up a characteristically Plutarchan judgment on Caesar’s rhetorical erudition, and puts it aggressively into Caesar’s mouth (Plut. Caes. 3.1–2; Jul. Caes. 322a). Plutarch says Caesar depreciated his own eloquence in comparison to Cicero’s praise of Cato, commenting that Cicero enjoyed both talent and time to foster it; Julian’s Caesar asserts that he could adduce more to advantage himself, but has not had time to study speaking carefully (πολλὰ εἰπεῖν ἔχων ἔτι περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ καὶ τοῦτο [Alexander], τῶν μὴ σχολὴν ἄγειν ἥκιστα τὸ λέγειν ἔξεμπλητήσα). Strictly, he excuses himself from fuller proof by the spontaneity of the competition, but his terms, especially “leisure” which figures in Plutarch’s account too, point to that profounder rationalization. Plutarch contextualizes Caesar’s remark about the Cato and Anti-Cato by stating that Caesar developed his genius for political speaking only so far as to be ranked in second place. He reports
Caesar chose to renounce higher oratorical ambitions in favor of general-ship and political power. Now Julian’s Julius Caesar brings the conceit full circle, by demanding the gods’ first prize for those arts.  

Meeting the provocation of Julius Caesar’s attack, Julian’s Alexander ripostes. He first accuses Caesar of rudely disparaging the very model he imitated in life (322b–c). The famous story that Caesar wept to think he had attained Alexander’s age without achieving comparable feats (Plut. Caes. 11.3; Dio Cass. 37.52.2; Suet. Jul. 7), of course, falls short of truly betokening imitation, but it is close enough for an agonistic counterstroke. Julian portrays his competitors vying keenly, not necessarily judging one another fairly or accurately: moments of opportunistic overreaching reveal themselves.

In response to Julius Caesar’s first cluster of comparisons (enemies overcome), Alexander belittles Caesar’s greatest opponent, Pompey, for having built much of his reputation atop the work of other generals (322c–323c). Alexander also rebukes the glory Caesar claims for defeating Romans: “You made war on the Germans and Gauls while preparing war against your own country – what could be worse or more foul?” (324a). Beneficiary of a death that obviated the rebellion he began, Julian feels free through Alexander to decry civil war. So too in Misopogon, while still blaming Constantius for “choosing enmity,” Julian credits the gods with “compassionately” deciding “our excessive contest with one another” (Misop. 357b).

Nonetheless, when Julian’s Alexander insists he warred on fellow-Greeks only when they blocked his aggression against the Persians (323d), he shows himself led by one half of the ancient popular working definition of virtue (“do harm to enemies”), into the same violation of the other half (“do good to friends”), that he condemns in Julius Caesar’s civil wars: both harmed their own people. Brilliant general though Alexander the Great was, Julian’s Alexander falls on his own argument. The best he can claim for his fits of violent temper is that he has been visited by the “saving spirit” Regret; alternatively, he repeats his contention that he was justified in punishing persistent opponents (ἡ μεταμέλεια, σώφρων πάνω καὶ τῶν ἐξημαρτηκότων σώτειρα δαίμων, 325b, c). Julian’s Julius Caesar more impressively reports of his clemency, “I forgave even my enemies”; his assassination attests his own good faith, which Justice proved (ἐγὼ καὶ τοῖς πολεμίοις συνέγνων· ἔπαθον γοῦν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὄσα ἐμέλησε τῇ Δίκῃ, 321c). The idea that Justice avenged Caesar’s death encapsulates Plutarch’s long coda to Caesar’s Life (Plut. Caes. 67–9, esp. 69).
Julian’s Julius Caesar makes his own case that he treated conquered peoples better than Alexander (321d).

Alexander makes no answer to Julius Caesar’s assertion Alexander visited Egypt merely to “look at” things, whereas he himself conquered the country while putting together symposia (Ἀλέξανδρος Αἴγυπτον παρήλθε θεωρῶν, ἐγὼ δὲ συμπόσια αὐγκροτῶν κατεπολέμησα, 321b). With this audacious claim that Caesar was Too Bad to Spoil, Julian improves on Plutarch’s report that Caesar avoided the machinations of the perfidious eunuch Pothinus by staying awake all night drinking in order to save his body from attack (Plut. Caes. 48.3). Implicitly, Caesar wins a point which Alexander loses when Silenus twits him for excess in wine (318c–d, 330b–c).

Julius Caesar sets the terms for most of the rest of the contest. Military success is required from its beginning: Caesar’s debate with Alexander sketches the criterion’s parameters. The fact that Plutarch counterpoised Caesar and Alexander surely favored Julian’s decision to include Julius Caesar in his survey of predecessors, the more readily to interrogate Roman leaders in light of a Greek paragon. Alexander refutes Roman disparagement of Greek valor, such as Caesar delivers (e.g., 321b). If he is thought to assume totalizing credit for Greek might, his move would parallel Caesar’s claims for Rome. Alexander’s merits must have especially compelled Julian’s attention on the eve of his own Persian campaign: Alexander rebukes Caesar’s disparagement of Darius and his troops against Pompey and his, by pointing to the Romans’ subsequent failure to annex Persian territory (324c–d). Yet the military honors come off surprisingly even between Alexander and Julius Caesar, for Alexander does little to vindicate his conquests against Caesar’s challenges to statistics. Winning, however brutally, never becomes other than good on a Roman view, but victorious records prove possible to compare in too many different ways to determine a firm decision between competing goods. If Alexander cannot triumph simply by having defeated the Persians, the sum of Roman glory profits in comparative reckoning. As national military heroes, Alexander and Caesar advance their peoples to parity under the consideration of Julian’s dialogue. Yet if military glory levels rivals, it fails, as a standard, to resolve their debate.

Julius Caesar thus serves Julian not only as an avid contender within his dialogue, but also as a stalking horse. Julian does not suggest Caesar would have objected to being assessed on his military record – so long as the measures used found him the best. Yet as his dialogue’s Caesar
grapples with Alexander’s reputation, he demonstrates that military glory rests on an unstable system. Julian the author thereby shows this commonsense measure of imperial excellence, his competition’s presumptive criterion, to be inadequate. At the same time, his Julius Caesar also introduces alternative considerations. First he, then Alexander, upholds historical pride in his people: Julian’s dialogue embraces both Roman and Greek heritage. The honor Rome has done the gods is the culmination of Caesar’s praise for his city, exactly suiting the passion of Julian’s doctrinal hymns and religious reforms. Caesar’s boast of combining symposia with conquest encompasses both luxury and self-mastery extending from intoxicants to territory. Plutarch discusses Julius Caesar’s physical discipline much more exhaustively than Julian does (Plut. *Caes.* 17.2–3), but the hint surfaces significantly. Julian’s Julius Caesar also contrasts his clemency to Alexander’s harshness. Benevolence to subjected peoples plays the same theme on a larger scale. Caesar points out that he restored devastated cities. All these virtues figure prominently in late antique canons of imperial excellence. By articulating them through Julius Caesar as he does, not only does Julian portray Caesar, individually, as forbearing and generous, but he also stamps this ideal on the whole institution of Roman overlordship as personalized within an individual. Julian’s Julius Caesar emblematically raises into view virtues essential to Roman monarchy.

Once the six competitors have spoken, they suppose the gods will choose a victor. But the gods feel that too much of what the human leaders each did really rested on Fortune. They prefer to determine how the Caesars and Alexander purposed their deeds. With this procedural decision, the gods move definitively beyond the criterion of military success. They do not reopen the field, so it is not that they or Julian discount victoriousness; but the contest shifts to moral choice. The final phase of evidence-gathering takes shape as an oral examination. Hermes conducts the formal questioning. It lasts, in all, about half as long as the speeches (329d–335b).

Silenus stays quiet while the competitors present their own cases: he cavils only at Constantine, near the end (329c–d). Now he is back in force, teasing and challenging. Alexander, beginning the new round, takes sallies on his susceptibility to wine, his claiming credit as general for his fighters’ work, and his murderous rages (330b–331c). The first charge reprises earlier byplay. The second turns back on Alexander the argument by which he had belittled Caesar’s opponent Pompey. The third grows
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dynamically out of the second. Silenus quotes the same verses Cleitus had used to rebuke Alexander until Dionysos arrests him with the memory of Alexander’s reaction then (cf. Plut. Alex. 50–1): when Julius Caesar first enters, Silenus affects to fear he will threaten Zeus (308d, discussed above), but now it is Alexander who blazes up with the impulse to assault a god. His is the more dangerously unregulated character. Obviously, Julian restricts Alexander’s glory from constituting excellence both by its dependence on others and by Alexander’s intemperance.47

Julius Caesar comes off a little better. Consistent with Julian’s portrait, he states his goal as “to be first, and neither to be nor to be thought second to anyone” (τὸ πρωτεύειν, ἔφη, τῆς ἐμαυτοῦ καὶ μηδενὸς μήτε εἶναι μήτενος νομίζεσθαι δεύτερον, 331c). He recurs to his Plutarchan choice of aspirations, more explicitly but with a significant shift. Hermes asks him to clarify what sort of primacy he sought: recognizing, he says, that he could not excel in all the fields Hermes mentions, wisdom and rhetoric and warfare and politics, he chose to exercise the greatest power among his fellow-citizens (κατὰ σοφίαν ἡ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις δευνότητα ἡ πολεμικὴν ἐμπειρίαν ἡ πολιτικὴν δύναμιν… deleteUser – twn πάντων ἐν πάσιν εἶναι πρώτων τούτων δέ οὐ δυνάμενος ἐπιτυχεῖν τὸ δύνασθαι μέγιστον παρὰ τοῖς ἐμαυτοῖς πολίταις εξήλωσα, 331d, cf. 322a, discussed above). Plutarch describes Caesar as preferring, over eloquence, military and political dominance both (Plut. Caes. 3.1–2). But having qualified military glory through the arguments his Julius Caesar adduces against Alexander, Julian now subordinates it as Caesar’s means to supremacy in the state, judging the latter to be his true end.

Silenus immediately objects. He denies that Caesar’s mastery extended to his subjects’ love, although he flattered them histrionically with benefactions (ἀγαπηθήναι δὲ αὐτῶν οὖχ οἶός τε ἐγένου, καὶ ταῦτα πολλὴν μὲν ύποκρινάµενος ἠσπέρ ἐν δράματι καὶ σκηνῇ φιλανθρωπίαν αἰσχρὸς πάντας κολακεύων, 332a–b). When Caesar protests that “the people” (demos) punished Brutus and Cassius for assassinating him, Silenus replies roughly, “for that, the people voted them governorships” (διὰ τούτο μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ὁ δῆμος ἐφηρήσατο εἶναι ὑπάτους, 332b).48 They only changed for the sake of the money bid by Caesar’s will. Silenus grossly simplifies late republican assignment of offices and the turbulent aftermath of Caesar’s assassination, but his charges follow the vein in which Plutarch analyzed the last part of Caesar’s life. Plutarch’s Caesar, in contrast even to his treatment of the same events in other Lives, identifies Caesar’s relationship with the Roman “people” as crucial to his rise and end.50
The excessive honors voted Caesar disaffected them (Plut. Caes. 57–61). Even as Caesar practiced an exemplary clemency and bestowed benefits in order to court popular good will, he acquiesced in the arrogance of exalted status. Plutarch shows him recognizing too late blunders like Antony’s staged attempt to present him with a diadem at the Lupercalia. The momentum of sentiment changed in his favor precisely when the will was opened (Plut. Caes. 68.1, similarly but less pointedly Dio Cass. 44.35; by contrast, Appian describes more mixed sentiments, which the will begins to soften and Antony’s funeral speech inflames, App. BC 2.20.143–7). Silenus’ blunt summation reproaches and amends the goal Julian attributes to Julius Caesar: pure power is too limited, even if transcendent Justice balances accounts after the power is removed with illegitimate violence (cf. 321c, discussed above). The ideal Julian’s dialogue sketches must sway hearts and minds.

Octavian tries to improve on Julius Caesar’s precedent by asserting that he sought to “rule well” (βασιλεύσαι, ἔφη, καλῶς, 332c). Too vague: Hermes points out that even tyrants say the same. Separately, Silenus rebukes Octavian for the precedent of divinizing predecessors (332d). As he notes, Octavian started first of all with Julius Caesar; clearly, this aspiringly cosmic fate for the predominant was another formal reason for Julian to include Julius Caesar. But, Silenus registers, he didn’t like the practice. He calls it model-making (ὁ κοροπλάθος…οὐκ ἔππλατες ἡµιν, εἰπεν, ὡσπερ ἐκεῖνοι τὰς νύμφας, ὁ Σέβαστε, θεοὺς;). Octavian is abashed. The criticism is more anachronistic in hindsight than fair: Octavian took great pains to raise his adoptive father’s memory. He cannot have foreseen what later custom would make of it. And tellingly, in principle Julian’s dialogue reviews the prospect that Julius Caesar’s life and achievements earned him the right to join Romulus/Quirinus in divinity. The human divinization Octavian inaugurated is too trivial for Julian to approve, but its impulse did not seem absurd.

The remaining examinations further refine Julian’s verdicts on leadership. Trajan says he followed Alexander’s aim to conquer the world, only acting more sensibly (σωφρονέστερον, 333a). Silenus objects that Trajan’s susceptibility to pleasure was ignoble. Marcus says he sought to imitate the gods. Silenus struggles to find objections, and Marcus answers them modestly (333a–335a). He sought to imitate the gods as far as is possible with a material body, not by denying its needs but by satisfying them as simply as possible while endeavoring to do good to as many people as possible. He honored his son and his wife on Homeric precepts, with
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divine and general precedents, in ignorance of Commodus’ subsequent
corruption, and from universally natural love. The gods as a group
approve Marcus’ initial answer as “wholly meritorious” (καὶ τοῦ παντὸς
ἀξία). Eventually he overcomes even Silenus’ willful fractiousness. Julian
thus recognizes it is appropriate to accommodate the physical and emo-
tional burdens of human life within the practice of a working idealism.
Physical practicality avoids *hybris*. Emotional realism justifies indulgence
when the irrefutable text of Homer ascribes similar impulses to the gods.
Julian renews the Platonic paradox of *mythos*: it is not theology, for it
expresses human capacity.

Finally, Constantine frankly admits he sought money and spent it
on his own and his friends’ pleasures. Silenus tells him the aspiration
belongs to a banker, the deeds to a pastry-cook or a hairdresser. Thus
Julian marks the limits to which he is willing to accommodate human
nature: the banker embodies materialistic greed, and Plato branded the
trades of cookery and adornment as superficial, misplaced gratification
(e.g., Pl. *Grg.* 464b–465d).

As Julian hints increasingly emphatically throughout the contest, Marcus
wins the gods’ vote (335c). Then Hermes, the herald, invites all the com-
petitors to choose divine patrons. The dialogue takes its last look at
Julius Caesar as he, unlike the others, dithers in his choice: finally Ares
and Aphrodite “take pity” and summon Caesar to their side (κατελεήσας,
335d). Julian ends up endorsing the Augustan trio of Julius Caesar’s
divinization: the mythological parents of the Roman race, Aphrodite spe-
cifically of the Julii, sympathetically take him up as their own. Finally
Pleasure and Wastrelsy bring Constantine to Jesus, who hawks baptism
and renewable nullification of sin (336a–b). This debased image com-
plements Julian’s *sphragis*, in which Hermes bids Julian obey the com-
mands of Mithras and look forward to his patronage after life (336c; cf.
*Cyn. Her.* 229c–234c).

Hermes announces it as the gods’ law that their judgments make the
victor rejoice without incurring blame from the loser (335c). Marcus re-
ceives the dialogue’s ultimate endorsement, but none of the Caesars is
penalized who is found worthy enough to be admitted to the Saturnalian
banquet. Silenus in mocking the entering guests calls attention to their
humbling, human flaws; within the competition he advances more crit-
ical dissection of the exemplary rulers’ ideals. But ultimately Julian’s
piety insists that the competition is benign. Even Constantine is welcomed
by the patron god he chooses.
Julian’s *Symposium, or, Kronia* appears ultimately as a personal fable. Elements of Julian’s self-image stand behind each of the competitors. Constantine represents his own family, from whose religion Julian broke. Marcus Aurelius embodies his highest aspirations. Trajan and Octavian Augustus comprise a slogan of late antique imperial good wishes, “more fortunate than Augustus, better than Trajan” (*felicior Augusto, melior Traiano*, Eutrop. *Brev.* 8.5). Alexander the Great is the quintessential Hellenic hero-general, whose Persian conquests Julian hoped to renew while avoiding his personal failings. Julius Caesar’s military career loosely paralleled Julian’s rise, from a term of military success in Gaul against Germanic foreigners, to a contested claim to predominate in the Roman state. Above all, Julius Caesar for Julian embodies a personal connection with Rome, the city that encapsulated the state, with which Julian identified himself.

Narratologically, Julius Caesar serves Julian literally as a leading figure throughout the dialogue, “love of being first” transfigured as a literary device. Contentious *philoprotia*, his distinctive characteristic, pushes Quirinus’ holiday banquet into a contest. Caesar initiates many of the key characteristics of imperial leadership the dialogue weighs. Paradoxically, he competes redundantly in them. Caesar says he sought power, but Octavian ruled longer and more successfully. Trajan conquered more extensively. Alexander’s military glory could never be entirely eclipsed by his failings. Clemency is one quality where Caesar vanquishes Alexander, according to Julian, yet it is to Trajan the gods give special commendation for this virtue. Marcus literally outshines them all, owing to his ascetic discipline of the body (317c–d). Constantine exceeds in sensuality, the lowest feature of embodiment. Caesar is thus, in a sense, superfluous. Yet by opening these different fields for the proof of excellence, his dynamic personality gives the dialogue its unity.

Julian’s *Symposium, or, Kronia* delicately traces the balance. Julian portrays Caesar as competitive and valiantly proud, of both his military record and his identification with Rome. In the dialogue he argues his case ably, boldly, shrewdly. Personal discipline stands behind his life’s attainments; amid success he exercised magnanimity. The flaw Julian identifies in Caesar is to have become infatuated with the glamour of his success. Julian’s dialogue as a whole advances a remedy, negatively through criticism especially of Caesar and Alexander, and positively through...
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Marcus: orientation to the gods’ perfection enables a human leader to regulate his capabilities. Tellingly, at the dialogue’s conclusion Julius Caesar alone needs help closing his affinity with the gods. Conscientiously pious Julian deems Caesar finally too human. Yet his enterprising humanity, with its blend of excellence and error, launched the succession of Roman Caesars and fitly launches this dialogue assessing Caesarship. The comet trail of Caesar’s charisma shoots through Julian’s mythos, still burning on its trajectory, some 406 years after Julius Caesar died.

NOTES

1 Important studies of Julian include, for biography, Bidez (1930), Bowersock (1978), and, compactly, Hunt (1998); for literary culture, Athanassiadi (1981/1992) and Bouffartigue (1992); for religion and philosophy, Smith (1995). I am most grateful to Maria Wyke and Christopher Pelling for thoughtful comments which have greatly improved this essay, and I am happy to thank the Classics Department of Vassar College for the support of their Blegen Research Fellowship, with which some of the research for this essay was completed.


4 Relihan (1989) shows Julian’s character is more literarily sophisticated than the interlocutor answers. It is possible to read their exchange as cooperatively playful, however (pace also Relihan [1993], 120, 122–3), with the interlocutor like a Dr. Watson underlining ideas for the readers’ benefit.

5 Bouffartigue (1992), 293–4 concedes Julian some knowledge of D. Chr. Or. 1–4; on Dio, cf. Whitmarsh (2001), 190–200.


7 Pack (1946); Lacombrade (1964), 17–25.


10 Silenus and Socrates also share erotic attraction to male beauty: Jul. Caes. 308c; Pl. Smp. 216d. Concerns with “truth” in the accounts to follow are
flagged nearby both passages, Jul. Caes. 307a; Pl. Symp. 214d–215a; but Plato alone would not have inspired the adverb ῥητορικός (quoted in text above) of Julian’s interlocutor.

11 Bouffartigue (1992), 269–71, cf. 85, fails to find sure reason to believe Julian read Xen. Symp., but the playfulness of Xenophon’s Socrates harmonizes with Julian’s Silenus too.

12 If Caesar’s willingness to fight with Zeus recalls Aphrodite’s accusation against Diomedes when he has wounded her (Il. 5.362, καὶ ἂν Διὶ πατρὶ µάχοιτο), the goal “for monarchy” makes Julian’s comment more pointedly political.

13 The verb ἐρίζειν links Caes. 308b and 308d. Bouffartigue (1992), 295–6, like Helm (1906), 74 n., contrasts Lucian, JTr 9–13, but Julian’s simple denial does not engage with Lucian’s scene: his Platonism suffices to explain it. Like Baldwin (1978), 450, Bouffartigue rightly doubts Julian bothered about Lucian; cf. Martin (1931), 233.

14 Lacombrade (1964), 9; Baldwin (1978), 455–6; Bowersock (1982), 171; Nesselrath (1992); Sardiello (1992). Nesselrath’s and Sardiello’s observations weigh against Bouffartigue (1992), 291–2, although Bouffartigue’s suggestion that Julian used intermediate sources not now preserved (401) cannot be refuted.


17 On the Epitome, including its independence from Victor, see Barnes (1976) = (1984), XIII and Baldwin (1993). The connections Baldwin notes with Suetonius make Epit.’s starting-point the more notable.

18 Similarly, when Eutropius compares emperors’ authority to dictators’, he names Octavian as the originator of imperial rule and Julius Caesar as a forerunner (Brev. 1.12, wrongly ascribing a dictatorship to Octavian too). Bird (1993), 37 blurs Eutropius’ constitutional distinction by rendering qui postea imperavit, of Julius Caesar (6.17.1), “who afterwards ruled as emperor”: whatever his style of power (e.g., Luc. 2.61; cf. OLD s.v. impero, 6a, 6b), Caesar’s dictatorship only returned the Roman state to civil war.

19 Alföldi (1968) argues Julian used the Kaisergeschichte; Bowersock (1982) refutes.

20 Sabbah (2003) ably introduces Ammianus Marcellinus and his Roman and Greek biculturalism.

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22 See Bouffartigue (1992), 401–12 for full argumentation. The suggestion was advanced by Bowersock (1982), 164; cf. Kaegi (1964).

23 E.g., I Const. 1d, 5c, d, etc. (ἀρχή, 7a); II Const. 50c, 52a, 53b, etc. (ἡγεμονία, 51c); Eus. 108b, c, 109a, etc.; Hel. 131d (κοινὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα, 157b); Cyn. Her. 225a; Ath. 270c, 272a, c, etc.; Ep. Sac. 290c, 294c; Misop. 339d (ἀρχή, 352d–353d); on καΐσαρ, see in text and next note); Ep. 75b 398b [I cite Julian’s letters by the numeration of Bidez (1960)3]; Ep. 110 398c (αὐτοκράτωρ, id.); Ep. 98 400d; Ep. 4 427b; Ep. 73 428c; Ep. 40 p. 64.9 (on καΐσαρ, see in text). Otherwise, ἀρχή, M. Th. 180b; Ep. 114 436a; αὐτοκράτωρ, Cons. Sall. 252c; Ep. 26 414b; Ep. 86 446a.

24 Text of Misop. now Müller (1998); interpretation, Marcone (1984); Gleason (1986); Long (1993). Conceivably the Antiochenes’ alleged usage imputes disrespect or presumptuous familiarity.

25 Gera (1993), 132–54 well highlights rivalry and competition among the guests as a prominent motif of literary symposia: its energy sustains their debates. Relihan (1993), 27 wrongly segregates the Caesars’ entrance as a “digression,” for Julian does not depart from a previous trajectory: it is better identified as the dialogue’s springboard.

26 Baldwin (1978), 458–65 and Bowersock (1982), 164–71 comment on some of the eccentric judgments Silenus displays.

27 Bowersock (1982), 164–6 ascribes them to ignorance, but Julian might have chosen to condense his list where he had no pressing observations to make. Later in the dialogue, Furius [Camillus] is said to enjoy this honor already (323a).

29 Julian finds no difficulty identifying Alexander as ethnically Greek (ἐνός… τουτουὶ τοῦ Γραικοῦ, Caes. 316c), here bypassing his usual emphasis on cultural Hellenism (e.g., Misop. 348c). Hall (2002), 220–6 discusses perceptions of “Hellenicity” in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Hall (2001) the historical ethnicity of Macedonians and their elite.

30 Julian thus dissents from one hostile pagan tradition on Constantine, e.g., Zos. 2.32.1, ἀπόλεμος.

31 Erbse (1956), 403–6 pioneers the argument; Pelling (1997b) = (2002a), 377–82 extends, refines, and confirms it (Duff [1999], 252–5 and n. 45, for example, rejects Erbse’s arguments but grants the force of Pelling’s for Plut. Alex.-Caes.); cf. Pelling (forthcoming), on Appian’s supplemental comparison, BC 2.21.149–54 (I thank Christopher Pelling for news of it). Lacombrade (1964), 9 canvasses the possibility of a lost synkrisis by Plutarch dutifully, without confidence, and Baldwin (1978), 456 rightly deems it superfluous to Julian’s inspiration, but the idea hovers still around Julianic studies, e.g., Müller (1998), 198.

32 Notoriety sharpens the appearance of Libanius’ attitude, e.g., Petit (1955), 347 n. 1, “Libanius déteste Rome et les Romains.” Roman studies’ threat to eclipse Greek paideia particularly exercised him: Festugière (1959), 91–

33 Smith (1995), 139–78 argues that traditions of Roman public cult set Julian’s priorities for his pagan revival.


35 At Caes. 324a Julian’s Alexander reaffirms Roman descent from Greeks; cf. C. Gal. 200A. The identification descends from Dion. Hal., Ant. Rom. 1.9–13, but Julian does not develop it with enough detail to show specific parentage: Bouffartigue (1992), 663–4.

36 Since Rome’s approval of Constantius is not a routine matter (I Const. 5c), Julian should either be writing a little later than is usually inferred and referring to Constantius’ visit to Rome in 357 (Amm. 16.10, cf. Jul. Eus. 129b–d) or looking back to Constantine’s visit in 326, which Constantius accompanied just before his ninth birthday (Barnes [1982], 43, 77, 85). The praise of Rome Julian ascribes to Constantius (I Const. 6b–c) would suit a speech delivered in the city.

37 Alonso-Núñez (1974), 318 calls the boast “sumamente expresivo,” but comments no further.

38 Nesselrath (1992), 364 and n. 19 credits his precise interpretation of Caes. 322a to C. W. Müller, against Wright (1913) and Lacombrade (1964), who assimilate the claim of Plut. Caes. 3.2 into their translations. Julian’s Caesar glissades from the gods’ contest to Plutarch’s concern for talent and expertise. The passage satisfies the criteria for source-use that Bouffartigue (1992), 291–2 finds lacking (see note 14 above).


41 Unlike Julian, App. BC 2.21.151 equates Alexander and Caesar on this score.

42 Although “I suffered from them what Justice took care of” could be taken ambiguously to concede justice to the assassination too, the limiting and connective force of γονίν relates the idea of Julius Caesar’s suffering to the characterization of his assassins as “enemies” (cf. Denniston [1954]2, 450–8): Julian’s Caesar shows no awareness of irony but rebukes them for betraying the pardon he granted.

44 See Nesselrath (1992), 362–3.
45 Athanassiadi (1981/1992), 199–200 highlights this connection; additional factors, however, will have influenced Julian’s own Persian campaign.
46 Mause (1994), for example, surveys panegyrical norms in oratory and poetry.
48 Müller (1998), 112 thus follows Hertlein, with Wright (1913); μηδενὸς εἶναι μήτε codd.; μηδενὸς εἶναι μηδὲ Lacombrade (1964).
51 Julian registers a similarly mixed verdict for Probus, 314a–d: the narrative judges his achievements favorably (πολλὰ πάνυ σωφρινοὶ ὤκονομήσας), Silenus rebukes his severity and says it explains his assassination, though not justifying it (πέπονθας οὐ βέβαια μὲν, εἰκότα δὲ ὅμως), and the gods exact retribution on the perpetrators.
52 Bonamente (1993) shows Julius Caesar was not regularly commemorated on the same footing as imperial divi.
54 Fowden (1994), 155–8 infers that Sopater of Apamea originated the story that Constantine converted to Christianity in guilt over executing his son Crispus (cf. Soz. 1.5.1; Zos. 2.29.2–4), to which Julian points.
56 Relihan (1993), 119–34, having detached the dialogue’s general review of Roman Caesars from his interpretation (note 25 above), equates Jesus’ embrace of Constantine with Claudius’ fate in Sen. Apoc. 14.4–15.2 (condemned to eternally frustrated dice-playing, claimed as Caligula’s slave, then remanded to duty as the freedman Menander’s law-clerk, cf. Relihan [1993], 86–7) and imagines Julian to subvert and reject his own theodicy. But although both works involve dead emperors, Claudius’ reception into the afterlife is a structurally very different story from a banquet reviewing four centuries of Roman leaders plus Alexander, or even from the competition of six finalists. It is good to recognize the affinities of Caes. with Menippean satire; Relihan well illuminates Julian’s allusive subtlety and wit, though Latin connections are dubious. But it is unsoundly Procrustean to truncate a work so as to fit a generic template.
57 Hunt (1995), 295–8 identifies Julian’s Marcus as “a projection of Julian’s own self-identification”; the fact the gods vote to honor Marcus, as Hunt emphasizes, not unanimously, should be credited to Julian as ironic modesty.
Part III
The City of Rome
The studies in this book show us how the figure of Julius Caesar has been repeatedly reinterpreted and reincarnated throughout history, even in our own time – as indeed has his very name, which has become synonymous with supreme power. In Rome, the name of Caesar was even connected to certain sites in the city itself: places where power resided and which were transformed into representations of power itself.

Caesar’s plans upon taking power included a vast urban rebuilding project that comprised, among other things, diverting the course of the Tiber beyond the Vatican hill and expanding the city in the Campus Martius district. In this, too, he was the forerunner of all his conscious or unconscious imitators in succeeding centuries, who showed a predilection for large building projects in their capitals as a way to affirm their power and create tangible representations of it. Caesar’s ambitious program was brought to an end by the dictator’s death; how much of it was later incorporated into the works of Augustus and Agrippa is still a matter for debate. The main nucleus of the building and city planning works begun by Caesar lies in the center of the city. Here a new Forum complex was built alongside the old Roman Forum; the Curia Hostilia, traditional seat of the Senate, was demolished; and a new Curia was built, with the clear intention of placing Caesar’s personal seal on the traditional seats of power: the Curia, the Comitium, and the Forum (figure 5.1). Caesar’s contemporaries fully grasped the ideological significance of his building program, as was demonstrated after Caesar’s death by the sometimes farcical breaking off and resumption of the works, depending on which warring faction had the upper hand. This was brought to
an end by Augustus, who completed and inaugurated the Curia and Caesar’s forum, even though this operation’s ideological significance – especially in the ostentatiously dynastic and divine reference contained in the dedication of the temple to Venus Genetrix – must have appeared too explicit perhaps for the more subtle diplomacy of Octavian.

Between 1998 and 2000, the culture department of the Rome commune or municipality undertook an archaeological excavation, under the direction of Eugenio La Rocca, as part of the Jubilee works. This allowed
investigation of the heart of Caesar’s project by uncovering a large section of Caesar’s Forum behind the Curia. I do not propose to give another description of the results of the investigation from a strictly archaeological point of view, which I have already done elsewhere for the period between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and which Eugenio La Rocca and Silvana Rizzo have done for antiquity. Instead, in keeping with our aims here, I should like to trace the changes undergone by Caesar’s complex, highlighting the retention or the loss of its functions as a place, and as a representation, of power.

As far as the first phase of the Forum’s construction is concerned, the new excavation did not change the architectural picture of the monument built up by previous studies, but it did reveal a far more complete picture of the intricate urban planning undertaken by Caesar to create the necessary space for building the complex. This included earth-moving operations on a large section of the slopes of the Capitol, and of the “saddle” between it and the Quirinal, well before the high ground was finally flattened for the building of Trajan’s Forum. Thus Caesar’s project, which comprised a radical remodeling of the land’s natural shape and redesign of the city’s layout – including the removal of a section of the Servian Wall – fits well with a program shaped by the desire to leave a strong, and autocratic, mark on the urban fabric (we need only recall the plan, mentioned above, to divert the Tiber River).

However, the most ideologically significant project was certainly the construction, closely connected to the Forum itself, of the Curia Iulia; this placed the dictator’s personal stamp on the site which throughout the Republic had been, by definition, the seat of power. Very little remains of the original fabric of Caesar’s Forum and the Curia, since successive modifications, first by Trajan and then by Diocletian, resulted in their total rebuilding.

Our investigation focuses on how lasting was the perception that the sites connected to Caesar constituted places for the representation and the exercise of power. In this context, Diocletian’s works take on a special significance. These were part of a vast building program in the city’s political heart, which included the redesign of the Forum, the construction of new rostra and erection of honorific columns, and the complete rebuilding of the Curia, Caesar’s Forum, and the Basilica Iulia. This program was continued seamlessly under Maxentius, with the building of the Basilica Nova and the Temple of Venus and Roma, to which should probably be added the work on the Templum Pacis, with the installation
of a large *horreum* in the center of the square, revealed by the recent excavations, and the building of the large hall giving access to the monument from the Via Sacra, the so-called Temple of Romulus.

Aside from contingent circumstances such as the great fire of 283 CE, which may have made it easier to carry out such a large building program in the city center, there can be no doubt that such a complex and coordinated plan must have been the result of a clear ideological decision. If we add to the list also the work carried out by Maxentius on the imperial palace on the Palatine, it becomes clear how the actions of these emperors aimed to make a powerful architectural statement in the places where power traditionally resided, in a telling continuation of a tradition that dated back to the birth of the empire. This being so, the theory put forward by Mario Torelli and taken up by Alessandro Viscogliosi is highly intriguing: that alongside the rebuilt Curia stood a monumental arch leading to Caesar’s Forum, also built, or rebuilt, during the tetrarchic period and decorated with *spolia* taken from monuments to Marcus Aurelius and Trajan. In this area, now completely redesigned, the arch would have been a clear statement of Diocletian’s interpretation of the structure of the empire, in which reference to those whom the Senate saw as good emperors *par excellence* would have mediated between the imperial exaltation of the monuments in the Forum and the Senate’s traditional premises, the rebuilt Curia Iulia. In this new topography of power, Caesar’s monuments – Curia, Basilica, and Forum – remained central, even though the memory of Caesar was now overlaid with that of Augustus who, unlike the revolutionary dictator, unequivocally belonged among the ranks of the good emperors and was a model for all who came after him.

In the Forum, the new excavations’ most significant discovery concerning Diocletian’s intervention was to identify a profound alteration in the southern porticus. As a result of his intervention, its central row of columns, which had divided it into two naves, was removed; it was richly and elaborately re-paved with slabs of colored marble; and on its colonnaded façade, which looked on to the square, the architraves were replaced by a series of arches – an architectural device that became widespread precisely from the tetrarchic-Constantinian period.

In effect, the southern arcade was transformed into a richly decorated hall of great architectural significance. The similarities between the design of its paving and that of Diocletian’s Curia suggest a close connection between the two buildings, not only topographically but probably also in
terms of function. As Eugenio la Rocca suggests, it is very likely that this hall is the *Atrium Libertatis* mentioned by some sources in late antiquity in connection with the Curia.  

Here, in the first half of the fifth century, the Senate erected a statue of Aetius *vindex libertatis*, and further restoration work was carried out again during the first years of Theoderic’s reign. In 500, Theoderic came to Rome to celebrate the twentieth year of his reign, as reported by the *Annales Valesiani*. After visiting St. Peter’s Basilica he entered the city, went to the Senate, gave an *adlocutio* to the people *ad palmam* – that is, at the site of the ancient rostra – and ascended to the palace. In the days that followed he attended the *ludi circenses*. The Curia, the rostra, the palace, the circus: as Augusto Fraschetti has pointed out, the topography of power and of imperial ceremony remained unchanged at this late time while the ancient city retained its structure – Christianized only by the introduction of the visit to St. Peter’s in place of the ascent to the Capitol. Within this topography, the Curia-*Atrium Libertatis* complex built by Caesar retained its central position, even though there is nothing to indicate that the memory of Julius Caesar now remained alive in these places.

How long did this urban layout, inherited from the height of the empire, remain essentially unchanged? As is well known, this has been one of the most widely debated problems in the archaeology of ancient Rome in recent years. The recent excavations have yielded important information on Caesar’s complex. It seems that very early on the fates of the Forum and of the Curia diverged, thus breaking the unity of the complex. The Curia retained its function as a meeting place for the Senate: the latest record of a session dates from 603, but it is likely that the hall continued to be the meeting place for the city’s highest assembly even after it was converted into a place of worship and dedicated to St. Adrian by Pope Honorius I (625–38). In the Forum, by contrast, layers of debris dating from the sixth century were found on the few fragments of paving that had remained undisturbed, indicating that the area must already have fallen out of use by this time. This fits with what seems to have been a constant pattern in the evolution of cities in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages: while the main thoroughfares that crossed the city, and the buildings along them, remained in use, minor streets and areas within blocks of buildings were abandoned, or used for functions other than residential or public use – for example, as burial grounds or quarries from which to extract materials for reuse.
As the Middle Ages progressed, this divergence between the Curia and the Forum was to become ever wider. The church of St. Adrian was restored by Pope Adrian I (772–95) and decorated with high-quality frescoes; a diaconia (a church-run establishment for aiding the poor) was attached to it. What is most interesting is the fact that the church retained an important place in the city’s public and ceremonial life throughout the medieval period: even though sources on Rome in the early Middle Ages are sadly scarce, a mention exists of the church of St. Adrian in 768, when the primicerius Christopher, in order to proceed with the election of a new pope, summoned the people and the notables of the city before it. Moreover, as is borne out by the Gregorian sacramentary, by the successive Ordines Romani, and, in especial detail, by the mid-twelfth-century Ordo di Benedetto Canonico, on the occasion of important papal processions on the four feast days of the Virgin Mary – Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, and Nativity – the ancient Curia was the place where the Roman people gathered to await and pay homage to the pope, who arrived from St. John in Lateran.

Especially important was the role played by the church of St. Adrian during the city’s main ceremonial event in the Middle Ages: the procession on the night of August 14 and 15, for the feast of the Assumption, which bore the acheropita icon of the Savior (“not fashioned by human hands”) from the Sancta Sanctorum of St. John in Lateran to S. Maria Maggiore. This was the sole occasion on which the priceless icon of the Savior left the Sancta Sanctorum. It possessed a terrible power, to the point that Pope Alexander III (1159–81) ordered that its face be covered by a veil because, as Gervase of Tilbury recalls, “it terrified those who looked upon it to the point of putting their lives in danger.” It was a veritable Palladium for the city, as testified by its first mention in the sources (in 752), when Stephen II ordered it to be carried in procession to ward off the capture of the city by the Lombards, who were besieging it. The mid-August procession, first mentioned in 847 but undoubtedly much older, on the one hand enacted a sort of sacred representation, with Christ in effigy paying tribute to his mother at the moment of her death, and on the other symbolized Christ’s taking possession of the city. This public part of the ceremony reached its climax precisely at St. Adrian’s church: here the people gathered to pay homage to the icon which, before the main altar, also received regal homage, being anointed with oil scented with basil.
Thus the Curia, and the Roman Forum before it, retained their function as places where the people gathered and where regal homage was paid to figures, real or in effigy, who were endowed with power. This demonstrates how, in a completely altered topographical and urban setting, there was an extraordinary continuity in the perception of these places as connected with the representation and celebration of power, even when the memory of their origin and original function was, as we shall see, completely lost.

The importance of the church of St. Adrian and of the Roman Forum in public and ceremonial life contrasts with what was happening in Caesar’s Forum at the time. The excavation has shown that at the end of the eighth century, just when the church of St. Adrian was being restored and decorated by Pope Adrian I, the Forum was being heavily plundered: almost all the square’s paving slabs were removed, and the arcade’s columns were toppled to remove the architraves and capitals. It is likely that such a large operation – the travertine paving slabs alone would have yielded between 600 and 700 tonnes of lime – was carried out by the public authorities, and needs to be related to the exceptionally large building program implemented by the popes of the Carolingian period. Until then, therefore, Caesar’s Forum, though marginalized, must have retained its character as a public space. Its despoilment permanently changed not just its appearance but also its use and its characteristic structure: immediately afterwards, in the early years of the ninth century, small trenches were dug and a vegetable garden planted in the layer of compressed earth that had been laid as a foundation for the paving. Archaeo-botanical analysis has given a fairly clear picture of the crops that replaced marble and works of art: these consisted of lettuce, cabbage, mint, and aniseed. A few years later the garden was replaced by a more organized agricultural operation comprising a vineyard and an orchard. This is the first example confirmed by archaeology of the ruralization of urban spaces that was certainly one of the salient characteristics of early medieval towns. The size and regularity of the cultivated area, and the planting of crops such as vines and fruit trees, which demanded great expense, indicate how the transformation of large parts of cities into farmed land reflected a particular conception of the urban area on the part of the ruling social groups; this blurred the distinction between the urban landscape and the rural one, and appears typical of the early medieval world and society.
In the tenth century, however, this farmed area was abandoned and Caesar’s Forum too became covered with the dense network of narrow lanes that was superimposed on the structures of the imperial fora, breaking up their unity. Houses began to spring up along these lanes until, around the middle of the century, the area developed into a fully built-up district. These houses consisted of a single room, and their walls were made of recovered building materials and unbaked clay; they are the only examples discovered in Rome of the dwellings referred to in sources as *domus terrine*, in which the mass of the people lived in the early and later Middle Ages (figure 5.2). The reconstruction illustrated here shows how the area would have looked around the middle of the tenth century. Documents relating to church properties show how, elsewhere in the city, such districts could form in areas that earlier appeared to be privately owned, and were the property of individuals belonging to the upper strata of society. The shrewd selling and renting of plots of land and houses by landowners, church bodies, and prominent secular figures had the function, besides an economic one, of bringing together geographically clients and factions which made up their political base.
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phenomenon emerges clearly in sources over the succeeding centuries, and these archaeological discoveries allow us to trace it back through the early Middle Ages. In the case of Caesar’s Forum, we can even put forward a theory as to who owned the area. In the decades of the mid-tenth century, just when the district was built up to its maximum extent, one figure seems to have exercised some sort of power over it: Leo (protoscrinarius sedis apostolica), one of the most prominent people in Roman politics at the time, who was elected pope at the request of Otto I in 963 under the name of Leo VIII. His house stood on the Clivus Argentarius, and he must have owned most of the properties in the district – to the extent that he gave his name to the Clivus itself, which was known throughout the Middle Ages as Ascesa Proti, and to the nearby church of S. Lorenzo de Proto.

In the eleventh century the area’s relentless tendency to become marshy led to the settlement’s progressive decay. There were continual attempts to counteract the problem by raising the level of the streets and houses, but eventually the whole area was abandoned and the remains of the houses were quickly buried under a thick layer of mud, which ensured their almost miraculous preservation. Thus the area of the old Forum remained marginal in relation to the rest of the city, and was perhaps used only as a dump for debris and refuse, until it was reclaimed and built up during the sixteenth century.

As Caesar’s Forum disappeared under layers of material several meters thick, so the memory of its true location, if not of its architect’s existence, faded. In the Ordo of Benedictus Canonicus, in the description cited above of the papal ceremonies of the mid-twelfth century, and in the Mirabilia Urbis Romae23 (the earliest version of which dates from the same period), the name Forum Caesari refers to an area west of the Via Sacra, near the temple of Vesta.

The different fates of the Curia and Caesar’s Forum, which were originally closely linked, demonstrate, I believe, how difficult it is to generalize about the history of the urban landscape, both in its real, monumental sense and in its psychological one. In some cases the fading of memory, and a change of use, can lead to total oblivion; in others, they do not break the slender thread that ties the past to the present. As in the case of the Curia (even when its original function as seat of the Senate and its connection to Caesar are forgotten), this thread marks out certain sites in the city as “forceful” places, places for the affirmation and the representation of power.
NOTES

1 Sommella (1994).
3 Santangeli Valenzani (2001).
4 La Rocca (2001); Rizzo (2001).
6 Coarelli (1986); Santangeli Valenzani (2000).
7 Torelli (1993); Viscogliosi (2000).
8 La Rocca (2001).
9 There is some debate about the relationship between this Atrium Libertatis of late antiquity and the eponymous republican and proto-imperial monument, which derived its name from the fact that it was the place where slaves were freed. Under Trajan, the name and probably the function were shifted to the western exedra of the Basilica Ulpia. It is likely that in late antiquity the name was connected with the propaganda value – typical of the period – of the connection between the senatorial order and the concept of Libertas.
10 Zevi (1971); Fraschetti (1999a).
11 Cit. Anonimo Valesiano.
12 Fraschetti (1999a) and (1999b).
17 Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53), 2.197–222.
18 Romano (2000); Parlato (2000).
22 Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani (2004).
St. Peter’s Needle and the Ashes of Julius Caesar: Invoking Rome’s Imperial History at the Papal Court, ca. 1100–1300

John Osborne

The history of the medieval papacy in Rome is to a large extent a history of the gradual appropriation of the power and authority previously wielded by the Roman emperors. When the emperor Constantine established his capital at “New Rome” on the Bosphorus in the early fourth century, the exercise of political power at “Old” Rome witnessed a period of slow but steady decline. To be sure, that decline had begun long before the fourth century, but it was rapidly accelerated by the establishment of a new imperial capital at Byzantium, renamed Constantinople. Rome remained a city of considerable substance, able to boast many magnificent buildings, both public and private, but increasingly the important political decisions were being taken elsewhere – and no longer on the Palatine Hill or in the Curia Senatus. As the power of the state apparatus waned, it would slowly be replaced by a new form of authority, and one ostensibly engaged with matters spiritual, not political. This was of course the office of the city’s Christian bishop – the successors to St. Peter – and the Roman papacy would gradually and very effectively smooth the path for this assumption of political authority by adopting over time many of the symbolic trappings associated with imperial status.

At some point in the early Middle Ages, probably in the mid-eighth century when the political ties to Constantinople were finally and irrevocably broken, the papacy would formalize its claim to be the political
successors to the emperors in a forged document known as the “Donation of Constantine”\(^1\) – and this underlies the very popular medieval legend about the conversion to Christianity of the emperor Constantine by Pope Sylvester, and the emperor’s subsequent gift to the pope of political authority and power, including the physical manifestations of that authority (the papal tiara, umbrella, and so on). This view was made visually explicit in documents like the cycle of murals in the St. Sylvester chapel of the church of the SS. Quattro Coronati, dating from 1246, a very dramatic statement of papal claims to political supremacy created at precisely the moment when such claims were being challenged by the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II.\(^2\) The inherent link between the Roman emperors of old and the medieval papacy reached its apogee in the two centuries roughly between 1100 and 1300 CE, following the apparent papal victory over secular control achieved in the period of the Gregorian Reform (named for Pope Gregory VII, 1073–85). For example, this is the moment when two popes – Innocent II (1130–43) and Anastasius IV (1153–4) – appropriated for subsequent personal reuse imperial sarcophagi made of porphyry, a very obvious sign of association with the imperial dignity, utilizing for this purpose the sarcophagi of the emperor Hadrian and the dowager empress Helena (Constantine’s mother) respectively. At an individual level, the political figure who served most frequently as the pre-Christian counterpart to St. Peter was Julius Caesar, and thus it is no coincidence that Innocent II was also addressed in contemporary panegyrics as “Caesar.” The papal self-image strongly encouraged this association.\(^3\)

This political equation between pope and emperor has long been acknowledged, and it is unnecessary to rehearse here all its many and various manifestations. What this study will attempt to do, however, is to demonstrate that it was not thought sufficient for the papacy simply to regard itself as the natural heir to the \textit{potestas} of the emperors. It was the papal view – and not only in the Middle Ages – that, in inheriting this authority, they were taking the greatness of Rome to a new and even more exalted level, replacing an ephemeral political empire with an empire of the spirit that would last forever. And of course the Roman church, as a \textit{political} institution, is still very much alive today, and still a player in global politics. In the world view which emerged from the central and later Middle Ages, the papacy was seen as the fulfillment of Rome’s historic destiny, the city chosen by God to be the rock, in the person of the first pope, Peter, on which the foundation of the Christian church
would be laid. Thus, in this view, Rome’s position at the center of the physical world – or at least of the world of medieval Europe – had been solidified by the popes in a way never quite managed by the former emperors. Consequently, it suited medieval papal propagandists to stress the glories of ancient Rome, since this made the reflected glories of Christian Rome even greater. This ideology informs not only much of the writing associated with the papal court in the late Middle Ages, but also much of the artistic patronage, as well as the continual attempts to construct an urban geography which translated this meta-narrative into physical terms.

The precise origins of this papal view are lost in the mists of history, but must surely have taken root in the power vacuum created with the transfer of the imperial administration to Byzantium in the fourth century. One of the first moments when we see the pope in action as defender, not simply of the spiritual welfare of his flock but also of their physical security, comes in the mid-fifth century with the famous intervention by Pope Leo I (440–61) to divert an attack on the city by Attila and the Huns. The precise historical circumstances need not concern us, and in any event are largely unknown. What is important is the “spin” – still sufficiently resonant over a thousand years later that this episode was included in the decorations of the papal apartments in the Vatican palace, in a room decorated by Raphael and his workshop in the time of Pope Leo X (1513–21), a pope who had a strong interest in the actions undertaken by his predecessors of that papal name in order to protect the physical welfare of those whom he served as bishop.

It is certainly not impossible that Leo I was the first pontiff to actively take on a political role as defender of the city, and this view is consistent with what we know of his thinking from his many surviving sermons. These constitute some of the earliest surviving texts in which Rome’s pre-Christian past is appropriated and interpreted in a new Christian context, for example texts such as sermon 82 (in the *Patrologia Latina* edition) in which Peter and Paul are seen as the new spiritual defenders of the city, replacing its legendary founders Romulus and Remus. This too is an idea which would enjoy a long currency, extending well beyond the end of the Middle Ages. Indeed, it was still very much alive in the second half of the sixteenth century, when Pope Sixtus V (1585–90) placed statues of these two quintessential Roman patron saints on the summits of the triumphal columns of the Roman emperors Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, where they remain to this day. But perhaps its most dramatic
verbal expression may be found in a pair of poems, written in the early twelfth century by a visitor to the city from northern France, Hildebert of Lavardin, bishop of Le Mans (and later archbishop of Tours). It is the first of these, *Par tibi Roma*, which is the better known, constituting a nostalgic lament for the lost glories of the ancient city, now revealed only in the landscape of monumental imposing ruins. Hildebert writes:

Rome, without compare, though all but shattered;  
Your very ruins tell of greatness once enjoyed.  

It was a verse that obviously struck some resonance with many medieval visitors, who gaped in awe at the ancient buildings and statues which still dominated the physical landscape of the city, and it would be quoted verbatim a century later by the English traveler Master Gregorius. But somewhat less known is the second of Hildebert’s poems, the sequel to the first, in which the personification of Rome responds in the first person to the poet’s lament, refuting the claim that ancient Rome was in any way greater than its contemporary medieval Christian equivalent. The emperors may have ruled the earthly empire, but the popes can command the Kingdom of Heaven. The critical verse is this one: “Plus aquilis vexilla crucis, plus Caesare Petrus.”

But now, more than the eagles of the legions,  
The standard of the cross has gifted me;  
More than Caesar, Peter.

There may be no more succinct statement of papal ideology concerning their relationship to the ancient glory of the city, a glory that served in large measure as the justification for their claims to broader authority. And the pairing chosen for the contrast is once again significant. As the political leader who significantly expanded the frontiers of Rome, making it truly an imperial power that dominated the known world, Julius Caesar epitomized the empire, and personified the concept of world domination, in the same way that Peter epitomized the papacy. And just as all subsequent pontiffs saw themselves as successors to Peter, so too all the political successors to Caesar used his name, to the point that it soon became a title, not a name. Indeed, it would function in this way well beyond the end of the Middle Ages, in places like Germany (Kaiser) and Russia (Tsar).
Pope Sixtus V was far from being the first pontiff to translate this ideology into a manipulation of the inherited physical legacy of the ancient city. It is a pattern which we can find at work time and time again throughout the Middle Ages, perhaps beginning in the year 609, which witnessed the transformation of what was arguably Rome’s most splendid pagan temple, the Pantheon, from a shrine dedicated to all the gods to one dedicated to Mary and all the saints. It would be interesting to know more about the thinking of Pope Boniface IV (608–15), who undertook this architectural conversion. Was it simply an act of purification, intended to exorcise the structure of any lingering pagan demons – or were there stronger ideological factors at work? Given the lack of surviving documentation, we shall probably never know – although it may be a telling statement of the fragility of the papal position in his day that Boniface first requested the permission of the reigning emperor in distant Constantinople, as the Liber Pontificalis records. But whether deliberate or not, he set the stage for the subsequent papal appropriation of the physical remains of the ancient city, transforming the legacy of the emperor Augustus and his imperial successors into the reinvigorated Roma Christiana. This process of establishing thematic links between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present is made explicit in another twelfth-century text that would become by far the most popular of the many medieval guidebooks to the city, the Mirabilia urbis Romae, aptly described by Robert Brentano as “a sort of palimpsest with one civilization written over the other.”

Although, technically, the first Roman emperor was Augustus, Julius Caesar’s adopted son, this subtlety would have been largely lost on a medieval audience, for whom the very name “Caesar” conjured up a vision of Rome’s imperial past – as indeed it does in the quoted couplet from Hildebert’s poem, and as it would well beyond the end of the Middle Ages. Of the plethora of ancient remains which dominated the city’s physical aspect, one more than any other was directly associated with his name: the red granite obelisk which stood adjacent to the south flank of the church of St. Peter’s (figure 6.1). In the summer of 1586, again under Pope Sixtus V, this obelisk was moved to its present location in the center of the piazza, directly in front of the church, a rather remarkable feat of engineering undertaken by the principal papal architect of the day, Domenico Fontana. Its location in antiquity and the Middle Ages, in what is today the Piazza dei Protomartiri, is now marked by a stone set into the pavement, and excavations at this spot in 1959 revealed
the original foundations. Quite a bit is known about the history of this obelisk, the only one of its type to have remained standing in Rome throughout the long course of the Middle Ages. Like the numerous other obelisks which decorate public spaces elsewhere in the city, it is of course ultimately of Egyptian origin, although its original location in Egypt is not recorded, and, rather curiously, there are no surviving inscriptions in
hieroglyphs. However, it is known that it was moved to Alexandria some-
time shortly after the Roman conquest of Egypt by Augustus, where it
was set up in the Forum Iulium by the prefect Cornelius Gallus. This was
recorded in its first inscription, composed of bronze letters attached indi-
vidually to the base. These letters have long since disappeared, but their
text has been reconstructed brilliantly by Filippo Magi on the basis of the
holes which were drilled into the base to permit their attachment.10 The
second inscription, still preserved, was added either during the reign of
the emperor Tiberius or during that of his adopted son and successor
Caligula, and refers both to Tiberius and to the deified Augustus.11 In the
year 37 ce, the emperor Caligula had the obelisk transported from Alex-
andria to Rome, as mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his Natural History
(16.76.201), and it was subsequently set up on the spina of the Vatican
circus, where it would remain until 1586.

A number of medieval guidebooks to the city refer to the obelisk as
“St. Peter’s Needle,” no doubt based on its location, coupled with the
belief that Peter had suffered his martyrdom in the Vatican circus, either
at or near this spot. But there was also a second popular understanding
regarding this monument. For whatever reason, and possibly it arose in
part from a misinterpretation of the carved inscription, which opens with
the words “Divo Caesari Divi Iulii,” the obelisk was widely believed in
the Middle Ages not only to honor Julius Caesar, but moreover to be his
tomb. The origins of this identification are unknown, but it is recorded in
a variety of medieval texts, beginning with the twelfth-century Mirabilia
urbis Romae. In this widely disseminated and influential record of the
city’s classical remains, the obelisk is referred to as the “memoria Caesaris,
id est agulia” (the memorial of Caesar, which is to say the Needle), and
the passage in question then goes on to report that his cremated remains
were contained in the large bronze sphere set at the top: “ubi splendide
cinis eius in suo sarcofago requiescit” (where his ashes rest nobly in his
sarcophagus). Significantly, the Mirabilia then stresses Caesar’s domina-
tion of the physical world, both in his lifetime and beyond: “as in his
lifetime the whole world lay subdued before him, even in his death the
world would lie beneath him forever.”12 The etymology and meaning of
agulia, a term also repeated in other sources, is far from certain, but may
be a corruption of acus Iulia (in other words, Julius’ Needle). This associa-
tion persisted well into the sixteenth century, and it is somewhat amus-
ing to note that, when the obelisk was moved to its present location in
1586, the bronze sphere was taken down and brought to a room in the
Belvedere where a rudimentary form of forensic examination was undertaken – and the results were published by Filippo Pigafetta in that same year. He reports, almost with regret, that the orb had not been found to contain any human remains, but only bits of rust, and some earth which he believed, not implausibly, to have remained from the original casting process. This orb would later find its way to the Capitoline Hill, where today it may be seen in the Palazzo dei Conservatori (figure 6.2).

The most expansive medieval account of Caesar’s memoria may be found not in the Mirabilia, but rather in another text which takes as its subject
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the physical legacy of the ancient city: the *De mirabilibus urbis Romae* of a certain Master Gregorius, a visitor to the city, probably from England, at the end of the twelfth or in the early decades of the thirteenth century.¹⁴ Unlike the stance taken in the *Mirabilia*, where an official and essentially papal view of history is presented in which, as in Hildebert’s poems, Rome is made complete with the triumph of Christianity, Gregorius’ *De mirabilibus* offers by contrast a uniquely personal view of Rome’s ancient remains, and one that appears to be untainted by any Christian “spin.” Significantly, its author quotes the two well-known lines from the first of Hildebert’s poems, lamenting the loss of Rome’s former grandeur, but he completely ignores the second poem, in which the personification of Rome responds to, and counters, the author’s complaint. The papal vision is conspicuous by its complete absence, as too is any mention of the city’s Christian monuments. Gregorius’ text is imbued throughout with a passionate regard for ancient monuments, a sort of precocious antiquarian curiosity, which results in many highly personal observations on the condition and placement of statues and buildings. For example, he tries, but fails, to throw a stone as high as the capitals of the columns in the Baths of Diocletian, clearly impressed with their massive size; he carefully notes the damage to the bronze statue of the she-wolf, one of the city’s most important symbols, then located outside the Lateran palace and now in the Capitoline Museum; he paces off and records the width of the interior of the Pantheon; and he goes back three times to admire a nude statue of the goddess Venus, which he candidly admits had entranced him. His attitude, and consequently his text, is unique in the numerous medieval accounts of the city of Rome, and it is made all the more interesting by the fact that he frequently records the current popular opinion about the identification of some object or building, usually then dismissing it as “worthless,” as well as observing how it functioned in his own day. His facts are often wrong, for the simple reason that he had no access to accurate information. But he did have access to contemporary opinion, and clearly he made a conscious effort to solicit this.

His account of the Vatican obelisk is one of his more detailed chapters, and begins with an echo of the *Mirabilia* as follows:

There are many pyramids in Rome, but of all of them the one which deserves the greatest admiration is the pyramid of Julius Caesar, made from a single porphyry block. It is indeed a marvel how a block of stone of such height could have been cut, or have been raised, or remain standing; for
they say that its height is 250 feet. At the top there is a bronze sphere, in which Julius Caesar’s ashes and bones are deposited.\textsuperscript{15}

What follows is mostly derived from the account of Caesar’s death related by the Roman historian Suetonius, on occasion somewhat inaccurately remembered: for example, he sets Caesar’s assassination on the \textit{kalends} of March, not the \textit{ides}; he places the Senate meeting on the Capitoline Hill, not in Pompey’s Theatre; and he reports that the body received twenty-four wounds, as opposed to Suetonius’ twenty-three. But perhaps the most curious passage comes at the end of this chapter, when he reports:

\begin{quote}
The pilgrims call this pyramid St. Peter’s Needle, and they make great efforts to crawl underneath it, where the stone rests on four bronze lions, claiming falsely that those who manage to do so are cleansed from their sins, having made a true penance.
\end{quote}

Throughout the \textit{De mirabilibus}, Gregory uses the word “pilgrims” with a sort of sneering contempt. They are never high on his list of reliable sources of accurate information. However, this appellation of the obelisk as “St. Peter’s Needle” is interesting, and while unusual, it is by no means unique to Gregory. It may be found in a number of other late medieval texts, including the description of Rome composed by a monk visiting from Iceland, Nikolas of Munkathvera,\textsuperscript{16} so there is no reason to doubt that this was indeed what it was popularly called. But what might have prompted this name?

It was a general practice in medieval Rome to “Christianize” ancient monuments in some way, thus stressing their role in the fulfillment of the city’s destiny – and this current runs throughout the \textit{Mirabilia}, the “official” guidebook, in its discussions of the Pantheon, and of Augustus’ vision of the “Ara caeli” on the Capitoline, to name but two prominent examples. No doubt in this instance it may have been quite simply the proximity to the great shrine church of St. Peter which prompted some popular association between the obelisk and that most preeminent of all Roman saints – or perhaps it was based on beliefs concerning the actual site of Peter’s crucifixion, believed to have taken place in the Vatican circus. But it is also possible that the obelisk bore more than ordinary significance for Rome’s medieval visitors; in other words, that there was a deeper current of meaning which informed the experience of those
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who left the walls of the city, crossed the Ponte Sant’Angelo, and then turned westwards to approach the tomb of the foremost of the apostles, the keeper of the keys to the Heavenly Kingdom. It is interesting to attempt to reconstruct that experience, and think for a moment about the various monuments which a pilgrim would actually have encountered on the last few hundred meters of this journey.

All visitors coming from the city to the suburban shrine of St. Peter’s needed first to cross the Ponte Sant’Angelo, the ancient *Pons Aelius*, as this was the only one of the city’s Roman bridges which survived in the Middle Ages upstream from the Tiber Island. Consequently, a number of the main streets which traversed the medieval city began or ended here, depending on one’s direction of travel. From one point of view, this created considerable congestion, and thus constituted a major bottleneck for traffic, sometimes with tragic results. In the *Inferno* (18.28–33), Dante makes reference to the attempt in the first Jubilee year, 1300, to divide the pilgrims crossing the bridge into two great streams, one moving in each direction. Dante could well have known this from his own personal experience, since he was himself a pilgrim to Rome in that year. Another *romeo* in 1300, Guilielmus Ventura from Asti in Piedmont, recorded his fear of being crushed or trodden underfoot by the great throngs, and in the Jubilee of 1450 some 200 people would be trampled to death on the bridge in a single incident when the crowd panicked. But from another perspective, the single crossing served to formalize the approach to the shrine of St. Peter, making it a common experience shared by all. And as a consequence, the route from the bridgehead to St. Peter’s was similarly standardized for medieval pilgrims, creating a form of ritual quite unknown to the modern visitor.

Having crossed the bridge, the pilgrim was immediately confronted by the Mausoleum of the Emperor Hadrian, better known as the Castel Sant’ Angelo, an imposing structure which commands the bridgehead on the Tiber’s right bank (figure 6.3). Although built originally as an imperial tomb, its strategic location had prompted its early conversion into a fortress, and it frequently played a role in the defense of the city or of the person of the pope, from the Gothic wars of the sixth century to the famous Sack of Rome in 1527. This structure, and also the bridge, took their medieval names from the story of the vision granted to Pope Gregory I (590–604) during a penitential procession aimed at bringing an end to a severe plague which had ravaged the city. The legend relates that the pope witnessed an angel standing on the highest parapet of the
Mausoleum, in the act of sheathing his sword, and this was interpreted to signal an end to the pestilence in response to the papal prayers. Despite the popular name, which persists to this day, the original function of the Castel Sant’Angelo as an imperial tomb was not forgotten in later centuries, and it is recorded, for example, in the *Mirabilia*.

Turning left towards St. Peter’s, the medieval pilgrim almost immediately encountered another funerary monument: a large pyramidal tomb, identified in medieval texts as the “meta Romuli,” and resembling that of the senator Gaius Cestius Epulo which still survives by the Porta S. Paolo on the city’s south side. The “meta Romuli” has long since vanished, but its base was rediscovered in excavations undertaken in 1948–9 at the beginning of the modern Via della Conciliazione, thus confirming the earlier hypothesis concerning its location proposed by Christian Huelsen. The original structure had been largely demolished by Pope Alexander VI in 1499, in order to widen the approaches to St. Peter’s in anticipation of the crowds flocking to the city in the 1500 Jubilee, although long before that the marble cladding had been removed and reused to pave the atrium of Old St. Peter’s. Its final demolition came in the time of Pope
Leo X. While there is no doubt about its funerary function, the identity of the original occupant remains unknown. But from at least the mid-eleventh century onwards, this pyramid was understood to be the Tomb of Romulus, one of the legendary founders of the city, an identification repeated in both the *Mirabilia* and Gregorius’ *De mirabilibus*, as well as other texts. In a similar way, its twin at the Porta S. Paolo was identified as the Tomb of Remus. These two pyramids served to reinforce the concept of Christian succession first expressed in the sermon of Pope Leo I, one marking the road to the shrine of St. Peter, and the second the road to the shrine of St. Paul. And then finally, approaching the culmination of a journey that was both physical and spiritual, the pilgrim encountered a third monument containing the remains of perhaps the most famous of all ancient Romans: the *agulia*, or Vatican obelisk.

It is both interesting and possibly highly significant that all medieval visitors to St. Peter’s would be first confronted with no fewer than three ancient monuments, all of which were considered to be the tombs of important Romans from the pre-Christian age: the emperor Hadrian, Romulus, and then Julius Caesar. All three names were associated with the foundation and extension of a city and its homonymous empire, a concept which continued to live large in the medieval imagination. In the Middle Ages, the very act of pilgrimage was, like the liturgy, thought of as a trope of God’s sacred plan – and the actions of the pilgrim, just like the rituals performed by those who undertake the Haj to Mecca in their thousands today, were designed to explain and reinforce this view. Thus, as the visitor arrived at the shrine of the foremost of the apostles, it would have been difficult not to have reflected on Rome’s long and glorious history, and more specifically on a series of the foremost individuals linked to that history whose tombs were encountered not only in succession, but arguably also in a sequence of increasing importance.

Although apparently not stated explicitly in any surviving medieval text, it is not impossible that the pilgrim’s journey past three tombs, identified correctly or incorrectly as those of important ancient Romans, was intended deliberately to set the stage for the fourth, and in medieval eyes most important, tomb in the sequence: that of St. Peter himself. And it is perhaps significant that the same term – *memoria* – is used by the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* for a number of these monuments, in the same way that Christian texts speak of the *memoria Petri*. Not simply ancient remains, these were sites of memory, places where the significance of the past was remembered in the present. In this way the final stage of the pilgrim’s
journey can perhaps be seen as a physical embodiment of the sentiment expressed succinctly in Hildebert’s line: “Plus aquilis vexilla crucis, plus Caesare Petrus.” Those words were given explicit physical expression as the pilgrims approached their final goal. Having passed a line of monuments associated with the memories of the bodies of famous Romans, culminating in that of Julius Caesar himself, the embodiment par excellence of pre-Christian Rome, they completed their personal mimesis of the city’s divine history by reaching the memoria of St. Peter, the climax not only of their own spiritual ascent, but perhaps more importantly of the history of the city that boasted the title of caput mundi. Sacred history was thus made manifest in sacred geography.

And so the memory of Julius Caesar was carefully nurtured in medieval Rome – not primarily for its own sake, but rather as a foil for the comparative importance of St. Peter, and of the line of popes who followed him as bishops of the city, in whom the power and authority of the ancient world had been made perfect. Indeed, it is not impossible that the very identification of the obelisk as Caesar’s tomb was invented and promulgated for this precise purpose, a product of the attempt to create a “memorial landscape” for visitors to Rome, rather than the survival of any ancient tradition.

NOTES

1 Das Constitutum Constantini (1968).
2 Mitchell (1980).
3 For the deliberate reuse of porphyry, see Déer (1959), 146–54; for the pope as “Caesar”: Schramm (1968–70), IV, 184.
4 PL 54, 422c–423a (82.1).
7 Brentano (1974), 79–80; see also Adriani (1960).
8 D’Onofrio (1992)3, 97–141.
9 Fontana (1590).
10 Magi (1963).
11 CIL 6.1, no. 882.
St. Peter’s Needle and the Ashes of Julius Caesar

13 Pigafetta (1586).
15 Osborne (1987), 34.
16 Magoun (1940), 280.
17 Ventura (1727), 192. For the Jubilee in 1300: Frugoni (1950).
18 Huelsen (1903), 383–7; for the post-World War II excavations: Gatti (1951).
19 Osborne (1986); Osborne (1987), 33, 86–8.
20 For an elaboration of this concept, see Boholm (1997).
This chapter examines the reception of Julius Caesar during the Pontificate of Julius II (1503–13), highlighting how the urban and architectural projects of this period were influenced by the status of the pope as “second Caesar.” The study will be undertaken at three interrelated levels: firstly, at the general level of classical Rome as a model for Renaissance views of *renovatio*; secondly, relating to the symbolism of the Roman triumph; and thirdly, concerning the more specific influence of Julius Caesar.

This threefold influence, as I will seek to demonstrate, drew upon the interpretations of humanists, antiquarians, and architects. One aspect of this influence that was to have a particular bearing on Julius II was the route and symbolism of the *via triumphalis*. As the passage along which triumphant armies processed to the Capitol in antiquity, the *via triumphalis* became the source of much antiquarian interest during the Renaissance. An indication of this can be seen in an inscription located on the façade of a house in the Ponte Rione district, and dating from the period of Julius II. Translated from the Latin, the inscription reads as follows: “Julius II Pontifex Optimus Maximus having liberated Italy and enlarged the dominions of the Roman church embellished the city of Rome which at the time was more like a squatter’s settlement than a properly planned city.”

The epigram is a eulogy of the achievements of Julius II, celebrating the pope’s liberation of Italy from tyranny and his ambitious urban and architectural projects in Rome. The reference to “a squatter’s settlement” (*occupate similiorem quam devise*) is a late Latin derivation from Livy’s *History of Rome*: “ut . . . forma . . . urbis sit occupatae magis quam divisae similis” (5.55.5). This relates to Livy’s account of a battle that took place
between the Etruscan city of Veii and Rome in 396 BCE. It was during this conflict that Veii lay siege to Rome, resulting in extensive destruction of the city. The final victory of the Romans, however, led to the Etruscan territories on the west bank of the Tiber River, including the Janiculum and Vatican, becoming part of Rome. The city was subsequently restored, albeit in haste and without much careful planning, hence Livy’s derogatory comparison to “a squatter’s settlement.”

The reasons for incorporating the Livy reference in the Julian epigram are open to speculation. Attempts to emulate the achievements of ancient Rome were a familiar feature in papal eulogies, as we see for example in the well-known sermons of Julius II’s chief spokesman, Giles of Viterbo. The description in the epigram was probably intended as a rhetorical gesture to highlight the contrast between the order and decorum of Julian Rome with the disorder and decadence of the city that was the legacy of Julius II’s much reviled predecessor, Pope Alexander VI. In using an ancient literary reference to underline Julius’ achievements, it seems that the hagiographers considered the emulation of ancient Rome as a way of legitimizing papal initiatives.

There is however a further, not unrelated, reason why the Livy reference was included in the epigram. This concerns the location of the inscription at the fork of Via dei Banchi Vecchi and Via dei Banchi Nuovi. Situated along the passage traditionally used for the papal coronation ceremony, the Solenne Possesso, the inscription is also in close proximity to the reconstructed route of the ancient via triumphalis. The significance of this ancient road in Livy’s account relates to Rome’s early territorial ambitions.

Livy’s description of the battle between Rome and Veii reiterates the well-known belief that the triumphal march was first performed by the Roman general Marcus Furius Camillus following his victory against the Etruscan city in 396 BCE. Having been granted the title of dictator, Camillus became better known for his famous battle against the Gauls that followed his victory at Veii. Whatever the actual history of the via triumphalis, what seems certain, at least from the point of view of humanists and antiquarians, is that the road originated in Veii and was established as a ceremonial passage for triumphant armies returning to Rome via the Vatican (figure 7.1). Understood in this broader historical context, it is reasonable to suppose that certain triumphal associations were intended in the Livy reference. Indeed, it could be argued that the epigram was intended to serve, at one
level, as a *recordatio* of the *via triumphalis* and its symbolism. The status of Julius II as “reviver” of ancient Roman imperialism – albeit reconstituted in the image of a Christian empire of faith – drew upon such ancient sources to reinforce a perceived continuity between papal Rome and classical Rome. The example of Camillus would, in one sense, have provided the hagiographers of Julius II with an appropriate early Roman precursor to the quintessential model of Roman triumphalism, Julius Caesar. In each case, military triumph and repair or embellishment of the city’s fabric are presented as interdependent aspects of the same restorative ambition. The link between conquest and city beautification was a distinctly Roman feature given that buildings and monuments were regularly constructed from the spoils of war. By seeking to convey, therefore, continuity and contrast in the association of Rome with triumphalism, the Renaissance was consciously emulating a well-established Roman practice.

The association was enhanced by the intense interest during the Renaissance in the Roman triumph, its route, and its now canonic triumphator,

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*Figure 7.1* Archaeological map of the Vatican area during the period of early Christianity (after Reekmans), indicating route of the ancient *via triumphalis* across the Tiber (Ponte Triumphale) and with later sixteenth-century buildings superimposed. Drawn by author (A) Cortile del Belvedere; (B) Papal Mint
Julius II as Second Caesar

Julius Caesar. As a ritual and ceremonial passage, which traditionally served to reaffirm the unity and purpose of ancient Rome and her empire, the symbolism of the Roman triumph was revived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This formed an integral part of the humanist project of renovatio, or renewal of classical antiquity. During Julius II’s pontificate, notions of historical continuity were cultivated by humanists on the basis that the pope was the “perpetual triumphator.” Often described as “il Papa Terribile,” on account of his unbending determination and belligerence, Julius II is portrayed in sermons and eulogies as the warrior pope who sought to unite the territories of Italy to form a papal empire. Indeed, his brief successes in the expansion of the Holy See were the result of sometimes bloody military campaigns and complex diplomatic alliances between the papacy and the ruling families of Europe.

His papal title, Julius II, was interpreted by many humanists and artists as a conscious reference to Julius Caesar. The association was cultivated in order to present Julius’ military successes and political initiatives as credible emulations of those of the earlier triumphator. The ancient route of the via triumphalis formed a central feature in this hagiography since the passage and its symbolism were understood as a prefiguration of papal ceremonial (figure 7.1).

Attempts in the Renaissance to identify the route of the ancient road were hindered by a lack of clear archaeological evidence. Accordingly, humanists had to rely on ancient accounts of Roman triumphal marches such as Suetonius’ description of Caesar’s entry. This probably served as the initial inspiration for Andrea Mantegna’s series of nine paintings of the Triumph of Caesar, now in Hampton Court, one of a number of representations dating from the Renaissance that conflate all of Caesar’s triumphs into one continuous sequence. These depictions, moreover, also utilize features of other triumphs that ancient sources describe, such as that of Aemilius Paullus. Mantegna’s paintings demonstrate how the triumph of Caesar, in its reception, takes on the grandest features of many other ancient triumphs, thereby becoming the Roman triumph par excellence.

In terms of identifying and representing key topographical features along the route, these paintings were also probably influenced by a well-known fifteenth-century reconstruction of the via triumphalis by Flavio Biondo. The account is unique in Renaissance antiquarian literature in the way it attempts to trace systematically the ancient road, from the Vatican to the Capitol, by highlighting the principal buildings and monuments that delineate its path. The ease with which the existing fabric
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of the papal city can serve as effective landmarks for reawakening the history of this ancient road does not so much reflect the thinking of a modern archaeologist. Rather, it demonstrates an underlying belief, prevalent in much humanist thought, in the intertwined histories of antiquity and the present. In this historical outlook questions of renewal and reform – manifested in urban and architectural initiatives, in religious sermons and papal eulogies – were considered a means of redeeming the past. This, as will become clearer later, was crucial to the meaning and symbolism of Julius II as second Caesar.

The first topographical landmark that Biondo mentions on the east side of the Tiber River is a little church by the name of St. Celso. Closely associated with the pontificate of Julius II, this modest building is located along the Canale di Ponte/Via dei Banchi Vecchi intersection in close proximity to the inscription. According to modern archaeological reconstructions, part of the Via dei Banchi Vecchi coincides with the supposed route of the ancient via triumphalis, as it extended to the bend in the Tiber River.

This quarter of Rome, called the Ponte Rione, formed a strategically important part of Donato Bramante’s larger urban redevelopment of the east and west banks of the Tiber. As architect to Julius II, Bramante is chiefly known for his designs for the new St. Peter’s Basilica and the nearby Cortile del Belvedere. His lesser-known urban scheme for the banks of the Tiber River necessitated the demolition of a large number of medieval buildings and the creation of two roughly parallel streets, Via Giulia and Via della Lungara. Straddling the Tiber River, these roads formed part of a larger urban project to create a looped network of streets with connecting bridges, to facilitate access between the Vatican, Trastevere, and the east bank of the Tiber. The via triumphalis almost certainly played a role in the ceremonial and symbolic intentions of this project (figure 7.2).

Forming part of the Ponte Rione district of Rome was the banking quarter (or “Quartiere dei Banchi”). Located along the Canale di Ponte, the quarter housed the major financial institutions of Renaissance Rome, including that of the celebrated banker and papal financier Agostino Chigi. The commemorative inscription, examined earlier, is located directly opposite the new papal mint (at the fork of Via dei Banchi Nuovi and Via dei Banchi Vecchi) that Julius II had himself established as part of the new administrative body of the church in Rome. This body included the construction of a new palace of justice, the Palazzo dei
Figure 7.2  Plan of Bramante’s urban and architectural projects for Rome, early sixteenth century, in relation to the northern route of the *via triumphalis*. Drawn by author (A) Northern route of the ancient *via triumphalis*; (B) Cortile del Belvedere/St. Peter’s Basilica; (C) reinstated Ponte Triumphale; (D) Palazzo dei Tribunali/Via Giulia; (E) Via della Lungara; (F) Papal Mint
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Tribunali, and the completion of the new Chancery, the Palazzo della Cancelleria, all located along the reconstructed route of the *via triumphalis* (figure 7.2). These initiatives underline the political, symbolic, and ceremonial importance of the east bank of the Tiber River during Julius II’s pontificate.

As the main north–south artery of the east bank of the Tiber River, Via Giulia was probably intended to serve a more specific ceremonial function. This is implied by the location of the enormous, but largely unexecuted, Palazzo dei Tribunali. The building punctuates the axis of the street and was to form a major visual focus. A sketch attributed to Bramante indicates that this palace was intended to front onto a large piazza. According to Arnaldo Bruschi, the piazza, and its adjacent developments, may have been consciously modeled on Julius Caesar’s Forum and his rebuilding of the Curia.

The implication of a conscious link between justice and triumphalism in this topography may seem problematic, particularly when viewed in terms of Julius Caesar’s reputation as a conqueror of considerable cruelty. Considered in the guise of the second Caesar (Julius II), however, the link is highly relevant. As the warrior pope, Julius II sought to bring his potentially conflicting roles as “chief priest” (*pontifex maximus*) and secular ruler under the same unifying purpose. The influence of Julius Caesar was crucially important in this enterprise given that the dictator was presented in humanist interpretations as both “restorer” of Roman justice and triumphator. The theme of justice, therefore, probably played a part in the development of a symbolic understanding of Bramante’s urban project for Via Giulia. Indeed, it is conceivable that the street was intended to serve as some kind of ceremonial passage, perhaps in emulation of the *via triumphalis* which it closely follows.

Evidence of a ceremonial function for Via Giulia is highlighted in an account of the procession of the Festa di Agone in 1513, held during the waning months of Julius II’s pontificate. According to Charles Stinger, the ceremony was a celebration of the pontiff’s rule, commemorating his military, political, and religious achievements:

The parade, which proceeded along the new Via Giulia in following the route from the Piazza del Campidoglio to Piazza Navona, included the governor of the city, the Conservatori, the Caporioni, and other municipal magistrates and officials, followed then by members of various Roman guilds, each of which sponsored a *carro trionfale*. Among these was one
showing a map of Italy with mountains, cities, and regions, a palm tree above it, and the explanatory caption, “Italy liberated.” Another bore an obelisk with inscriptions in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian hieroglyphics proclaiming “Julius II, liberator of Italy and the expeller of schismatics.” Both floats alluded to the pope’s anti-French policy, while the carri, depicting the Romagna, Bologna, Reggio in Emilia, Parma, and Piacenza, represented cities and regions recovered by the papacy since the formation of the anti-French Holy League (1511). 16

The triumphal symbolism expressed in this procession might be paralleled by the ancient accounts, referred to earlier, of Caesar’s conquests. Indeed, could an analogy even have been intended between Caesar’s Gallic triumph and Julian anti-French policy? Added to this is the role of Marcus Furius Camillus, reputed “founder” of the Roman triumph, and the first Roman dictator to do battle with the Gauls. This threefold relationship could be said to support an underlying theme that permeates the Festa di Agone procession of 1513, namely, Italianità. Understood as an early form of Italian consciousness, Italianità was propagated in the Renaissance by the desire to reestablish the Italian peninsula as a major political and religious focus centered on papal Rome. Besides emulating ancient Rome, these early nationalist sentiments were also influenced by another less evident association. This concerns the ancient region of Etruria, the land of the Etruscans, which roughly coincides with the territories of the Holy See during the pontificate of Julius II. The association was based on the belief, cultivated by such commentators as Annius and Giles of Viterbo, that the region was the second “Holy Land,” because the Etruscans had been one of the saved tribes of Noah. 17 The conflation of imperial and Christian redemptive themes in the territories of Italy that we see expressed in the procession of the Festa di Agone was founded on the principle of the interrelatedness of Etrusco-Roman and Judeo-Christian histories. This link finds expression in the association of Via Giulia with the via triumphalis, the latter serving as an abiding reminder of the unity of ancient Italy and her empire.

Bramante’s attempt to exploit the triumphal symbolism of Julius II’s pontificate is not just alluded to in his urban schemes for the east bank of the Tiber River but also probably influenced his work in the Vatican. Extending south from Monte Mario, the via triumphalis entered Rome via the Vatican fields (ager Vaticanus). The significance of the Vatican in the meaning of the triumphal march was well known in the Renaissance,
thanks to ancient accounts of the procession and to Flavio Biondo’s anti-
quarian studies. Once the marshaling ground for triumphant armies
entering the city, the Vatican was thought to be the location of the \textit{porta
triumphalis}, a venerated ceremonial gateway in the Roman procession
that became associated with the cult of Janus.\(^{18}\)

Among the numerous descriptions of buildings and monuments given
by Flavio Biondo that delineate the route of the ancient passage is a
reference to a “\textit{ponte triumphale}.” The bridge formed the original river-
crossing for the \textit{via triumphalis}, connecting the Mons Vaticanus on the
west side to the Campus Martius on the east. At one time the only river-
crossing in the north part of Rome, the \textit{ponte triumphale} had been in a
state of ruin since its probable destruction following the Gothic invasion
of 410 CE.\(^{19}\) By the Renaissance only traces of the structure could be seen
in the Tiber River, traces which still exist today.\(^{20}\)

Bramante had planned to rebuild the \textit{ponte triumphale} as part of his
urban project for the east and west banks of the Tiber River (figure 7.2).\(^{21}\)
The initiative brought with it a particularly rich source of symbolic
references that centered on the relation between Caesar and Peter, and
between Roman imperial and Christian notions of immortality. These
gave legitimacy to the dual symbolism of Julius II as \textit{claviger} (following
St. Peter, the key-bearer of the Roman Catholic Church) and as “second
Caesar.” Whilst this dual role may appear irreconcilable from our mod-
ern perspective, the Renaissance proclivities toward continuity of classi-
cal, Judaic, and Christian traditions ensured a degree of concordance.
This, moreover, was underpinned by the fervent belief in a redemptive
understanding of history.

The martyrdom and burial of St. Peter on the west bank of the Tiber
River was interpreted by Julius II’s chief spokesman, Giles of Viterbo,
as signaling the beginning of Rome’s redemption from its pagan past.\(^{22}\)
In this symbolism Roman military triumph was conveyed as a sinful
prelude to spiritual triumph over death in Christian martyrdom. In late
antiquity, the tomb of the Christian key-bearer was sometimes described
as a \textit{trofeo}, a term probably derived from the Greek \textit{tropaea} meaning
“victory memorials.”\(^{23}\) The word was also used in Roman military termino-
logy to denote a commemorative tomb to a dead soldier. These monu-
ments were traditionally located on the sites of important battles, often
on a river bank. The famous \textit{trofeo} which commemorated Trajan’s victory
against the Dacians on the banks of the Danube is an obvious case in
point.\(^{24}\) The use of such a term to denote the burial place of the Prince of
Julius II as Second Caesar

The Church may relate to the idea that the military function of the Vatican, as the staging ground for returning armies, reaffirms the providential nature of Rome’s topography as the setting of Christian martyrdom.

The Christianizing of pagan imperial symbolism was to find a more direct architectural expression in the memory of the Vatican as *territorium triumphale*. During the demolition of old St. Peter’s Basilica under Julius II, a Latin inscription was found. Located on the triumphal arch of the Constantinian Basilica that separates the main body of the building from the sanctuary, the epigraph reads as follows in translation: “Because under [Christ’s] leadership the world rose triumphant to the skies, Constantine, himself victorious, has founded this hall in Your honor.”

The inscription was accompanied by a mosaic, probably of slightly later date, which it is thought depicted Constantine presenting a model of the Basilica to Christ and St. Peter. Juxtaposed, both commemorative inscription and mosaic highlight the manner in which military triumph and architecture were put to the service of Christianizing the city. This has interesting parallels to the Julian epigram, referred to earlier, where the Roman imperial practice of interdependency between *renovatio urbis* (urban renewal) and military success was similarly invoked. Under Julius II’s pontificate, this symbolism was deployed in order to draw a parallel and a contrast between the providential rule of the pope, as descendant of Peter, and Julius Caesar’s apotheosis.

The symbolism, therefore, underlines the relation between the “founder” of imperial Rome and the “founder” of Christian Rome. It would seem plausible that this connection influenced Bramante’s plan to reinstate the ancient triumphal bridge. This assertion is based on the idea that the *ponte triumphale* was used not only by Julius Caesar in his triumphal entry into Rome, but also by St. Peter in his passage to martyrdom and burial in the Vatican. The idea is supported by the fact that the bridge was the nearest river-crossing to the Vatican from the *Campus Martius* at the time of Nero, and therefore the most likely access to the place of Peter’s execution.

The twofold symbolism inferred in this relationship reinforces Julius II’s dual role as temporal ruler and descendant of St. Peter. As if anticipating his ascendancy to the pontificate, Julius was earlier granted the title of “Vincula” or “in Vincoli” (meaning “in chains”) by his uncle, Sixtus IV. This was during Julius’ period as Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, in the late fifteenth century, when he served as titular head of the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli. The church holds the chains that
supposedly incarcerated the apostle during his imprisonment under Herod. It was also on this site that Peter and Paul were reputedly tried before their martyrdom.\textsuperscript{28}

Against this rich historical background, it seems inconceivable that Bramante would have overlooked the symbolic significance of reinstating the ancient bridge. The passage of Peter across the \textit{pons triumphalis} to the Vatican, and his subsequent “triumph” over death through his martyrdom, could be said to signify an “ontological inversion” of the military triumph of Caesar in the triumphator’s procession from the Vatican to the Capitol. Accordingly, the past deeds and misdemeanors of imperial rule are redeemed by Peter’s reverse passage, subsequent martyrdom, and final veneration as Christ’s chosen apostle. In so doing, the nature and meaning of death in the Christian world are set alongside, and consequently take precedence over, Roman imperial notions of immortality as exemplified in \textit{Divus Iulius}.

The memory of the \textit{via triumphalis} in the pontificate of Julius II takes on more explicit imperial overtones in Bramante’s design for the Cortile del Belvedere, a vast three-tiered colonnaded structure that connects the Vatican Palace to the south to the Villa Belvedere to the north (figure 7.3).\textsuperscript{29} Emulating such Roman monuments as Domitian’s Stadium on the Palatine and the Temple of Fortuna in Palestrina, the Cortile was built directly alongside the Via dei Pellegrini, one of the principal pilgrimage routes which entered Rome from Monte Mario to the north. The road originally formed part of the supposed north route of the \textit{via triumphalis extra muros} which was used by the emperor Frederick III in his procession to the Vatican for his coronation in 1452. In view of the close topographical relationship between Cortile and \textit{via triumphalis}, it may come as no surprise that a commemorative medal of the former had inscribed upon it the words, VIA IVLIA TRIUM.\textsuperscript{30} This suggests that the passage of the pontiff along the Cortile, between Vatican Palace and Villa, was likened to a triumphal procession. The allusion was further underlined by the proposal to include a monumental triumphal arch within a nymphaeum on the second tier of the Cortile, located on the longitudinal axis of the enclosure.

In the carefully orchestrated dialogue between imperial and papal symbolism, notions of \textit{translatio imperii} find expression in the interrelationship between papal ceremonial and architectural or urban projects. This, as we have seen, centered around the identity and personality of Julius II. It finds expression in the location and iconography of the Stanza della
Segnatura. Forming part of the papal apartments in the Vatican Palace, and situated roughly on the longitudinal axis of the Cortile, this celebrated room was originally used as the private library of Julius II. Famous for its cycle of frescoes by the young Raphael, including the School of Athens, the private library contained printed editions of Dante Alighieri’s works. Both Julius II and Bramante shared an interest in Dante’s writings and poems, highlighted by the fact that Bramante often recited these.
works to the pope. Amongst the collection was a volume of Dante’s *Monarchia*, a work of special interest in this context. In advocating a form of caesaro-papal rule, Dante articulates an alliance between pope and emperor. This is examined in Ernst Kantorowicz’s seminal study of “man-centered kingship,” where he interprets Dante’s mode of caesaro-papal rule as advocating a link between the paradigms of *Deus* and *optimus homo* and those qualities that pope and emperor potentially share. Implicit in this concordance is a symmetry between divine and temporal rule that hints at Julius II’s own dual status.

As the best location from which to view the perspective effect of the Cortile and the countryside beyond, the north window of the Stanza della Segnatura would also have provided an ideal vantage point from which the pope could reflect upon his territorial ambitions. Forming part of Julius II’s private collection of books was a map of the peninsula of Italy dating from 1507, the year after the pope’s military campaigns in Bologna and Perugia. Attributed to Bramante, the work was probably commissioned by the pope for strategic purposes, to highlight the territories of Italy that were either under papal jurisdiction or singled out for possible conquest and inclusion in the Holy See.

It would not be difficult to imagine Julius II, in a rare moment of solitude, examining this map with the spectacular view of the prati beyond. Combined, both map and view serve as powerful metaphors of papal domination. Advancing the Empedoclean notion of vision as a form of touching, the mere act of seeing could be said to constitute, in the emanatory power of the warrior pope’s vision, the act of taking possession. Hence, the meaning of “perpetual triumphator” pertains not only to issues of active engagement (*vita activa*), through conquest, urban renewal, and church reform, but also to private contemplation (*vita contemplativa*).

Part of Bramante’s scheme for the Cortile del Belvedere was the proposal to incorporate a relief in the lower courtyard. Described briefly by Giorgio Vasari in his *Lives*, the relief was in the form of a pictogram or hieroglyph. The motifs in the pictogram were to stand for the title: GIULIO II PONT MAX. They comprised three elements: a profile of Julius Caesar which stands for “Giulio II”; a bridge for “Pont” (short for Pontifex); and finally an obelisk evoking “Max” (short for Maximus). The choice of a profile of Caesar in the papal title is self-explanatory, given Julius’ status as “second Caesar.” The representation of Pontifex as a bridge seems clear given the meaning of the Latin word *pons*. However,
it could be argued that Bramante had in mind a more specific connection, namely, the proposed reinstatement of the *ponte triumphale* which was probably intended to function as a ceremonial gateway to the Vatican for the pope, in emulation of Caesar and Peter. As for the obelisk, this would seem to be a conflation of two associations. The first is the Circus Maximus, whose spina contained two obelisks. Both were later relocated by Sixtus V to the Piazza del Popolo and the Piazza of St. John the Lateran. The second association is more local to the Cortile del Belvedere, namely, the so-called “Needle” of St. Peter that originally formed part of the spina of the Circus of Caligula in the Vatican. This stood on the south side of the Basilica until the late sixteenth century when it was moved to St. Peter’s Square.

As John Osborne points out, throughout the Middle Ages the orb that crowns the obelisk was believed to contain the ashes of Julius Caesar. This assumption is supported by the status of the obelisk as a trophy of conquest, an association that is particularly germane to Caesar given his own successes in Egypt. It was as a result of this persistent belief in the funereal significance of the obelisk that it later became an important symbol in Bramante’s portrayal of Julius II as second Caesar.

Whilst, according to Vasari, Julius II rejected Bramante’s proposal for the hieroglyphic relief, the opportunities to exploit the caesarean symbolism of the obelisk were not to go unnoticed by the pope. Evidence of this can be seen in a more ambitious proposal made by Bramante in 1503–4. This concerns his initial design for the new Basilica of St. Peter’s. We have two accounts of this project. The first is by the chief spokesman of Julius II, Giles of Viterbo (referred to earlier), the second by a later sixteenth-century commentator, Panvinio. In Giles’ account, Bramante attempts to persuade the pope to orientate the new Basilica on the north–south axis so that it would directly face the obelisk, which he calls “the monument of Julius Caesar.” Julius’ rejection of the proposed reorientation, on the grounds that he forbade the movement of things “which ought not to be moved,” relates to the controversial matter of exhuming the body of the apostle and relocating his tomb. In Panvinio’s description, however, the pope initially considered the idea and even commissioned Bramante to construct a model of the proposal, in spite of opposition from the cardinals.

The idea of orienting the Basilica so that the ashes of Caesar would be on axis with the Petrine tomb underlines the special alliance between the triumphator and the first vicar of Christ. This relationship centers on the
desire to communicate both topographically and iconographically a continuity between Julius II as “second Caesar” and key-bearer of the church. An important feature of Bramante’s design for the new Basilica was the plan to site Julius II’s tomb within the choir, on axis with the altar, St. Peter’s tomb, and obelisk. The idea of siting what was intended to be a monumental mausoleum of the pope directly behind the altar and burial place of St. Peter is reminiscent of the location of the tomb of Constantine. According to Constantine’s biographer Eusebius, the first Christian emperor insisted that he should be buried under the altar of the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople. Eusebius justified this audacious demand by claiming that Constantine was the thirteenth apostle and therefore deserved to be laid at this most sacred spot at the crossing of the church. Whilst it would be misleading to assume similar aspirations with respect to Julius II, it is conceivable that Bramante sought to emulate, in his designs for the new Basilica and Cortile del Belvedere, early Christian imperial models.

In the implied concordance between imperium and sacerdotium, highlighted in this study, Bramante developed a form of caesaro-papal symbolism that could ensure a sustained dialogue between the histories of imperial and papal Rome. This was implemented through a narrative reading of topography, the symbolism of which served as a “measure” of human piety against the iniquities of historical triumphalism. Both the events of the past (embodied in Caesar’s triumphs and Peter’s martyrdom and burial) and those of the present (exemplified in Julius II’s triumphal entry into Rome on Palm Sunday in 1508 and the building of the new St. Peter’s Basilica) form part of a larger redemptive history. We should recognize, however, the problematic nature of this analogy given the associations of tyranny, assassination, and pagan divinity that are synonymous with Caesar’s rule. This is particularly important given the distaste with which such strategies were received by some members of Julius II’s cardinalate, such as Giles of Viterbo.

Given the political risks involved in such an enterprise, it would seem that the rewards were sufficiently high to justify Bramante’s excursion into historical comparison and emulation. The title Pontifex Maximus is particularly instructive in this regard, since it reveals the idea of the pope not just as a literal bridge builder, but also as himself a metaphoric bridge that spans humanity and divinity, and the traditions of classical antiquity and Christianity. In such a relationship, state and church, Caesar and St. Peter, are brought into a sustained and meaningful dialogue.
Julius II as Second Caesar

NOTES

1. For a brief examination of this epigram, see Salerno et al. (1973), 67.
2. The Latin epigram is as follows:

JULIO.II PONT:OPT:MAX:QUOD FINIB:DITIONIS:SRE.
PROLATIS ITALIQ:/ LIBERATA URBEM ROMAM OCCUPATE
/SIMILIOREM QUAM DEVISE PATEFACTIS/ DIMENSISQ:
:VIIS PRO MAESTATE/ IMPERII ORNAVIT/ DOMINICUS
MAXIMUS/AEDILES, F.C.MDII / HIERONIMOUS PICUS

See Forcella (1869), 88.
3. In translation Livy’s text reads: “so that the appearance of the city was of one where the ground had been occupied rather than properly divided up.” This suggests building by individuals on land that has simply been appropriated (occupied) after the destruction of the city, rather than properly divided up and assigned to specific builders as one would expect in a properly planned city. I am grateful to Professor Robert Maltby of Leeds University for this translation and interpretation.
4. See, for example, Appendix II in Martin (1992), 297–308, for a translation of a sermon delivered in Santa Maria del Popolo in 1512 in the company of Julius II and Emperor Maximilian. For the original Latin text see O’Reilly (1972).
7. For a detailed account of this, see Shaw (1996), 209–315.
8. MS Vat. Lat. 1682, fol. 190v, 192r; Albertini (1866), fols. Biv, 68r; Signorelli (1938), 320 n. 7 and 337. Also O’Malley (1967), 538.
10. For a summary of these ancient sources, see Coarelli (1968).
11. These concern Caesar’s Gallic, Egyptian, Pontic, African, and Spanish campaigns.
13. ManfredoTafuri asserts that Julius II sought to extend the field of influence of the Leonine city to the east bank of the Tiber River, in an area that was crucially important to the commercial and financial activities of the city. See Salerno et al. (1973), 71. Luigi Spezzaferro even suggests a form of papal “corporatism” in this venture, by which the Vatican becomes the law enforcer, financier, and administrative body of Rome. See Salerno et al. (1973), 48.
Nicholas Temple

16 Stinger (1985), 58.
17 Viterbo (1498), fol. 182v; O’Malley (1969), 290.
18 Coarelli (1968). Sixteenth-century reconstructions of the ponte triumphale often incorporated the porta triumphalis in some way. This usually entailed the addition of monumental gateways at either end of the bridge in the tradition of Roman triumphal bridges, as we see for example in Pirro Ligorio’s 1561 version.
19 D’Onofrio (1978), 48. His date for the bridge’s destruction contradicts Mulvius’ assertion that some sort of bridge crossing was in existence between the fall of Veii in 396 BCE and 220 CE. See Holland (1961), 289.
20 These are remnants of a reconstruction of the older archaic bridge under the emperor Nero, hence the alternative name for the bridge, “pons Neronianus.”
21 Albertini (1510).
22 This idea derives from St. Augustine’s notion of Christian Rome as the redeemed city. See St. Augustine (1986).
23 According to Varro, trofeo signifies the flight of the enemy, which suggests the site of a military victory. In an early Christian polemic, the Roman presbyter Gaius (Cajo) states: “Ma io posso mostrare i trofei degli apostolici. Se infatti vorrai uscire il Vaticano o sulla via di Ostia, troverai i trofei di coloro che fondarono questa Chiesa.” See Guarducci (1984), 136.
24 Tropaeae were typically in the form of tumuli, circular mounds in the tradition of Etruscan burial chambers. They were also built as “heroon,” circular temples set on raised square or circular plinths.
26 The Pons Aelius (Ponte Sant’Angelo), which was the bridge that crossed to the Borgo and Vatican in the Middle Ages, was built during the period of Hadrian after St. Peter’s martyrdom. The only other bridge that gave access to the Vatican during the period of St. Peter was the Pons Agrippae (later reconstructed in the fifteenth century). This, however, was located some distance from the Mons Vaticanus, at the southern termination of via Septimiana (later via della Lungara).
27 Shaw (1996), 11.
28 Ibid., 189–90.
29 Ackerman (1954).
30 The reverse of the medal shows a bird’s-eye view of the completed Cortile del Belvedere.
31 For a discussion of the Stanza see especially Shearman (1971).
32 Kantorowicz (1957); Davis (1957).
33 Bellio (1903), 499–503.
34 For Empedocles’ theory of vision, see Park (1997), 35.
Julius II as Second Caesar

35 Both active and contemplative aspects underlie Renaissance views of order. See Coffin (1989), 9–16.
37 See John Osborne, chapter 6 in this volume.
38 Viterbo, Bibl. Ang. MS Lat. 502, fol. 194r.
40 Frommel (1994), 401.
42 Borsi (1989), 283.
43 As both Augustinian friar and Neoplatonist, Giles of Viterbo exemplifies the breadth of Renaissance ideas. Yet when comparing his pope, Julius II, with Caesar, the latter was always portrayed as a lesser figure, indeed as a corrupt forebear to papal rule. This is demonstrated in a sermon delivered to Julius II and his court in 1507, following the expedition to the Orient under the auspices of the Portuguese king Manuel I. In this sermon Giles proclaims that Caesar would never have contemplated achieving such a vast empire as that of Christianity under Julius II, whose expansion was brought about not principally through conquest, but rather by faith and peaceful conversion. See Martin (1992), 222–84.
Part IV
Statecraft and Nationalism
Imitation Gone Wrong:  
The “Pestilentially Ambitious”  
Figure of Julius Caesar in Michel de Montaigne’s Essais  

Louisa Mackenzie

This chapter considers Julius Caesar as presented by Michel de Montaigne, one of the great thinkers of late sixteenth-century France. Montaigne’s Essais (1580–95), long considered a monument to the skeptical tradition, are haunted by the horrors of the civil wars through which he lived (the French Wars of Religion), and images of violence and the state sundered. Caesar, himself an agent of civil war, not surprisingly appears in the Essais as a polymorphous figure. He is admirable as a military tactician and literary example, execrable as a man and political leader: exemplar and anti-exemplar. Montaigne’s treatment of Caesar has much to teach the reader, not only about the suspicious processes of mythologization of an individual – particularly one whose fame is based on violent acts – but also about political fears particular to sixteenth-century France, itself ravaged by civil war. What happens, Montaigne asks, if contemporary political leaders adopt Caesar as their role model? The answer is unequivocally pessimistic.

Renaissance Reception of Caesar

Julius Caesar was one of the most widely read and appreciated Roman writers throughout the Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century in continental Europe. The de bello Gallico seems to have circulated widely before the sixteenth century, with the popularity of the de bello civili
taking off thereafter. The circulation of Caesar’s commentaries was always significant, but reached its apogee in the second half of the sixteenth century: among the seventeen classical histories surveyed by Peter Burke, the *commentarii* were the most widely printed from 1550 to 1600 in most of Europe (from 1500 to 1549, Caesar was in third place). The interest in Caesar was particularly marked in France, French being the top vernacular language into which his Latin was translated (twenty-seven separate translations, a figure second only to German translations of Livy in the same period, with Italian a close second at twenty-six). Perhaps France’s own civil wars explain the surge of interest in Caesar from 1550, as well as the increased tendency to publish the *de bello civili* with the *de bello Gallico*, but even before the French religious wars, most of the scriptoria for Caesar’s manuscripts were in France, and about half of the manuscripts used today were copied by French scribes.

Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, Caesar was also a popular exemplar of military and political might. Early ideologies of the Holy Roman Empire were suffused with the figure of Caesar as just conqueror, as were popular literary traditions. Such images continued into the sixteenth century, with Caesar figuring large in the iconography of royal entries in both Italy and France. And Caesar’s status as a military tactician and leader was undisputed: Montaigne calls him the “breviary” of every warrior (see below, 135–6), and Machiavelli cites him no fewer than seventeen times in his *Art of War*.

There is, however, a dark underside to Julius Caesar which is exploited and exposed by many early humanists, and this split vision of the man comes to dominate late sixteenth-century political thought. Already in the fourteenth century Petrarch presents a Caesar transgressive both as an ideal and as a scandal, and with the Italian civic humanists of the fifteenth century, the figuration of Caesar becomes increasingly problematic. He is seen as a pivotal point between the greatness and the decline of Rome, between democracy and tyranny. This anxious reading of Caesar was directly linked to the development of the Italian city-states, vulnerable as they were to losing their liberty and being swallowed up by the rule of tyrants. Cicero and Cato, who had previously been seen more as Stoic sages, were now hailed as models of civic virtue who had seen the threat posed to liberty by the first despot, Caesar. Guicciardini, an Italian historian praised by Montaigne for his objective treatment of historical data, does not hesitate to call Caesar detestable and monstrous. Even Machiavelli called him “Rome’s first tyrant,” warning his readers not to
be deceived by Caesar’s reputation. This view of Caesar as tyrant started to influence French political thought, but with a singular insistence on the role played by ambition.

Throughout the fifteenth century in France there were multiple translations of Caesar’s commentaries. Jean du Chesne in 1473 translated the entire corpus into French, but embellished freely with biographical details from Suetonius and others in such a way as to depict Caesar as a great general led astray by overweening ambition. This generally sympathetic recreation of the person of Caesar as a great man with one fatal flaw characterizes many early and mid-sixteenth-century readings of Caesar. In the theatre, Caesar’s spectacular rise and fall made of him an ideal tragic hero, an essentially good man marred by one tragic flaw, his ambition. One of the first tragedies in the French language was Marc-Antoine de Muret’s school drama, *Julius Caesar*, written for performance at the Collège de Guyenne around 1544, followed by his pupil Jacques Grevin’s adaptation (ca. 1561). Caesar in these plays seems almost “tired of life,” as if the writers were expressing a fatigue with the endless transmutations of their subject in public debate. No writer, however, offered a simple judgment on Julius Caesar: Muret’s Caesar himself is both “tyrant and Stoic hero.” In other words, to deal with Caesar was to deal with a problem.

The Renaissance problem of Caesar, as with other ancient figures, was one of imitation and exemplarity, or how to apply the lessons of both his writing and his actions in literary and civic life. During the French sixteenth century, ancient texts were being translated or transcribed, or even discovered, for the first time. There was a corresponding anxiety among scholars about how to weigh themselves against the examples of the ancients, seen, for example, in the much-used poetic topos of the French voyage to Rome, figured as an encounter between present and past. The present, in late sixteenth-century France, was the reality of civil religious war (1562–94), Protestants and Catholics massacring one another in the name of one God, and factions seeking personal political gain from the civil strife. The question of self-interested ambition in the political sphere thus posed itself in a particularly violent way. For Renaissance historians, concerned with reading ancient history in such a way as to make it profitable in the present, the example of Caesar became particularly heavily weighted. In other words, the French Wars of Religion profoundly marked ways in which exemplarity was thought about, and it arguably became impossible to present ambitious, successful, and
violent leaders simply as tragic heroes. Nor was it possible not to reflect on the parallelisms between Caesar’s civil war and France’s own. Too much was at stake.  

Montaigne’s Uses and Abuses of Caesar

Michel de Montaigne draws heavily on classical literature and history in his *Essais* (1580–95), and he offers a particularly interesting reading of the writings and the person of Caesar. The two – Caesar as author and Caesar as historical agent – are often distinguished in Montaigne, who tells us in the chapter “Of Books” that he “sometimes consider[s] him in himself by his *actions* and the miracle of his greatness, and at other times consider[s] the purity and inimitable polish of his *language*” (II: 10, 303, my italics). For the most part, Montaigne admires and praises Caesar’s text, while expressing a mixture of admiration and horror for his person. We shall deal with the two separately at first. However, there is at least one instance in the *Essais* where Montaigne’s doubts about Caesar the agent perturb his presentation of an episode in Caesar’s commentary on the Gallic Wars, and I shall also discuss this anxious reading.

We know that Montaigne had a Latin copy of Caesar’s *commentarii*. His annotations are dated from February 25 to July 21 of 1578. The first edition of the *Essais* appeared in 1580; thus many of the references to Caesar can be assumed to be based on a first-hand reading of the text itself, although there are instances where Montaigne appears to be relying on memory (a faculty in which he was famously deficient). Most of the annotations he wrote on his copy of Caesar found their way, fragmented, into the first edition (1580) of the *Essais*. Montaigne admires Caesar’s writing and language, praising it in the chapter “Of the Education of Children”:

> The speech I love is a simple, natural speech, the same on paper as in the mouth; a speech succulent and sinewy . . . each bit making a body in itself; not pedantic, not monkish, not lawyer-like, but rather soldierly, as Suetonius calls Julius Caesar’s speech. (I: 26, 127)

Montaigne’s preferred language, he claims, is the antithesis of Ciceronian rhetoric, which he describes as “ostentatious and wordy” (I: 39, 183), as display rather than action.
Despite his professed admiration for Caesar’s language, there are nevertheless surprisingly few instances where Montaigne quotes Caesar in the Latin. And where he does, the reader is, if anything, distanced from Caesar. One important citation is in his short chapter “Of a Saying of Caesar’s.” It is an unusual sentence from the *de bello civili* 2.4, in which Caesar allows himself a short aside on human nature while describing the tactical setup for the siege of Marseilles: “communi fit vitio naturae ut invisis, latitantibus atque incognitis rebus magis confidamus, vehementiusque exterreamur” [it happens by a common vice of nature that we trust more, and fear more violently, things to us unseen, hidden, and unknown] (I: 54, 225). Montaigne has appropriated this sentence (which becomes a *sententia* in the classical sense), divesting it of the context of war and using it as the conclusion for a general musing on the nature of human desire which seems to have little to do with the Caesarian context. The sentence appears right at the end of the chapter, inverting the usual Renaissance practice (as seen in Erasmus’ *Adages*) of starting by quoting a venerable ancient and then glossing him. This is, I think, a deliberately ahistorical use of Caesar; Montaigne seems to be defying the reader to find a logical connection. The source text is, after all, about a civil war: had Montaigne wanted to assimilate his France to Caesar’s Italy, he could easily have done so. Caesar’s *text*, then, is detachable from history; it can be appropriated by Montaigne’s playful practice of citation, dispersed into fragments, reappropriated or swallowed by a new text.\(^{25}\) Not so Caesar the man, who resists scattering and remains ominously whole, present, indigestible by Montaigne. This, with respect to Caesar, is perhaps a key to the distinction between textual imitation and political exemplarity. Texts can be assimilated and rid of the potential for harm, historical agents cannot.

It is Caesar the political agent rather than Caesar the writer who looms large in the *Essais*. Rather than citing Caesar’s Latin directly, Montaigne loosely paraphrases the *commentarii* and quotes Suetonius and Plutarch, engaging Caesar’s deeds over his words. In “A Consideration upon Cicero,” the chapter following his dismissal of Cicero’s wordiness, he writes: “If the deeds of Xenophon and Caesar had not far surpassed their eloquence, I do not believe they would ever have written them down. They sought to recommend not their sayings but their deeds” (I: 40, 183). This insistence on action places Caesar on an axis of exemplars who shaped military and political history, including Xenophon, Alexander, and Epaminondas. Caesar, in “Observations on Julius Caesar’s Methods
of Making War,” is the apogee of military brilliance: “he should be the breviary of every warrior, as being the true and sovereign model of the military art” (II: 34, 556). Yet along the axis of exemplars are subtle distinctions often not in Caesar’s favor. Alexander, whose cruel treatment of Betis at Gaza and the slaughter of the six thousand vanquished soldiers of Thebes memorably ends the very first of the Essais,26 is often paired with Caesar as a “miracle of military art” while he is also criticized for his unstable temper (II: 1, 243). Yet Montaigne ultimately prefers his example over Caesar’s. Alexander is mentioned as one of three of “the most outstanding men” (II: 36, 569) in the chapter of that title, whereas Caesar does not make the grade. Why? Caesar was too ambitious:

I have been right to prefer him [Alexander] even to Caesar . . . But even if Caesar’s ambition had more moderation in itself, it is so unfortunate in having for its abominable object the ruin of his country and the general detriment of the world, that all things put together and placed in the balance, I cannot help inclining to the side of Alexander. (572)

To both Caesar and Alexander, of course, he prefers Epaminondas, not for reasons of military strategy but simply because his person was less vain, less prone to violent outbursts, more restrained.27

Caesar may be read, but his actions should not be imitated, Montaigne seems to suggest. Yet there is at least one direct reference to the commentarii that twists Caesar’s text in order to address concerns about power and the state in sixteenth-century France. It is, interestingly, in the chapter on eating humans (“Of Cannibals”)28 that Caesar’s text appears “indigestible.” Caesar is not cited directly, but rather paraphrased in a way which I believe to be deliberately misleading, creating an uncomfortable fold in the text. The episode is the supposed cannibalism of the Gauls besieged in Alesia by the Romans under Caesar. Montaigne paraphrases the words of a Gaul in Caesar’s de bello Gallico thus: “[O]ur ancestors, when besieged by Caesar in the city of Alesia, resolved to relieve their famine by eating old men, women, and other people useless for fighting” (I: 31, 155).29 This troubling suggestion – that the French have been eating each other for centuries – is central to Montaigne’s critique of the violence of the French Wars of Religion (where antagonists on both sides were accused of devouring body parts). But Montaigne remains frustratingly coy; these few lines – followed by a short citation from Juvenal, not Caesar – are all he says on the subject. The reader is left with the distinct
impression that the Gauls did in fact resort to cannibalism. Yet Montaigne
does not expound on the details found in Caesar’s text, which reveal that
while the Gallic noble Critognatus did recommend following the exam-
ple of their ancestors who “eorum corporibus qui aetate ad bellum inutiles
uidebantur uitam tolerauerunt” [sustained life on the bodies of those
whose age showed them useless for war] (BG 7.77.492–3),30 the Gauls
ended up sending away, not eating, those who were “useless for war.”
This suggestion of documented Gaulish cannibalism has been taken
as a “misreading” of Caesar due to a memory lapse.31 However, since
Montaigne possessed a heavily annotated copy of the source text, it is
reasonable to assume that he was aware of the implications of his selective
reading.

We need to place this particular use of source material in the context
of what Montaigne is trying to do in this particular chapter. Here he is
ostensibly writing about the New World, and most of the chapter is a
report of what he has heard from a “reliable” source about the cannibal-
istic practices of the Brazilian tribes. But Montaigne throughout the Essais
is careful to relativize the information coming to France about the New
World by comparisons with barbarisms in France itself, and by the rec-
ognition that we are all formed by the culture we grow up in, rather than
by a morality founded on an objective sense of good and bad: “we have
no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the
opinions and customs of the country we live in” (I: 31, 152). Ultimately,
as David Quint has shown,32 the chapter is much more about violence
within France than it is a portrait of the Brazilians. The image of the
Gauls practicing cannibalism establishes a powerful parallel between the
so-called barbaric tribes of the New World and France itself.33 The paral-
lel operates not only between the Gauls and the tribes of the New World,
but also between the European explorers discovering and subjugating
a new world, and Caesar himself, discovering and conquering Gaul. It
is a troubling comparison to make, and comes back explicitly in a later
chapter on the New World, “Of Coaches.”

In this chapter, Montaigne seems to adopt the “ethnographic” voice of
Caesar describing the Gauls, as he himself describes the native Ameri-
cans. Other French writers in the sixteenth century had shown an interest
in Caesar’s observations on the ancient Gauls,34 and Montaigne shows
no small curiosity about the behavior of his ancestors as described by
Caesar (1: 49; 2: 8). However, what seems more interesting is what one
might term Montaigne’s displacement of Caesar’s ethnographic eye into
the current context of the discovery of the Americas. “Of Coaches” is a long and melancholic chapter behind which lurks the figure of Caesar. The first half treats the subject of prodigal spending on the part of public figures, citing many abuses of the emperors of Rome. Caesar, we know, was greatly in debt to Crassus, and was known for his lavish public games during his time as aedile. But it is the second part of the chapter which Caesar inhabits in a particularly uncomfortable way. “On Coaches” turns abruptly away from economic concerns toward the New World, of which Montaigne gloomily says: “I am very much afraid that we shall have greatly hastened the decline and ruin of this new world by our contagion” (III: 6, 693). Caesar is very much present.

The conqueror of Gaul who determined the course of French history has become France itself, now on the point of conquering and profoundly altering a whole other world. While Caesar gives the facts of what he has learned about Gaul in as objective a way as possible, Montaigne imagines the moment of first contact with the Americas from the presumed point of view of the tribespeople themselves. And in the middle of this long sentence appears Caesar, who would himself have been disturbed, Montaigne says, if he had been attacked by a sixteenth-century French army! This sentence is worth citing in its entirety:

For, as to those who subdued them, take but away the tricks and artifices they practiced to gull them, and the just astonishment it was to those nations, to see so sudden and unexpected an arrival of men with beards, differing in language, religion, shape, and countenance, from so remote a part of the world, and where they had never heard there was any habitation, mounted upon great unknown monsters, against those who had not only never seen a horse, but had never seen any other beast trained to carry a man or any other burden; shelled in a hard and shining skin, with a cutting and glittering weapon in his hand, against them, who, out of wonder at the brightness of a looking-glass or a knife, would exchange great treasures of gold and pearl; and who had neither knowledge nor the material with which to penetrate our steel: add to this the lightning and thunder of our cannons and harquebuses – capable of disturbing Caesar himself, if he had been surprised by them with as little experience and in his time – against people who were naked (except in some regions where the invention of some cotton fabric had reached them), without other arms at the most than bows, stones, sticks, and wooden bucklers; people taken by surprise, under color of friendship and good faith, by curiosity to see strange and unknown things: eliminate this disparity, I say, and you take from the conquerors the whole basis of so many victories. (III: 6, 694)
Right at the point of first contact between Europeans and the tribes of the New World appears Julius Caesar – hardly an innocent detail. Montaigne introduces Caesar into a context of relativity, or juxtaposition of different points of view, which is absent from the description of the Gauls that seems to lie at the heart of this chapter. There is here an almost apocalyptic sense of the irreparable loss of other cultures. Montaigne is in a sense rewriting Caesar’s text to add the point of view of the defeated, and grief for the loss of human life and culture. His anguished lament begs comparison with Caesar’s deadpan observation of the almost total annihilation of the Nervii at his hands: “Hoc proelio facto et prope ad internecionem gente ac homine Nerviorum redacto” [this battle being ended, and the nation and name of the Nervii being almost reduced to annihilation, BG 2.28.1].

Caesar in his writing does not stop to elaborate on the consequences of his actions. This is something that Montaigne does for him, invoking the cost in human lives and also in the stability of the Republic. There is an almost obsessive attention in Renaissance writing to body counts, which are documented in Caesar only to validate his victories. (In contrast, a French general, Monluc, who wrote his Commentaires on the civil wars in imitation of Caesar, was scrupulous in paying debts of homage to those who served or fell under his command.) Montaigne makes Caesar’s body count for him: “Ten thousand good comrades and many great captains died in his service, valiantly and courageously” (II: 16, 476). Caesar, the conqueror of France and one of the principal parties in the civil war, becomes France the conqueror of the New World, itself plunged into civil war. Ancient history and the present meet in a gloomy way, and the common factors Montaigne brings into play are human vices, which he is convinced have not changed. Caesar becomes a presage of two of the vices that make the conquest of the New World and France’s current civil war possible: financial greed and, most importantly, ambition for glory.

Ambition is the fault to which Montaigne comes back again and again in the Essais. This one flaw, given the context of a France torn apart by the maneuvers of powerful men using the guise of religion to further their own cause in the state, was enough to make Montaigne’s judgment on Caesar negative: “this most unjust and most iniquitous cause” (II: 33, 553). Montaigne subscribes to a long tradition of political thought which sets personal gain against the greater good of the commonwealth. Caesar’s pursuit of dignitas was interpreted by Theodore Beza, Castellio, Montaigne,
and many others, as overbearing self-interest imposed upon the whole of the Republic. Caesar’s political ambition had plunged the Republic into civil war: sixteenth-century France too was reeling from the civil wars, prolonged immeasurably by aristocratic factions fueled by similar ambition.

Montaigne makes the comparison explicit in one of his most important chapters on Caesar, the so-called “Story of Spurina”: “it is no wonder if, in the civil wars by which we are afflicted, those who, like him, are combatting the ancient order of their country, do not imitate his example” (II: 33, 553). This is an important chapter, and Caesar is the most significant presence in it. Caesar somehow manages to derail Montaigne’s own writing – firstly, by usurping the purported subject of the chapter, a man called Spurina (the subject of an anecdote in Valerius Maximus). Caesar is mentioned long before Spurina himself, and manages to hold Montaigne’s attention for most of the length of the chapter. Caesar is introduced first of all as a man of great sexual appetite, and Montaigne proceeds to give a long list of Caesar’s lovers. But even this line of thinking is disrupted when Montaigne starts to think about Caesar’s ambition.

I have reason, it seems to me, to take him for a man extremely addicted to this form of debauch and of a very amorous constitution. But the other passion of ambition, with which he was also infinitely smitten, coming into conflict with this one, promptly made it give way . . . His pleasures never made him steal a single minute of time, or turn aside one step, from the occasions that presented themselves for his aggrandizement. This passion of ambition ruled all the others so sovereignly in him and possessed his soul with such full authority that it carried him away where it willed. Indeed it vexes me when I consider the greatness of this person in all other respects and the marvelous qualities that were in him: so much ability in every kind of learning . . . so vigilant, so active . . . The examples of his mildness and clemency toward those who had done him harm are infinite. (II: 33, 551–3)

The ambition of this otherwise great man troubles Montaigne to the point of disrupting his writing on more than one occasion. In his chapter “On Books,” Montaigne writes of the value of reading ancient authors. The paragraph on Caesar starts off with the Renaissance commonplace of the exemplum: “Caesar singularly deserves to be studied, not only for the knowledge of history, but for himself, so much perfection and excellence he has” (II: 10, 303). But, as so often in Montaigne, the paragraph
develops in an unpredictable way and as reader of Caesar’s works he is finally unable to accept that the man is a good example:

Except for the false colors with which he tries to cover his evil cause and the filthiness of his pestilential ambition, I think the only fault that can be found in him is that he has been too sparing in speaking of himself. (II: 10, 303)

The “false colors” are the disguising of personal ambition as a public good. Caesar’s strategy of self-presentation is at issue, his use of words such as “dignitas,” or “rei publicae causae” by which he sets up a close equivalence, in his commentarii, between his actions and the good of the state. His only wish, he writes in the de bello civili, is that “res ad otium deduci posset” [a peaceable conclusion might be reached, BC 1.5.10–11].

His stated cause is peace; he desperately wants to bring Pompey to the conference table to settle disputes, and has always put the Republic ahead of private want. Not so, says Montaigne:

Whoever with such hunger sought security and repose as Alexander and Caesar sought unrest and difficulties? (I: 14, 42)

Caesar’s ambition . . . is so unfortunate in having for its abominable object the ruin of his country and the general detriment of the world. (II: 33, 553)

Caesar’s “pestilential ambition” was put in the service of a glory the very notion of which was extremely problematic during the Renaissance. Most writers questioned the motives behind the quest for eternal fame. Montaigne is clear on this point. Glory gained in war is no virtue, virtue is a private quality: “[t]he worth and valor of a man is in his heart and his will, therein lies his real honor” (I: 27, 132). We must go to war only “out of duty,” he writes in his chapter “Of Glory,” and expect only this reward, “the contentment that a well-regulated conscience receives in itself from well-doing” (II: 16, 472). This distinction between public and private virtue underscores the whole chapter. Quoting 2 Corinthians, Montaigne states: “‘Our glory is the testimony of our conscience.’ Whoever is a good man only because people will know it . . . that man is not one from whom one can derive much service” (II: 16, 472). Public glory is a capricious creature, built up by the accidents and subjectivities of history. Caesar owes his glory, in the end, less to his merit than to the caprices of fortune, which had put him at the head of an army: “To what
but to fortune do Caesar and Alexander owe the infinite greatness of their renown?” (II: 16, 471).

A public virtue put in the service of personal ambition is, for Montaigne, problematic at best. Montaigne seeks to counter Caesarian virtue with other, less dangerous paradigms, using other ancient interlocutors such as Sallust and Plutarch, who also articulate deep misgivings about Caesar. One notion of virtue can be found in the gesture of retreat from public affairs, where one is less sullied by the business of politics as usual, and whence one can serve the state in other valuable ways. Sallust, writing in the troubled times after the assassination of Caesar, presents and justifies his retreat from politics: “Nam pro pudore, pro abstinentia, pro virtute audacia, largitio, avaritia vigebant . . . mihi reliquam aetatem a re publica procul habendam decrevi” [For instead of modesty, incorruptibility and honesty, shamelessness, bribery, and rapacity held sway . . . I had determined that I must pass what was left of my life aloof from public affairs, Catiline 3.3–4.1]. A very similar statement of retreat is found in the beginning of his Jugurtha (4.3). Noting that “omnis cura rerum publicarum minime mihi hac tempestate cupiunda videntur, quoniam neque virtuti honos datur” [all public offices are least desirable in these times, since honor is not bestowed upon merit, Jugurtha 3.1], Sallust extols the merits of a different kind of public service: the recording of history (Catiline 3; Jugurtha 4). This kind of service is distinguished by its detachment from the fraught and corrupt domain of public action: Sallust insists on his freedom “a spe, metu, partibus rei publicae” [from hope, fear, and partisanship, Catiline 4.2].

Montaigne, in a similar gesture, makes a virtue out of retreat from the public domain. To the vagaries of a morally dubious public glory, he counters images of a private, well-regulated conscience. The very beginning of the Essais announces the work to be “a book of good faith, reader. It warns you from the start that in it I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private one. I have had no thought of serving either you or my own glory” (“To the Reader,” 2). The address to a readership, and publication itself, of course negate the claim to a purely private goal, a contradiction of which Montaigne is aware. What is at stake is not an absolute opposition between public and private, but rather the self-conscious attempt to reconcile the two in the public presentation of a privately moral conscience. Marc Blanchard has suggested that in this confluence of public and private, Julius Caesar functions in the Essais as a touchstone for Montaigne’s science of self-presentation.
according to Blanchard, understood how to make public capital out of (images of) private virtue, a process analogous to Montaigne’s project. Both men thus consciously put into circulation images of their private selves. This reading is original and useful, although it tends to elide the moral distance that Montaigne seeks to take from Caesar. I suggest instead that Montaigne performs his private self publicly in such a way as not to follow Caesar’s example. Cato might be a more appropriate touchstone than Caesar.

Cato exemplifies another kind of virtue in the *Essais* and in Latin sources. He emerges as a kind of anti-Caesar, an example of the kind of statesmanlike comportment that would be most likely to defeat Caesarian ambition. Sallust, who has implicitly contrasted the virtue of the statesman and soldier (e.g., Caesar) with that of the historian (e.g., Sallust), holds up Cato as an explicit possible contrast to Caesar. Cato and Caesar are “ingenti virtute, divorsis moribus . . . viri duo” [two men of towering merit, though of diverse character, 53.6.110–11]. Cato is praised for the uprightness of his life, his austerity, immunity to bribes, and his good works. Most importantly, “esse quam videri bonus malebat” [he preferred to be, rather than to seem, virtuous, 54.6.112–13]. Cato, in Montaigne, is praised as a man who put public interest over personal gain, who would “have preferred to perform a beautiful, noble, and just action with ignominy than for the sake of glory” (I: 37, 171).

One of the broader stakes in Caesar’s example is, of course, the fraught question of the applicability of any classical examples. Sixteenth-century humanist writers, while imbued in classical culture to the point of being arguably culturally bilingual, were nevertheless increasingly conscious of the historical distance separating them from ancient Greece and Italy. One of the undeniable uses for Montaigne of other Latin writers is as sources of information better to judge illustrious or infamous ancient examples. In the case of Caesar, Montaigne marshals a veritable army of Latin and Greek interlocutors. I have already mentioned Sallust’s contrast of Cato with Caesar; Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars* looms large, and Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar* also lies behind many of the descriptions of Caesar’s person, including the purchase of power and debt to Crassus (*Caesar* 4–7, 11) and his report, in *Caesar* 4, of Cicero’s misgivings about Caesar’s ambitions for absolute power. Montaigne shares a great deal of his sources’ admiration for the man, too. Plutarch greatly admired many of Caesar’s characteristics, and his *Life* has been taken as a lesson that “pride will lead to a fall.” This lesson is intensified in Montaigne, where
pride leads to the fall not just of a great individual, but of the state. The widely divergent characteristics ascribed to Caesar become not just a problem of biography, of history, or of individual tragedy, but of critical relevance to the ways in which history teaches.

In his influential study of political exemplarity (or the production of political effects through textual exemplarity) in the European Renaissance, Timothy Hampton argues that Montaigne’s presentation of Cato is a self-conscious attempt to preserve the possibility of a myth of a historical hero. Through Cato, Hampton suggests, Montaigne tries to find a way in which history can be exemplary across and despite inevitable historical distance. ⁴⁰ Caesar is opposed to Cato (and Socrates) not only through his vain manipulation of his public image that contrasts with the latter’s selfless construction of public personae, ⁴¹ but also, I would argue, through his relationship to history. If, as Hampton suggests, Caesar is symptomatic of the collapse of humanist exemplarity, it is due not so much to historical distance as to an uncomfortable continuity. The problem with Caesar is not that his example is inapplicable, but that it is too pertinent to the present; he inhabits the French crisis of exemplarity as a powerful anti-exemplar.

Conclusion

Montaigne uses Caesar in a way quite different to that in which he uses most of his Latin sources. He rarely employs actual text from the commentarii, and even then he does so in a way which empties the source text of its original context to employ it in a chapter which itself has little or no relation to Caesar’s own observation. If he refers to events from Caesar’s commentaries, he does so in a way which reveals the dangerous uses to which the texts might be put. Otherwise, he reads Caesar as a man of action, the general who conquered what was now Montaigne’s own country, and who hastened the decline of the Republic in the name of ambition. He praises Caesar in many respects: as “true and sovereign model of the military art,” endowed with “gracious severity” (95) and the gift of leadership. Yet Montaigne shows that if sixteenth-century French readers follow Caesar’s example and pose as saviors of the country while actually undoing it by their ambition, they will, as Caesar, hasten its decline. It is not only France which is endangered; the same ambition is also hastening the decline and elimination of indigenous
populations on the other side of the world. Caesar should not be imitated, not because he is inimitable but because he is dangerous. With powerful aristocratic factions laying France to waste, the ascendancy of the French monarchy culminating only decades later in Louis XIV, the draining of public coffers by war, and the decimation of native populations overseas, it is not surprising that Montaigne’s last word on Caesar shows absolute horror for his ambition (and I leave the last word to him and his “Story of Spurina”):

But all these fine tendencies were spoiled and stifled by the furious passion of ambition . . . Of a liberal man it made a public robber, to provide for his profusion and largesse . . . It intoxicated him with a vanity so extreme . . . to sum up, this single vice, in my opinion, ruined in him the finest and richest nature that ever was, and has made his memory abominable to all good men, because he willed to seek his glory in the ruin of the country and the subversion of the most powerful and flourishing republic that the world will ever see. (II: 33, 554)

NOTES

1 Burke (1966), 137.
2 Ibid., 139.
3 Brown (1972), 14, 65.
4 Jacquiot (1985), 139–43.
5 Baillet (1985), 67.
6 See McGowan (2001), 283–306 for one of the best recent studies of the complex and contradictory ways in which Caesar was figured in late sixteenth-century France.
7 Blanc (1985).
8 For these details and for the rest of this paragraph, I am indebted to Skinner (1978), vol. 1, 161–2.
9 Baillet (1985), 69 shows that Machiavelli was aware that Caesar was a dangerous political model to use, limiting his exemplary status to the realm of military strategy. Admiring references are much more abundant in his Art of War than in any political writings.
11 Gundolf (1928), 203, although Gundolf does qualify this by noting that the attempt at interiorizing Caesar “remains a learned quotation, never rising to real gesture or effect.”
Louisa Mackenzie

12 Bloemendal (2001). This article is particularly useful on Muret’s use of source material.

13 Classic studies of the European Renaissance’s relationship to the past include Greene (1982) on imitation and Hampton (1990) on exemplarity.

14 See Brown (1972) for a full history of the transmission of the *de bello civili*.

15 I am here avoiding any conflation of “Caesar” with “Rome”; however, McGowan (2001), 285–306 brings the two together well, offering a nuanced reading of Caesar in Montaigne and other writers as part of a broader history of the mechanisms of transmission of images of Rome in late Renaissance France.

16 See Holt (1995) for a good recent study that seeks to take religion seriously as a motivating cause for violence. An indispensable reference work is Jouanna et al. (1998).


18 Editions of the *Essais* are based on the 1595 “Bordeaux Copy.” The first two books were published in 1580, a three-book edition with additions to the first two in 1588, and the 1595 edition contains yet more additions. These three strata are often referred to as the a-, b-, and c-texts, respectively.

19 See Chevallier (1985) for a thorough survey, usefully divided by theme, of Montaigne’s references to Caesar.

20 But see Lestringant (1985) for an argument proposing that the conflation of writing and action in Caesar is what “delights” Montaigne.

21 All English citations from Montaigne’s *Essais*, and page numbers, are taken from the authoritative English translation by Donald Frame (1965). I have occasionally modified the translation slightly.


23 See Villey (1908), vol. 1, 91–2 for a transcription of these annotations.

24 See Green (1975) for Cicero in Montaigne. See also Smith (2001) for Plutarch as the model of anti-rhetorical writing in Montaigne; and for diverse studies on rhetoric in Montaigne, see the collected essays edited by O’Brien et al. (1995).

25 See Compagnon (1979) for a study of Montaigne’s citation practices.

26 Montaigne refers to Quintus Curtius, who recounts that Alexander, after taking the city of Gaza, came upon their leader Betis still fighting in defeat. He refused to grant him an honorable soldier’s death, but rather had him
dragged alive behind a cart. The slaughter at Thebes is from Diodorus of Sicily: Alexander went through the captured city of Thebes slaughtering 6,000 soldiers left alive, unmoved by their valiant attempts to keep fighting.

27 See Bonadeo (1985) for a discussion of this trio in Montaigne.

28 Literature on this chapter is abundant: one of the best recent studies for our purposes here is Quint (1998), 75–101. Quint convincingly debunks the myth of Montaigne the sympathetic anthropologist, showing that “Of Cannibals” is much more a reflection on the generality of violence in his own France.

29 The relevant chapters in the Gallico are 7.77–8.

30 Translations and page references to the de bello Gallico are from the Loeb edition, translated by H. J. Edwards (1917).

31 Chevallier (1985), 92.


33 The image of France reduced to cannibalism was one frequently used by writers struggling to express the horrors of the religious wars; such images abound in Agrippa D’Aubigné’s Les Tragiques (1616).

34 Petrus Ramus had relied heavily on Caesar for his Liber de moribus veterum Gallorum (1559).

35 Translations and page numbers for the de bello civile are taken from the Loeb edition, translation by A. G. Peskett (1914).

36 See Desan (1992) for a study of economic imagery in Montaigne as a self-conscious “commerce” or exchange between writer and reader.


38 See Gray (1991) for a study of Montaigne’s Latin–French bilingualism, and Coleman (1979) who seeks to incorporate cultural bilingualism as a principle into her study of sixteenth-century French poets and Montaigne.

39 Bloemendal (2001), 309. I would like to thank Christopher Pelling for bringing a number of passages from Plutarch and Sallust to my attention.

40 Hampton (1990), 181–8.

41 Ibid., 173.
In early May of 1778, Philadelphia had been lost to the British. A long and difficult winter had exhausted the troops. The beleaguered general George Washington requested a performance of Joseph Addison’s play *Cato*, at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.¹ The situation was dire, the physical discomforts overwhelming. Washington trusted to the performance to inspire the dispirited soldiers with the shining example of Cato the Younger’s clarion call to fight to the death for liberty:

So shall we gain still one day’s liberty;  
And let me perish, but in Cato’s judgment,  
A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty,  
Is worth a whole eternity in bondage.  

*(Cato 2.1)*

Washington was not relying on novelty to invigorate his men. *Cato* was first performed in America in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1735; by the middle of the eighteenth century it was the most popular play in America.² Addison’s tragedy relied on Plutarch’s lives of Cato the Younger and Julius Caesar, texts well known in the American colonies. The play ends with Cato’s suicide following Caesar’s occupation of Utica:

When liberty is gone,  
Life grows insipid, and has lost its relish.  
O could my dying hand but lodge a sword  
In Caesar’s bosom, and revenge my country,
By heavens I could enjoy the pangs of death,  
And smile in agony.

(Cato 2.3)

The popularity of this play, and its performance at a critical moment in Washington’s career, can tell us something about how the Americans of the revolutionary period defined themselves in terms of not only the Britons of the present, but the Romans of the past.

The exemplary qualities of the tragedy are clear: it stars Cato, the charismatic Stoic who, almost from his death, was the very model of a patriotic hero. Cato embodied the qualities most admired in eighteenth-century America: moral virtue, unselfish patriotism, and courage. Julius Caesar stood for their opposites: unchecked ambition and tyrannical oppression. “Dost thou love watchings, abstinence, and toil, Laborious virtues all? Learn them from Cato; Success and fortune must thou learn from Caesar” (Cato 2.2). Caesar was emblematic of tyranny, and resistance against tyranny, the central theme of Addison’s play, resonated in eighteenth-century America.

In the political rhetoric of Revolutionary America, those whom we now call the Founding Fathers passionately identified with those who vainly fought against Caesar’s rise to power. For men steeped in the classics and Enlightenment views of the cyclical nature of history, their own times seemed to recapitulate the last days of the Roman Republic. At the time of the American Revolution, Caesar was popularly believed to have brought down the Roman Republic. In 1764, James Otis called Caesar “the destroyer of Roman glory and grandeur, at a time when but for him and his adherents both might have been rendered immortal.” Brutus, Cassius, Cato, and Cicero were heroes invoked by the colonists in their own struggle against the British monarchy. The Roman liberators’ struggle against Caesar was made analogous to the colonists’ struggle against the British crown, a struggle in which England was often referred to as “Caesar” by the colonists. In Patrick Henry’s Stamp Act Speech of 1765, he compared George III with Caesar, declaring: “Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George III [cries of ‘Treason!’] may profit by their example.” In 1771 John Adams compared Massachusetts’ new royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson, with Caesar: “Caesar, by destroying the Roman Republic, made himself a perpetual Dictator; Hutchinson, by countenancing and supporting a System of Corruption and Tyranny, has made himself Governor.” In the American
context, there was the possibility of victory where the Romans had failed. The new liberators could overthrow the “tyranny” of the British and establish an American Republic.4

The Founders embraced Enlightenment views of the inevitable historical cycle of the rise and fall of nations. John Adams believed that if America withdrew from Great Britain and established a republic, America, like Rome, could rise to glory and grandeur: “Immortal Rome was at first but an insignificant Village, inhabited only by a few abandoned Ruffians, but by beginnings it rose to a stupendous Height, and excell’d in Arts and Arms all nations that preceded it,” Adams wrote in 1775. The unvarying cycle of imperial rise and decline suggested that America was on the rise; Adams pointed out that “[I]f we look into History we shall find some nations rising from contemptible beginnings, and spreading their influence, ’till the whole Globe is subjected to their sway. When they reach’d the summit of Grandeur, some minute and unsuspected Cause commonly effects their Ruin, and the Empire of the world is transferred to some other place.” The idea that empire moved westward was a commonplace in European thought: empires had emerged first in the ancient Near East, then in Greece, then Rome, then France and Great Britain, and now, the Founding Fathers believed, in America. According to this view, the British Empire was in decline, undermined by wealth and decadence, but in America, as Adams put it, “it is the time of Ennius with us.”5 Furthermore, Enlightenment views on the rise and fall of empires suggested that a new American Republic could match and even surpass the glories of Rome while avoiding or at least delaying, for an indefinite period of time, its decline. This required the cultivation of virtue on the part of citizens. Civic virtue was the “moral cement” of republican society, and it was a commonplace that Greek and Roman republics had fallen when their citizens lost their sense of virtue.6

The cyclical theory of history and the necessity for the cultivation of civic virtue were deeply embedded in republican political philosophy and ideology. The “imagined affinity” between republican Rome and Revolutionary America and the emphasis on the classics in colonial education encouraged a cult of Roman antiquity, and the Founders looked for instructive exemplars of virtue and corruption in Roman authors.7 Livy wrote, in the preface to his history, that in history “you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid” (1.1).
John Adams gave his son, John Quincy, the same advice in a letter he wrote on May 18, 1781: “In company with Sallust, Cicero, Tacitus and Livy, you will learn Wisdom and Virtue. You will see them represented, with all the Charms which Language and Imagination can exhibit, and Vice and Folly painted in all their Deformity and Horror.”

Roman authors’ accounts of the expulsion of the Etruscan monarchy, the foundation of the Roman Republic, and Rome’s subsequent slide from republican virtues to a corrupting materialism and imperialism offered a series of exemplars to emulate or avoid. Eighteenth-century Americans, like their European counterparts, avidly scanned Plutarch, Sallust, and Livy for suitable – and unsuitable – models of behavior. Classical history offered a way to think about politics and morals – politics was understood and described as a struggle between virtue and corruption – and so the actions of ancient political and military figures were scrutinized as telling examples of how to behave in the public sphere.

John Adams admired the performative aspects of Cicero’s public career. Writing in 1774 about Cicero’s term as quaestor in Sicily he noted: “He did not receive this office as Persons do now a days, as a Gift, or a Farm, but as a public Trust, and considered it as a Theatre, in which the Eyes of the World were upon him.” Public service (both performance and civic virtue) was the glue that bound members of a republic together. It was imperative that it be carefully cultivated and displayed to preserve moral and political order. In 1803, Adams quoted Cicero’s exemplary views on the true public servant: “Such a man will devote himself entirely to the republic, nor will he covet power or riches . . . He will adhere closely to justice and equity, that, provided he can preserve these virtues, although he may give offence and create enemies by them he will set death itself at defiance, rather than abandon his principles.”

There was virtual unanimity among Revolutionary Americans that imitation of the Roman liberators would result in a virtuous and healthy polity, while following the example of Julius Caesar would corrupt the moral and political state of the young nation. “What is a Roman that is Caesar’s foe?” asks Decius in Addison’s play. “Greater than Caesar, he’s the friend of virtue,” Cato replies (2.2). The contrast between Cato and Caesar was paradigmatic: Cato stood for liberty, Caesar for overweening tyranny. To oppose Caesar was to be virtuous.

Asking that Addison’s Cato be performed for the troops at Valley Forge demonstrates George Washington’s genius for intuiting the needs of
his army. Far from being a cynical choice of popular entertainment to please the masses, *Cato* was one of George Washington’s favorite plays. Alexander Pope’s prologue to the play sums up the aim of the performance: “To make mankind in conscious virtue hold, Live o’er each scene, and be what they behold.” Americans in the Revolutionary era believed in the educative mission of the arts. As Diderot declared, “To make virtue attractive, vice odious, ridicule forceful: that is the aim of every honest man who takes up the pen, the brush or the chisel.”

The brush, the pen, the chisel . . . neoclassical aesthetic theory suggested that painters and sculptors could capture moral virtues on canvas or stone or metal. Exhibitions of paintings and statues and busts of eminent men in marble or bronze could inspire men to virtuous action. According to the theory of contagion, virtue or vice could be induced simply by being in the presence of an exemplary figure, or in contact with one through literary description or artistic representation. This helps us understand why Thomas Jefferson’s tea room in Monticello contained busts and twenty-eight portraits of exceptional men, and John Quincy Adams had six bronze busts of ancient exemplars which he called his “Household Gods.”

Oratory and theatrical productions presented didactic models of behavior for the public to emulate or avoid. In Addison’s play we see the process at work: for his Juba, the mere presence of Cato inspired virtuous behavior: “I’m charm’d whene’er thou talk’st. I pant for virtue! And all my soul endeavors at perfection” (2.4). Early American art and education aimed at nothing less than the (re)production of classical heroes. Like Cato’s sons, the American revolutionaries should “Copy out our father’s bright example” (1.1).

An epilogue written by Jonathan Sewall for a 1778 performance of Addison’s *Cato* at the Bow Street Theater in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, makes clear what was at stake in contemporary performances of the play:

In Caesar’s days had such a daring mind  
With Washington’s serenity been joined  
The tyrant then had bled, great Cato liv’d,  
Rise then, my countrymen! For fight prepare,  
Gird on your swords, and fearless rush to war!  
For your grieved country nobly dare to die,  
And empty all your veins for Liberty.  
No pent-up Utica contracts your pow’rs,  
But the whole boundless continent is yours!

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*Margaret Malamud*
Ancient exemplars helped men know how to live well and, even more important in this troubled time, how to die well. Nathan Hale, on his way to the gallows for espionage, recalled Addison: his “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country” is a paraphrase of Addison’s Cato saying, on receiving the dead body of his son: “What a pity is it / That we can die but once for our country” (4.4).16

Washington resigned his commission as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army after the peace treaty between Great Britain and the United States was signed in 1783 and returned to private life. This self-abnegating gesture was astonishing, but more astonishing, Washington repeated it. To the amazement of European contemporaries, Washington again did not hold on to power when he later became president. He stepped down from the presidency in 1796 after serving two terms. We can guess from his devotion to the model of the Roman hero Cato that George Washington’s choice to step down from power was based on his identification with the exemplary heroes of the Roman Republic. Self-perception and public perception, in this case, coincided: George Washington was eulogized as an American Cato and Cincinnatus. Washington embodied the Roman values admired in the early republic so well that he was often portrayed in Roman dress. Antonio Canova sculpted Washington in Roman military dress, his sword laid down to symbolize his relinquishment of power, his pen poised to write his Farewell Address on his departure from the presidency (figure 9.1). John Trumbull and Charles Willson Peale painted him as Cincinnatus (now lost), and Jean-Antoine Houdon sculpted him as a Roman soldier.17

Au contraire, on the other side of the Atlantic, Napoleon, the general turned imperial monarch, seemed more and more like Julius Caesar incarnate. By 1802 it had become clear that Napoleon intended to eliminate the newly created French Republic: he named himself First Consul for life, and in 1804, with the pope’s blessing, he crowned himself emperor. As emperor, his face and name adorned coins, engravings, paintings, and public monuments. For American observers, the failure of the French republican experiment and the slide into absolutism was disturbing but not surprising. The trajectory of the French Revolution was consistent with the classic cyclical pattern of excessive democracy leading to tyranny. It was the different outcome of the American Revolution that was the real surprise.18 In contrast to Washington’s abhorrence for Julius Caesar, Napoleon clearly admired him and admired his imperial successor, Caesar Augustus, even more. French artists active at the court in Paris
utilized references to both Roman rulers in art and iconography to illustrate and celebrate Napoleon’s move from victorious general and First Consul of the French Republic to Napoleon I, emperor of the French.\textsuperscript{19} In America, it was Washington’s avoidance of Caesarism that made his life an exemplary model for his immediate presidential successors and for generations of American citizens.\textsuperscript{20}
Manifest Destiny and the Eclipse of Julius Caesar

An American Caesar?

“Sir, . . . it is the reign of Caesar, and we are cowards, dastards, slaves, if we submit to this state of things.”

(Representative Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina in 1836 on the presidency of Andrew Jackson)

The republic of George Washington’s day lasted only a generation. The period between 1790 and 1840 was an age of great ferment in the United States. Vast new territories were added to the Union, including Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and Florida in 1819, transforming the United States into a transcontinental power. Economically and socially, the early republic encompassed what historians have come to call the “Market Revolution”: the transformation of the nation from an agrarian state with isolated pockets of commerce to a nation of new cities and ports, united by trade networks and tied together by roads and canals. Factories and mass production changed the work experiences of many Americans and the consumption experiences of many more. And most importantly in terms of the production of images about Julius Caesar, it saw the foundation of the first political parties, as the young nation struggled with the idea of a party system, redefining the polity as a democratic state and expanding suffrage to include white men without property.

As America rapidly expanded beyond her original territories, debates over the consequences of expansion and the transformation of the economy arose. Might the American nation be a beneficent one, rooted in the virtues and values of earlier republican times? Or – as Romans had asked about their own nascent empire – would wealth and expansion bring in their wake a damaging imperialism and political and moral corruption? Worrying that luxus, the deleterious effects of the rapid accumulation of wealth on morals, was insinuating itself into the new republic, John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1819: “Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice, and folly?” Senator John Taylor of Virginia warned his fellow citizens not to replicate the mistakes of the Roman Republic, noting in 1814 that

A gradual monopoly of lands and wealth overturned the Roman Republick . . . Just as Roman aristocrats had aggrandized themselves through warfare,
by monopolizing conquered territory, the English and American financial elites [have] sought to increase their own power through wars, by raising the national debt and profiting from the interest . . . The Roman aristocracy engaged the nation in war to aggrandize itself; but it entertained the people with shows, feasts, and triumphs and allowed them some small share of the booty.  

An enlightened aristocracy, inspired by civic virtue, would govern the democracy with the good of the collective in mind. So hoped the Founding Fathers. But sweeping changes from 1790 on undermined the social, political, and economic fabric of the republic of Washington’s time. Americans sought a greater share of the new economic wealth produced by the industrial revolution and the expansion of commerce, and demanded a more direct form of democracy. Resentment of the aristocratic establishment and the new mercantile monopolies grew increasingly more outspoken and strident as factions and divisions within the republic called for political egalitarianism. The election of the Tennessee general-turned-politician Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828 signaled a decisive shift in American politics from the aristocratic government of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the popular democracy of Jackson and his supporters.

Andrew Jackson defeated the incumbent president, John Quincy Adams. The differences between the two men were telling. Adams was the last in a line of classically educated gentlemen statesmen from the Revolutionary era and a member of a distinguished family: his father had been the vice-president (1789–97) and then president of the new republic (1797–1801). Adams viewed the great changes of the times through the lens of Roman history. Classical republican political philosophy and ideology suggested that the accumulation of excessive wealth opened the door to the dangers of *luxus*, the corruption of political process, and, ultimately, the rise of tyrants and demagogues. Upon his retirement, he read the complete works of Cicero, and worried about the state of the American Republic: “I watch with his sleepless nights. I hear his solitary sighs. I feel the agitation of his pulse, not for himself, but for his son, his Tullia, for his country.” Adams feared that he was witnessing a repetition of the last days of the Roman Republic.

Andrew Jackson, by contrast, was the son of Ulster immigrants, had grown up in the backwoods of Tennessee, and was virtually unschooled. He was a self-made man who acquired fame and popular adulation for
Manifest Destiny and the Eclipse of Julius Caesar

his skills as a general. Jackson was the “Hero of New Orleans,” the man who defeated the British in one of the most famous battles of the War of 1812 and the general who, in 1818, ruthlessly subdued the Seminole Indians, seized Spanish forts in Florida, and authorized the court-martial and execution of two British citizens who had aided the Indians. Such autocratic behavior won Jackson popularity in some circles but led Senator Henry Clay, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, to recommend the censure of Jackson, warning: “Remember that Greece had her Alexander, Rome had her Caesar, England her Cromwell, France her Bonaparte, and, that, if we were to escape the rock on which they split, we must avoid their errors.” Clay, who remained an outspoken critic of Jackson throughout his political career, saw Jackson’s conduct in Florida as analogous to that of Caesar in Gaul: “In the provinces were laid the abuses and the seeds of the ambitious projects which overturned the liberties of Rome.”

Just as Julius Caesar had done in his times, the passions Jackson aroused crystalized the concerns and anxieties of his age. He became, as Harry Watson has put it, the “symbolic leader of American political transformation.” The social, economic, and political cleavages and transformations that were dividing the new nation were expressed and condensed in the ardent debates about the merits and dangers of Jackson’s presidency (1829–37). To his opponents, he was a Caesar, an arrogant and imperious military hero-turned-demagogue who would lead the republic into tyranny and a damaging imperialism. To his supporters, he stood for the possibilities of transformation in America and the extension of democracy to (white) men oppressed by aristocratic and mercantile oligarchies. During Jackson’s presidency, analogies to Rome continued to be used but were employed with a new twist. To supporters of Andrew Jackson’s popular democracy, republican Rome now offered a negative model of aristocratic and oligarchic domination. In contrast to what happened in Napoleonic France, neither Jackson nor his supporters used Julius Caesar as a positive model. Instead they looked further back into Rome’s republican past and identified with early republican heroes who had resisted aristocratic oppression. Opponents of Jackson, fearing they were witnessing the rise of an American Caesar and the demise of their new republic, identified with the Roman liberators.

Jackson’s enemies joined forces in 1834 under the banner of the Whig Party (the name the Revolutionary patriots had adopted in opposing the British monarchy). Disliking the excesses of popular democracy, the
Whigs worried about the dangers of factionalism and tyranny. Philip Hone, a wealthy merchant and former mayor of New York, feared that if the Whigs didn’t prevail, “this noble country of ours will be subjected to all the horrors of civil war; our republican institutions, theoretically so beautiful but relying too much upon the virtue and intelligence of the people, will be broken into pieces, and a suffering and abused people will be compelled to submit to the degrading alternative of Jacobin misrule or the tyranny of a Caesar, a Cromwell, or a Bonaparte.” Appropriating the rhetoric of the last days of the Roman Republic, the Whigs portrayed themselves as the counterparts of the Roman senators who defended the republic and fought against Julius Caesar. Cato and Cicero may have lost to the tyranny of Caesar and the imperium of Augustus after him, but the American Whigs hoped to win their struggle against Jackson and popular democracy.

The dangers to liberty in the 1830s were not, as they were cast in the 1770s, from the British monarchy and empire, but from ambitious and ruthless men within the American Republic. Senator Clay had compared Jackson to Caesar years before he ran for president. Once president, Jackson did nothing to assuage Clay’s anxieties about his potential for Caesarism. “Caesar had ‘harangued’ the Senate, degraded its ‘dignity and authority,’ and appealed to the people against his senatorial adversaries; so had Jackson.” Jackson governed like an autocrat and used the presidential veto to override the wishes of Congress. Critics accused him of endangering liberty and he was shown in cartoons trampling the Constitution and wearing imperial regalia. For example, “King Andrew the First, Born to Command,” a lithograph of about 1834, represents him as a crowned tyrant trampling on the Constitution (figure 9.2). In 1831 Niles’ Register suggested that the “future battle cry of the anti-Jacksonians might well be the motto adopted by a Vermont newspaper: Not the glory of Caesar, but the welfare of Rome.”

Whig congressional rhetoric portrayed Jackson as Caesar incarnate. When Jackson attempted to break the Bank of the United States (and the power of its monopoly), he seized the deposits of the nation’s bank and put them in state banks, prompting outrage in Congress. In a dramatic speech given during the last days of 1833, Senator Henry Clay accused Jackson of endangering public liberty and establishing a tyranny. He compared Jackson’s dismissal of Secretary of the Treasury William J. Duane to Caesar’s seizure of the Roman treasury during his war with Pompey. Holding Plutarch in one hand and reciting his account of Caesar’s
Figure 9.2  “King Andrew the First, Born to Command.” Tennessee Historical Society Collections. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Society
actions, Clay explained the analogy to Jackson’s behavior and the dangers it presented to the nation:

We are, said he, in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly tending towards a total change of the pure republican character of the government, and to the concentration of all power in the hands of one man . . . The measure adopted by the President is without precedent. I beg pardon – there is one; but we must go down for it to the commencement of the Christian era. It will be recollected by those Who are conversant with Roman history, that, after Pompey was compelled to retire to Brundusium, Caesar, who had been anxious to give him battle, returned to Rome, “having reduced Italy,” says the venerable biographer, in sixty days – [the exact period between the removal of the deposits and that of the commencement of the present session of Congress, without the usual allowance of any days of grace] – in sixty days, without bloodshed.37

Senator John Calhoun, who had been Jackson’s first vice-president, agreed that Jackson had acted like Julius Caesar when the latter had invaded the public treasury on his way to destroying the Roman Republic and warned:

We are at the same stage of our political revolution, and the analogy between the two cases is complete, varied only by the character of the actors and the circumstances of the times . . . With men and money Caesar struck down Roman liberty, at the fatal battle of Pharsalia, never to rise again; from which disastrous hour all the powers of the Roman republic were consolidated in the person of Caesar, and perpetuated in his line. With money and corrupt partisans a great effort is now making to choke and stifle the voice of American liberty.38

Jackson defended himself against these and other senatorial condemnations.39 He protested that he was not moved by ambition like other conquerors and usurpers:

No; the ambition which leads me on, is . . . to persuade my countrymen, so far as I may, that it is not in a splendid government, supported by powerful monopolies and aristocratical establishments, that they will find happiness, or their liberties protected, but in a plain system, void of pomp – protecting all, and granting favors to none.40
In a letter to Andrew Jackson, Jr. in 1834, he asserted that: “It was a corrupt and venal senate that overturned the liberty of Rome before ever Cezar reached her gates.”41 Jackson had “little faith in the benefits of a ‘natural aristocracy’ . . . political equality in his mind was the cornerstone of the American Republic.”42 From the point of view of Jackson and his supporters, he represented the interests of the exploited citizenry and they laid the blame for the problems of the nation on the corruption and exploitative practices of America’s ruling classes. The greatest danger to liberty arose from moral turpitude: “It is from within, among yourselves – from cupidity, from corruption, from disappointed ambition and inordinate thirst for power – that factions will be formed and liberty endangered.” Moral decay could be prevented by trusting the majority of the people: “Never for a moment believe that the great body of the citizens . . . can deliberately intend to do wrong.”43

In January 1835, Richard Lawrence unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Jackson in the rotunda of the Capitol. Whig rhetoric comparing Jackson to Caesar was so heated that Francis P. Blair, editor of the Globe, suggested that Lawrence might have been influenced by the orators who “had depicted the President as a Caesar who ought to have a Brutus.”44 Even after he left office, his opponents continued to liken him to Caesar and his successors, the Roman emperors. The Panic of 1837 ushered in a depression, and Representative John Pendleton Kennedy of Maryland contrasted the prosperity of 1829 with the hard times of 1837. Jackson, he said, “reversing the boast of the Roman Emperor [Augustus], might have exclaimed, at his departure from the capital, ‘I have found Rome marble, and I have left it brick.’” Representative Henry A. Wise of Virginia parodied Antony’s funeral oration: “Truly, truly, it may be said, sir, that the evil which General Jackson did lives after him.”45 But in 1845 Jackson pointedly refused a sarcophagus of a Roman emperor for his remains because of its associations with kings and emperors.

Playing Roman Soldiers and Gladiators

Two of the most popular plays during Jackson’s presidency were set in ancient Rome: Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird’s The Gladiator (1831) and James Sheridan Knowles’ Virginius (1820), both of which starred the charismatic actor Edwin Forrest, icon of working-class men. The enthusiastic
reception of these plays reveals the continued utility of images of ancient Rome for articulating the political ideologies and aspirations of people outside the arena of congressional debate. Reflecting the passions of the times, both feature protagonists who revolt against the Roman aristocratic establishment and they celebrate resistance to oppression.

*The Gladiator* explored the revolt of the Thracian gladiator-slave Spartacus against Roman rule between 73 and 71 BCE, its ruthless suppression by Rome, and the death of Spartacus. It became one of the most popular plays of the nineteenth century. Spartacus’ passionate fight for liberty from Roman oppression was deemed the same spirit that fueled the American rebellion against British tyranny, and the play could be understood as a reenactment of the American Revolution against Britain. More specifically, the play’s sympathetic treatment of those oppressed by the Roman oligarchy was, for the populist supporters of Andrew Jackson, a metaphor for their own exploitation by the American ruling classes. Spartacus’ desire for freedom from Roman oppression gave the working-class man a model for struggling to free himself from oppression. His fight against the Roman aristocrat and general Crassus similarly modeled resistance to American aristocratic domination.

Edwin Forrest also starred in James Sheridan Knowles’ play *Virginius*, and by 1834 it was prominent in his repertory. Knowles’ play was written in 1820 and was based on the story in Livy’s history of Rome in which the Roman soldier Virginius kills his daughter Virginia in order to save her from the lust of the tyrannical patrician Appius Claudius. Appius Claudius was one of the Board of Ten (*decemviri*) who had been appointed to draw up a code of laws but who had then refused to resign and reinstate constitutional government. Virginius’ fierce example of resistance against the oppressive behaviors of Appius Claudius inspired the plebeian revolution in 449 BCE which overthrew the tyranny of the patrician decemvirate and restored a constitutional government more favorable to the plebeians.

The Roman plebeian revolution against patrician tyranny resonated in 1830s America. Jackson’s supporters saw clear analogies between their own struggle for the extension of the benefits of democracy and a more equitable share of wealth and the struggles and aspirations of the Roman plebeians. “Rome long struggled with the powers of wealth, bribery and corruption practiced by the patricians,” said Representative Alexander Duncan of Ohio; and Representative John McKeon of New York declared that Roman liberty fell “when the patrician had trampled the plebeian
power under foot; when the great masses were deprived of influence.” 48 Some Jacksonian Democrats even claimed that the Roman plebeians had been the precursors to the American Democratic Party, and boasted of Jackson’s “Roman virtue,” his “Roman firmness,” and his “Roman wisdom.”49 If the Whigs in the Senate saw Jackson as a Caesar, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri viewed Jackson as the representative of the American plebeians.50

In Knowles’ play, Livy’s story about the Roman soldier was recast in terms of a nineteenth-century anti-aristocratic sensibility.51 One of Edwin Forrest’s friends and supporters was William Leggett, editor of the New York Evening Post, and a critic of special interest monopolies and moneyed privilege: “The true designation of the two great antagonistic political divisions of society,” Leggett wrote, “is democratick and aristocratick.” Leggett and other supporters of Jackson urged a more thorough-going revolution for America and called for a reawakening of the revolutionary impulse for “the amelioration of the condition of mankind.” Rather than draw positive analogies between Julius Caesar and Andrew Jackson, supporters of the president reached further back into Rome’s history for a fitting counter-analogy. Those who hoped to reignite “revolutionary fervor” could have found an analogue and an inspiration in Knowles’ play about the Roman plebeian revolution against the oppressive tyranny of the patrician class and the plebeians’ success in gaining a greater share in the political process.52 By identifying with the ruling classes of late republican Rome, the Whigs were effectively denying the legitimacy of any more thorough-going revolution than the one already achieved in the 1770s. When Knowles arrived in New York in 1834 he stayed for nine months and acted in several of his own plays, including Virginius. He also dined at the White House with President Andrew Jackson, who remarked that he “had never shaken hands with a European [Knowles] with so much pleasure.”53

The Course of Empire

During Jackson’s presidency, the conservative painter Thomas Cole composed a series of five paintings entitled The Course of Empire (1833–6). Cole adhered to the eighteenth-century cyclical vision of history and he believed that the course of the United States would be shaped by universal historical forces.54 “We see that nations have sprung from obscurity,
risen to glory, and decayed. Their rise has in general been marked by virtue; their decadence by vice, vanity, and licentiousness. Let us beware,” he warned.\textsuperscript{55} Cole’s paintings had a didactic purpose: he intended observers to draw analogies between the paradigmatic rise and fall of empires and contemporary 1830s America.

The series offered an allegorical portrait of the agrarian origins of nations, their rise to imperial grandeur, their subsequent fall into corruption, tyranny, and conquest, and their end in bleak desolation. The Course of Empire was a general meditation on the rise and fall of empires, but many details in the central painting, Consummation, evoke one empire in particular: imperial Rome (figure 9.3).\textsuperscript{56} It depicts a purple-robed conqueror’s triumphal return to a monumental white marble city. Colossal and elaborate classical architecture dominates the canvas, the harbor is filled with ships of the mercantile empire, the goddess Minerva holding a victory figure stands on a columned pedestal to the center right, and hanging from the temple on the right is a banner with the image of an imperial eagle, the symbol of Roman might and the American national
The crowned conqueror is borne aloft in a procession toward a triumphal arch. He is surrounded, in Cole’s words, “by captives on foot, and a numerous train of guards, senators & pictures and golden treasures are carried before him. He is about to pass beneath the triumphal arch, while girls strew flowers around.” Cole’s triumphal procession is a visual compilation drawn from a number of sources, especially Andrea Mantegna’s *Triumphs of Caesar* at Hampton Court Palace, which Cole had visited in July of 1829. Mantegna’s painting had made the triumphs of Julius Caesar exemplary for the triumphs of all Roman generals. Cole’s victorious general suggests Julius Caesar and, at least to some observers, it may also have suggested Andrew Jackson. Whig critical comparisons of Jackson to Caesar were well known and Jackson was frequently portrayed in cartoons with imperial regalia (figure 9.2).

Critics have read Cole’s series as a Whig allegory. From Cole’s conservative perspective, Andrew Jackson was a modern-day Caesar, and the popular democracy and expansionist pursuits of the Jacksonian era seemed to signal the end of the virtuous American Republic and the rise of corruption and tyranny. Where Jacksonian Democrats saw progress and the extension of democracy, and looked back into Rome’s republican history to validate America’s rapid expansion and republican institutions, Cole saw rampant materialism, utilitarianism, social decline, and the breakdown of order, and looked to the Roman Empire for criticism of it all. The Market Revolution had led to growing gaps between rich and poor in cities. Riots and lawlessness were common. Commercial greatness and expansionism came at a heavy cost: Cole was troubled by the erosion of gentility and old lines of authority and dismayed at the decline of civic virtue, the moral cement that had so far kept the republic intact. For Cole, Jackson’s reelection confirmed the disturbing direction in which the country was moving – and his *Consummation* may be suggesting that democracy is degenerating into mob rule at the hands of a demagogue, an American Caesar.

For the series “motto” Cole chose an excerpt from Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold* that articulated the inevitable historical cycle: “First Freedom and then Glory – When that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption.” For the title of his series, Cole chose a phrase from a poem by Bishop George Berkeley that expressed the idea of an unvarying cycle of imperial rise and decline: “Westward the course of empire takes its way; The four first Acts already past, A fifth shall close the Drama with the day; Time’s noblest offspring is the last.” Cole’s negative views of empire were shaped by his
pessimistic understanding of the rise and decline of empires, and his title suggested that even a New World empire was subject to the same principles of historical causation.\textsuperscript{64}

It is possible that few who saw Cole’s paintings drew the parallel between Roman decline and 1830s America. The cyclical view of history and the rise and fall of nations and empires was in the process of being superseded by “a narrative of progressive development over time.”\textsuperscript{65} The cyclical theory had posited an affinity between the American and Roman Republics but the new view suggested that instead of repeating ancient history, America could develop and progress upward from it. Instead of cycles or spirals, there was progressive linear change over time; and with that change, Roman antiquity began to lose its relevance or usefulness as an instructive model for America.\textsuperscript{66} In 1839 the editor of the \textit{United States Magazine and Democratic Review}, John L. O’Sullivan, asserted that the United States had “in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them, and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. On the contrary, our national birth was the beginning of a new history . . . Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?”\textsuperscript{67} J. D. B. DeBow, editor of \textit{Debow’s Review}, commented with approval that “already does our empire extend over domain wider than that of the Romans in their proudest days of conquest.”\textsuperscript{68} Conquest, expansion, and material progress were in vogue.

In 1838 Edwin Forrest gave a speech at the Independence Day celebrations in New York. The Revolution, said Forrest, marked “the most august event which ever constituted an epoch in the political annals of mankind.” According to the \textit{Democratic Review} of September of the same year, Forrest’s patriotism was “imbued with the philanthropy which saw America as designed by her example to shed the light of her moral truth into the remotest corners of the earth for man’s emancipation.”\textsuperscript{69} Not long after this, in 1845, John L. O’Sullivan coined the term “Manifest Destiny” in his arguments for the annexation of Texas. Manifest Destiny quickly came to mean not only that America was exempt from the cycles of history, but that the American achievement was the divinely ordained culmination of the westward movement of progressive civilization. America’s unique combination of democracy, capitalism, and Christianity was destined to spread across the continent and to serve as a shining model for all nations to emulate. Given the mood and rhetoric of the times, it isn’t surprising perhaps that the critic from the \textit{New-York Mirror} who reviewed Cole’s paintings missed Cole’s intended analogy. The critic
Manifest Destiny and the Eclipse of Julius Caesar

suggested that “democracy was the antidote to the cyclical process... democracy and material progress would bring about an ‘empire of love’ the result of mankind’s advance along ‘the road to greater and greater perfection.’”70 By the end of the 1840s, empire was viewed more positively. The phrase the “course of empire” had merged with Manifest Destiny. Angry invocations of Julius Caesar as an exemplar to avoid and evocations of the values of the Roman Republic were now fading. Democratic America became in the popular mind the great nation that would achieve the destiny promised to Rome in Vergil’s Aeneid: imperium sine fine, empire without end.

NOTES

1 Joseph Addison’s play was first performed in London in 1713.
2 There were nine American editions of Cato before 1800 and eight more in the nineteenth century.
4 Richard (1994), 84.
5 Adams cited in Richard (1994), 77–8. Ennius (239–169 BCE) wrote of the expansion of Rome’s sway in the Mediterranean in the republican period and has often been called the “father of Roman poetry.”
6 Watson (1990), 45.
7 Winterer (2002), 18–19.
10 Diderot cited in Honour (1968), 80.
13 Wills (1984), 111–12; Winterer (2002), 47.
14 Wills (1984), 58.
18 Wood (1992), 368.
19 Huet (1999), 53–69.
20 Wills (1984), 80–2; and, commenting on Mason Locke Weems’ popular and long-lived Life of Washington, first published in 1800, Wills says Weems was certain that “a description of a hero could produce heroes among his readers,” 110.
Margaret Malamud

21 *Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 1st session, 3877, cited in Miles (1968), 368.
22 For an in-depth treatment of these changes, see Watson (1990), 17–41.
25 Watson (1990), 5.
30 Watson (1990), 9.
31 Ibid.
33 Miles (1968), 369.
34 *Register of Debates*, 23rd Congress, 1st session, 1525, 3407, cited in Miles (1968), 369.
35 Jackson was also sometimes compared to Napoleon. Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 17; Davison (1975), 23.
36 *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 40 (April 16, 1831), 113, cited in Miles (1968), 368.
37 Benton (1893), 402–6; Watson (1990), 156.
38 Benton (1893), 411–12.
39 Jackson was officially censured by Congress for his actions while in power.
40 Benton (1893), 427.
41 Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., April 15, 1834, cited in Miles (1968), 374.
42 Watson (1990), 11.
43 Jackson cited in Watson (1990), 10.
44 Quoted in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 47 (February 7, 1835), 391, cited in Miles (1968), 371. Carl Richard has pointed out that the Whig attempts “to brand Jackson as another Caesar were so numerous and passionate that one newspaper blamed the first presidential assassination attempt in American history on the overheated rhetoric” (Richard [2003], 177).
47 Wyke (1997), 59–60. Wyke also points out that the play’s production occurred amidst the beginnings of abolitionism – Nat Turner’s slave revolt had only recently been violently put down – and so it might also have been seen as a criticism of American slavery (though the author denied that this was his intended meaning).
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49 Register of Debates, 23rd Congress, 1st session, 704, 2834 and 24th Congress, 2nd session, 1096, cited in Miles (1968), 375.
50 Miles (1968), 376.
51 Parker (1992), 22.
52 Ibid., 16. Concurrently, as Caroline Winterer has pointed out, there was a rising interest in Athenian democracy as a model for the young nation. “With democracy on the ascendant in America, fifth-century Athens became a more acceptable model to emulate in preparation for citizenship” (Winterer [2002], 61).
53 Parker (1992), 15.
54 Miller (1993), 25.
56 Cf. Wilton and Barringer (2002), 53. Barringer suggests that Cole’s city could also be read as “a parodic vision of Imperial London.”
58 Quoted in Wilton and Barringer (2002), 102.
60 Miller (1990), 71–3; Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 16; Wallach (1994), 94.
63 Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 10. Others agreed with Cole; in an address on the value of history, Thomas Gilmer urged his audience to remember the example of Rome and consider “how inevitably the fabric of a nation’s freedom and greatness crumbles and falls when it rests not on the firm foundation of virtue. It may be profitable for our countrymen to know and to remember, the means by which the people who expelled the Tarquins and established the tribunes, became so enervated and depraved . . . it was virtue alone that gave to Rome its liberty and its distinction; it was the decay of its public virtue that rendered it finally the country of wretchedness and slavery” (Gilmer [1837], 101).
65 Winterer (2002), 79; see also Wallach (1994), 95; Miller (1993), 39.
66 Athens rather than Rome provided a more suitable positive model for a more truly democratic society and interest in Greek antiquity proliferated from the 1830s on. Winterer (2002), 79; 133–42, esp. 133, 139.
67 O’Sullivan (1839), 426.
68 DeBow (1849), 482. See also examples in Miller (1990), 75–6. The Whig party feared imperial overstretch and opposed expansionism, but the party disintegrated over the course of the late 1840s and 1850s.
69 “Mr. Forrest’s Oration,” United States Magazine and Democratic Review 3 (1838), 51–7.
70 Wallach (1994), 95.
Caesar, Cinema, and National Identity in the 1910s

Maria Wyke

The body of Caesar lies burning on a pyre built up high in the Forum. The camera moves upwards to a sky filled with black smoke and flames. An intertitle avows: “The flames of the funeral pyre cannot destroy the glorious work of Caesar who, immortalized and consecrated in history, will ever represent the Imperial dominion of Rome which civilized the entire world.” Whereas Julius Caesar dies only part way through Shakespeare’s play, leaving plenty of space for consideration of the relative merits and consequences of assassination, Enrico Guazzoni’s elaborate film biography of the dictator – *Cajus Julius Caesar* (1914) – concludes with his funeral, and appears to fix its protagonist (and his reception) as forever imperial and magnificent.

On closer scrutiny, however, aspects of the film as well as the history of its distribution and consumption disclose a much greater complexity to the construction and reception of this cinematic Caesar than the final intertitle allows. This chapter explores the characterization of Julius Caesar in Guazzoni’s film, and the film’s reception both in Italy and on its subsequent and widespread exhibition in the United States of America. The alterations made to the film for its American release and the divergent responses it triggered there demonstrate the different charge Julius Caesar has carried in the national identities of Italy and the United States, a charge which was also particularly intense during and immediately after World War I.¹

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Caesar, Cinema, and Italian Nationalism

By the time the Roman production house Cines released *Cajus Julius Caesar* in 1914, its eponymous hero had already had a significant role to
play over the course of the last seventy-odd years in discourses of Italian nationalism. During the Risorgimento, ancient Rome had constantly been invoked to support the unification of Italy, the choice of Rome as its capital, the creation of a republican form of government, and the formation of a mission for the new nation in Europe. Once the new Italian nation-state was proclaimed in 1861, its invention was concealed and its legitimacy sustained through constant appeals to romanità, or a historical continuity with ancient Rome. Practical steps were taken by both state and non-state agencies to develop a national culture and identity for the new Italy that involved the reification of ancient Rome’s authority in coins, stamps, statues, urban planning, and monumental architecture, as well as archaeology, and its reenactment in such cultural discourses as political ritual, historiography, drama, and education in schools. Caesar, however, could appear in these discourses as either villain or hero.

In 1874, for example, Raffaello Giovagnoli published a historical novel, Spartaco, which was widely disseminated and became very popular throughout Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Having fought in the war for independence under the standards of Garibaldi, the author projects the Risorgimento back in time—in tribute to its achievement—and clothes it in the more extravagant language of an ancient revolt against slavery. The personal confrontation between Julius Caesar and Spartacus that occurs at a high point in the novel can easily be read as an embodiment of key political concepts in the propaganda of the modern revolutionaries: despotism or liberty. Writing his mammoth history of the Grandezza e decadenza di Roma (1902–4) at the very beginning of the new century, the scholar Guglielmo Ferrero was somewhat more generous in his appraisal of Caesar: a great general, a gifted writer, but still no admirable statesman. On reaching the assassination of Caesar, and in contrast to the bombastic language which was to accompany the closing sequence of Guazzoni’s film portrait some twelve years later, Ferrero concluded his more nuanced account of the man:

The Archdestroyer had himself been cut down at the moment when he was setting out to conquer the Empire of Parthia and set Rome on the road trodden by Alexander. . . . But for once the incomparable opportunist had mistaken his reckoning. Caesar had already, without knowing it, contributed more than all his contemporaries to the future of the world. His greatest work for posterity was the conquest of Gaul, to which he himself attributed so little importance. But to the men of his own day he had no remedy to offer. Before the regeneration of her society could come about
Rome needed, not feats of arms on her distant frontiers, but a great crisis at home in which the forces of dissolution, now at work for a century, could at last run their course. Twenty more long years of storm and tragedy.¹

For Ferrero, war was not only a necessary condition for the development of ancient Rome’s imperial grandeur, but also the seedbed of its decline. Caesar’s wars of conquest led to social disarray and civil war and, ultimately, to the destruction of the once victorious state.⁵ Years later, under the Fascist regime and now in exile, Ferrero recalled that in this radical reassessment of Caesar his purpose had been to overthrow the nineteenth-century, romantic admiration for the Roman as “the hero-usurper and the saviour-tyrant” – a nineteenth-century Caesar manufactured only to act as a suitable precursor by which to exalt Napoleon and advocate Caesarism.⁶ He notes with great concern that his reappraisal had carried conviction only temporarily, until World War I had reawakened the old romantic illusions about the Roman dictator.⁷

In Italy, however, the reawakening of those “illusions” had begun even before the outbreak of world war. At the very same time as Ferrero was publishing his reappraisal of Caesar, in 1902, a play was staged in Rome whose author (in a critical review of Ferrero’s work) identified Caesar as “the man who was in reality and is still in ideal the most superb specimen of the strong man.”⁸ The tragedy in question, Giulio Cesare, had been written by the journalist and founding father of Italian nationalism, Enrico Corradini. Grounded in disillusion with the Liberal government, the oppositional nationalism of the new right had begun to advocate the establishment of a more authoritarian regime, and to elaborate fantasies of national regeneration and glorification built on grand imperial ambitions and colonial adventures; Italy must have dictatorship and war to triumph among western nations. At this early stage, the movement was more literary than political in its aim – by means of articles, reviews, and other such works – to rouse a warlike spirit in Italians and to shape an elite which would aspire to military victory. Integral to this project was the resumption of the myth of imperial (rather than republican) Rome, the repeated expression of a nostalgia for a highly idealized Roman past of war, conquest, and empire, and a renewed fascination with the figure of Julius Caesar as, in Ferrero’s scathing terms, “the hero-usurper and the saviour-tyrant.”⁹

Thus, in Corradini’s play of 1902, Caesar is the hero of his race who, from act to act, is raised above his fellow-Romans to become a superman:
Caesar, Cinema, and National Identity in the 1910s

chief of state, founder of empire, the personification of Rome. At the play’s close, the charismatic leader is cruelly struck down before he can complete his mission to extend Rome’s empire to the limits of the known world. As the conspirators close in, his last words ring out (in tones not dissimilar to those concluding Guazzoni’s film biography):

**Cesare** E così l’Impero Romano, da me soggiogati, o spenti lungo l’immensa linea dei suoi confini tutti i suoi nemici, sarà cinto da un antemurale di sicurezza e per opera mia durerà eterno. (“And so the Roman Empire, with all its enemies subjugated or destroyed by me along the immense line of its frontiers, will be surrounded by a barbican of security and through my labors will endure for ever.”)\(^{10}\)

The assassination is here rendered a double parricide, of the father of Brutus and of the savior of the country.\(^{11}\)

In the years immediately preceding the release of Guazzoni’s silent epic *Cajus Julius Caesar*, Italian nationalism had flourished into an organized political movement and its evocations of Roman Empire had dramatically intensified. In active support of the key idea that war was the most effective means of rebuilding the nation, Corradini paid visits to North Africa and sent back dispatches during the first half of 1911 pressing for the seizure of the Libyan provinces from the Ottoman Empire, and campaigned vociferously for a war that in the ideology of nationalists was only a legitimate return to territories owned once before by Rome.\(^{12}\) Buoyed by victory in the African war of 1911–12, the nationalists then proceeded to campaign against the Italian government’s policy of neutrality in the Great War as declared in August 1914, until military intervention finally took place in May 1915 with an offensive on Italy’s northern frontier nominally in support of Britain and France. Released by Cines in November 1914, Guazzoni’s cinematic biography of Julius Caesar was thus consumed by Italian spectators precisely in the period of the *intervento* (the crucial ten months which would lead to the national decision to enter the war).\(^{13}\)

Moreover, by now, both Roman archaeology and epic films set in Italy’s Roman past had already been conscripted into serving the campaigns for war in Africa and celebrating the subsequent victory. While archaeology had excavated and documented traces of ancient Roman civilization on African soil, cinema had patriotically brought those traces
to vivid life for a mass, often illiterate, domestic audience. As a further signal that Guazzoni’s *Caesar* could and would be consumed as another manifestation of the nationalist rhetoric of *romanità*, in the year just prior to its exhibition, the same director had released the epic *Marcantonio e Cleopatra*, which had included documentary footage of Egypt shot during the Libyan campaign, and ended with Octavian celebrating his African triumph through the streets of Rome. Consequently, the language of *romanità* can be found embedded in the Italian reviews of Julius Caesar’s cinematic biography:

> Assistere, anzi rivivere – perché questo lavoro, curato nei più minimi particolari, è una ricostruzione esatta dei tempi e degli ambienti dell’Urbe – un’epoca gloriosa, che rimarrà eterna fra le rovine degli antichi mausolei, fra i capitelli delle colonne infrante, nelle tradizioni, negli scritti, nei papiri de’ nostri avi, nella nostra memoria, con orgoglio e rimpianto, è un godimento. (“It is a delight to watch, even to relive again – because this work, attended to in the smallest details, is an exact reconstruction of the times and society of the City – a past epoch, a glorious epoch, which will remain eternal among the ruins of the ancient tombs, among the capitals of the broken columns, in the traditions, writings, and documents of our ancestors, in our own memory, with pride and with regret.”)

It is thus no surprise that some modern critics have thought Guazzoni’s script was inspired, or even written, by the nationalist Enrico Corradini himself. The film, however, does not neatly match the plotline of Corradini’s play *Giulio Cesare*. Its starting-point is not the crossing of the Rubicon and its political repercussions (as with Corradini), but “the dawn of love.” Initially, more melodrama than triumph and tragedy, we learn that young Caio secretly loves Servilia (sister of the strict moralist Catone). Forced into marriage with Marco Bruto in order to protect her Cesare, Servilia has to confess to her husband that she carries her lover’s illegitimate child. Born unaware of his origins, little Bruto is taught a profound hatred for his now exiled father by uncle Catone. This domestic drama of paternity establishes a humane rather than a superhuman dimension for the heroic Caesar who will soon return (figure 10.1). Intermittently, Guazzoni’s *Caesar* is even prepared to concede that either its protagonist or his actions are flawed. After the spectacular fall of Alesia, and inserted between long shots of corpses heaped up high and wide behind a scattering of Roman soldiers, an intertitle recognizes the toll of war (“the theatre
Figure 10.1  Little Brutus (Caesar’s illegitimate son) plays with his mother Servilia. Still from Enrico Guazzoni’s *Cajus Julius Caesar* (1914). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.
of war – a terrible and tragic sight after the crushing defeat of the fierce and warlike Gauls”). Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon is described as “a tragic moment in the history of the people,” “the Roman Eagles now hasten to attack Rome.” Yet, otherwise, the film is largely a strident celebration of Caesar’s military achievements, all the Risorgimento distaste for despotism and militancy almost completely suppressed.

In keeping with the increasingly bellicose climate of its period of distribution and exhibition during the *intervento*, *Cajus Julius Caesar* largely represents its protagonist (played by Amleto Novelli, an actor highly experienced and respected in the role of historical heroes) as a military chief and embodiment of conquering Italy. The campaigns in Gaul are magnified into a struggle between civilization and barbarity. In long shot, a sea of cheering senators and massed extras part to allow the Roman general to ride off screen to war at the head of his cavalry, followed by standard bearers who raise aloft Rome’s spread-winged Eagles, and neatly armored Roman foot soldiers who parade slowly in disciplined formations out of a magnificently metropolitan Forum set and off into wild Gaul. There the undisciplined enemy run and lurch headlong out of savage woodlands like animals, dressed in bulky furs and spiked helmets. Finally, after the Roman troops have broken “the undisciplined impetuosity of the savage hordes” at Alesia, and in imitation of nineteenth-century paintings of the event, Vercingetorix (as Commander of the Gauls) enters the Roman camp and reluctantly places his sword at the feet of a Caesar who sits aloft on his judgment-seat (figure 10.2). It is at this point that an intertitle boasts poetically: “the irresistible claws of the gilded Eagle has crushed the savage and obstinate resistance of the wild boar of the Gauls.”

The high point in Guazzoni’s epic representation of Caesar’s life also, significantly, touches most explicitly on events dear to the hearts of nationalists and other warmongers in contemporary Italy. A long, spectacular sequence, shot with a distant, overhead camera, receives apparent authentication at the same time as it gains immense aesthetic appeal by the extraordinary degree to which it recasts in moving images the celebrated pictorial cycle *Triumphs of Caesar* (ca. 1480) by Andrea Mantegna, a cycle that once hung in the palace of the Gonzaga family to display, by association, their own power, prestige, and iron virility. Through a Forum crowded with eager spectators, there slowly snakes a magnificent parade of – to name only selected groups – lictors, standard bearers wearing animal-skin hoods, trumpeters, javelin-bearing infantry,
prisoners and trophies from Gaul, more garlanded foot soldiers and togate senators, a float drawn by four horses that carries high the laurel-bearing triumphator on whom the crowd throws rose petals, Egyptian priests with feather fans, cavalry, and so on. The whole event is heralded by an intertitle which suggests that Caesar, like the Italian nationalists after him, is celebrating African victory and empire: “Rome decreed several years later that solemn triumphal honors should be paid to he who, in the sands of the Lybian desert had gained and tasted the Empire of the world.”

What, then, of Caesar’s assassination? When Guazzoni’s cinematic hero is made aware of the danger to his life, he courageously refuses to insult the dignity of the Senate by taking with him an escort of armed guards. Informed by the soothsayer on the Ides that the hand which first touches him will kill him, Caesar is approached by Brutus (figure 10.3). Given the film’s earlier, melodramatic concern with this frustrated father–son relationship, Guazzoni’s Caesar is less willing to die than his literary predecessor, who chooses the moment of victory to end his life. Rather, Guazzoni’s Caesar, unlike his Roman counterpart, remains solely dedicated to the good of the state. When Brutus asks why he has come, Caesar replies, “I come to prospice a happy day.” Brutus questions the nature of his friend’s exertion on his behalf, to which Caesar answers simply, “It is the love of my country.”

As such, Guazzoni’s Caesar is a more modern man. The selfless dedication to the common good that Guazzoni prizes over the personal motto of “civis Romanus sum” is one that would be more at home in the modern era. Where Caesar was the epitome of the autocratic Roman emperor, Guazzoni’s Caesar is the ideal of the modern nation-state. The modern nation-state, as distinct from the ancient Roman Empire, is one in which the state is no longer the central authority. In many ways, Guazzoni’s Caesar is more in line with the ideals of the modern nation-state. The modern nation-state is one in which the state is no longer the central authority.
relationship, and with Caesar’s continual efforts throughout the narrative to protect or save the life of an unknowing Brutus (at Ravenna and at Pharsalia), this moment constitutes the final tragic betrayal: “And thou, Brutus, my son?” Given also that Dante had placed Brutus alongside Judas in the mouth of Lucifer as punishment for their comparable sins, the assassination scene may even suggest a link between the betrayals of Caesar and of Christ. And so we reach the funeral of an extraordinary man who can embody empire: “who will ever represent the Imperial dominion of Rome which civilised the entire world.”

In Italy, during the intervento, spectators well understood the jingoistic characterization of the dictator offered up by Guazzoni’s Cajus Julius Caesar, and reviewers correspondingly reveled in its militant Caesar and his masterful conquest of other nations. One such review observed that
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the film opened as an idyll but ended as a tragedy, yet in between it overcame spectators transporting them back to glorious times:

Da tutta l’opera poi emana, risalta lo spirito conquistatore dei Romani, la grandezza di quel fortunato e temuto popolo. Il cittadino che era rispettato anche nelle lontane plaghe, fin dove giungeva l’eco della potenza Romana e il fragore delle armi, alle sole parole: Miles Romanus Sum! (“Furthermore, out of the whole work, there issues and springs up the conquering spirit of the Romans, the greatness of that fortunate and feared people. The citizen who was esteemed even in distant regions, right up to where the echo of Roman power and the din of swords reached, at the mere words: I am a Roman soldier!”)²³

Caesar, Cinema, and American Classical Education

The cinematic Caesar I have so far described, however, was not exactly the version made available to American audiences when Enrico Guazzoni’s film Cajus Julius Caesar was released in the United States. Characters’ names were changed, whole scenes abridged, deleted, or repositioned, Shakespearean quotations added, and the jingoism of the whole radically diminished. The motion picture entrepreneur George Kleine imported the film, along with many other Italian historical epics, into the United States but he also collated and retained in a series of scrapbooks an extraordinary set of documents about Julius Caesar (as it was now known in its American version), including distributors’ publicity and sample programs, newspaper reviews and press reports, letters from exhibitors (including schools and universities), and comments by individual consumers, all of which provide extraordinary and vivid testimony to the many ways in which the Italian Caesar was “denationalized” and rendered more palatable for American consumers.²⁴ The second part of my chapter, therefore, focuses on these alterations to the film, to its exhibition context and to its consumption, and interlinks them with the different reception history of Julius Caesar in the United States.

One immediately apparent and striking difference between the Italian and American Caesars is that the former’s sexual immorality has been very carefully erased. In the original film, we observe a secret ritual in the Temple of Eros where the youthful affair between Cesare and his mistress Servilia is consecrated. This very same scene, in the American
version, is translated into a secret but genuine marriage to Cornelia. Similarly, a later Italian sequence in which another veiled, cloaked, and conniving mistress, Tertullia (wife of wealthy Crasso), donates money toward Cesare’s election bid for the consulship is translated on American screens into a demonstration of the devoted love of Caesar’s wife-to-be Calpurnia. For American spectators, moreover, there is no melodrama of paternity, no illegitimate son, no familial betrayal. Brutus always remains nephew of Cato and good friend. And, at the American film’s close, the most sincere mourner at Caesar’s funeral is not his one true love and first mistress Servilia but his loyal (though divorced) first wife Cornelia. The motivation for these substantial moral improvements to Caesar’s sexual behavior (which would have been made by the George Kleine Motion Pictures distribution company) can most probably be attributed to the necessity of meeting the currently stringent requirements of American film censorship. Within just a few months of the arrival of Cajus Julius Caesar in the United States, in early 1915, the Supreme Court unanimously agreed to deny motion pictures the constitutional protection of freedom of speech – a decision that now crowned the numerous efforts at local and state level to control the content and the exhibition of motion pictures. Whatever Julius Caesar’s faults might have been (both historical and fictional), in American cinema of the 1910s he would not be permitted to sully the sanctity of marriage or the dignity of paternity.

Perhaps less surprisingly, much of the bellicose imagery in the original intertitles of Guazzoni’s film – designed to stir Italian spectators to thoughts of war, conquest, and imperial dominion – has also been toned down or altogether removed from Kleine’s Julius Caesar. When the Roman troops march so spectacularly out of the Forum and off screen to instigate war in Gaul, an Italian intertitle declares excitedly: “The Triumphant Eagles proudly spread their wings, happy presage of the laurels to decorate the brow of Caesar.” No intertitle has been inserted at this same point in the American version of the film. Later, when Vercingetorix surrenders, Julius Caesar includes no reference to the irresistible claws of the gilded Eagle crushing the resistance of the wild boar. Instead the comparable American intertitle observes more modestly that “Gaul bows before the victorious Roman eagles.” In Italy, the good news subsequently delivered from Gaul to the waiting Roman Senate is that “[t]he gilded Roman Eagle has stayed its triumphant flight, spreading beyond the seas the majesty and might of the name of Rome.” In the United States, the Roman senators merely learn that “[a]ll Gaul is at the feet of mighty
Caesar.” Thus, across the Atlantic, much of the nationalist rhetoric of romanità embedded in the original Italian intertitles of Caesar’s cinematic biography (all those soaring, crushing, triumphant Eagles) has disappeared in the process of translation into English.

What has been inserted instead, to provide an alternative to romanità as cultural anchor for this cinematic biography of Julius Caesar, are a large number of quotations from Shakespeare’s play, especially (and inevitably) in the last reel where the narrative finally reaches 44 BCE and the Ides of March. The very first American intertitle cites Cassius’ often repeated words as he stoops to wash his hands symbolically in his friend’s blood: “How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over, / In states unborn, and accents yet unknown!” (Jul. Caes. 3.1). Divorced from their original context and transposed to open the film, the words can apply self-referentially to the cinematic reenactment which is about to follow and reassuringly suggest to spectators that this version of Caesar will be authentic because familiarly Shakespearean. Shakespeare and his drama had become an integral part of American popular culture through the course of the nineteenth century. His plays, Julius Caesar in particular, were frequently and prominently performed (and even parodied). Taught as part of the curriculum in every public school across the nation, Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar achieved even wider circulation in the culture fragmented into key words, key phrases, and key scenes. It was on the basis of the play’s popularity and cultural respectability that the American Vitagraph Company had already released a silent film adaptation of it in 1908, compressed into fifteen shots.

Reformulated in Shakespearean terms, the closing moments of Kleine’s Julius Caesar distinguish it subtly from Guazzoni’s original. In the Italian version, the multitude are stirred by Mark Antony’s single piece of direct speech – a brief address to Caesar’s corpse as the victor in every battle, felled by a traitor – but it is the sight of their hero’s toga clotted with blood that ultimately drives them to sack and burn the palaces of the conspirators. In contrast, the American version here includes a rush of four quotations from Mark Antony’s celebrated speech to the Plebeians in Shakespeare’s play inserted between long shots of increasing crowd agitation. The dispersal of the mob to loot and murder is then immediately preceded by Mark Antony’s final aside: “Mischief, thou art afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt” (Jul. Caes. 3.2). In the United States, it is Antony’s rhetorical skill, not simply the great Caesar’s victories and generosity, his betrayal and gruesome murder, that causes riot.
Maria Wyke

If we turn to the numerous reviews of this new American Caesar collated in George Kleine’s scrapbooks, they repeatedly provide a clear indication that what mattered above all else in the exhibition and reception of the film in the United States was not any contemporary political resonance afforded by the depiction of “the conquering spirit of the Romans” but the educational value for school students of seeing enacted realistically on screen “the immortally famous deeds of the conqueror.” The reviewer for the Boston (Mass.) Transcript (November 3, 1914) even commented:

The pity was not for Caesar’s fate, though it was portrayed in finely tragic pantomime, but pity for ourselves – that we should have been a generation of school children who would not read Caesar’s Commentaries by day and then see these motion-pictures by night. How much more the dull reading would have meant to us, could we have been thus admitted into the councils of the Senate Chamber and watched the brute reality of the fighting which Caesar described.

Modeled on British educational arrangements, the school system originally established in the American colonies had contained at its core the study of the languages, literatures, and antiquities of ancient Greece and Rome. It was through Classics (customarily equated with “Learning”) that students were principally prepared for college, and it was Classics that they most often continued to study. Throughout the nineteenth century, the classical languages were still an essential discipline of a liberal arts education at American universities and broad knowledge of classical civilization remained central to the social conception of a cultured person. Even as working-class children started to enter secondary education en masse at the century’s end, classical subjects were still chosen as a means of social advancement, and Latin – and, therefore, Caesar through his self-presentation in his commentaries – was still studied by at least half of secondary school pupils while remaining compulsory for admission to American colleges. However, roughly paralleling the exhibition period of Kleine’s Julius Caesar across the United States (it stretched from the tail-end of 1914 right up until at least 1922), Latin’s popularity in high schools fell by more than half and, simultaneously, the debate about the value of a classical education, whether in schools or universities, reached a very heated crescendo.

In autumn 1916, the General Education Board published a pamphlet entitled A Modern School in which it proposed – to subsequent storms of
protest – that both Greek and Latin be entirely omitted from the curriculum of American secondary schools. A Princeton University conference held the following year, in June 1917, found that the continuation of study of Latin was both necessary and urgent in light of the entry of the United States only a few months earlier into the war in Europe. When the proceedings were later published as *Value of the Classics*, they now contained supportive testimonies from the serving president as well as all living ex-presidents: Latin helped forge courage, wisdom, and faith in freedom.33 From the beginning of World War I up to its end and beyond, moreover, the pages of classical journals and of newspapers and magazines were filled with testimonies to the utility not just of Latin in general, but of Caesar’s Latin in particular:

There is probably no production of the ancient world that has such an emphatic modern ring as Caesar’s description of his Gallic wars. Most of us remember Julius Caesar as a gentleman who spent the larger part of his existence composing Latin histories that have since vexed the lives of millions of schoolboys. Yet no work deserves more careful reading at this present hour. The very first page of the “Gallic Wars” might almost have been written by a correspondent in the present war. (*The World’s Work*, October 1917)

Close scrutiny of Caesar’s commentaries would increase understanding of the present war in northwestern Europe, it was regularly claimed: the same battlefields, similar strategy and tactics (short-range combat, cavalry screens, close formations, the use of the flank, transverse ditches for artillery, rivers as rear protection, forced marches), the same aggressive leaders (most often the pairing is of Caesar and the German Kaiser).34 Nonetheless, despite these opportunistic demonstrations of the enormous benefits to be derived from learning Latin and reading Caesar, during the course of the following decade Latin was to collapse as a foundation of education at both high school and college levels.

It is in the context of this crisis for Classics that it becomes possible to understand the extent of the enthusiasm with which George Kleine’s *Julius Caesar* was received across the whole United States by public school teachers and university lecturers alike.35 Filmed Caesar was accessible, entertaining, and popular, and it appeared capable of giving the lie to any hostile conception of Latin as an instrument of the elite wielded only to hammer out gentlemen, generals, and presidents. Initial presentations
of *Julius Caesar* were arranged by university professors of Classics for leading members of their communities to demonstrate its educational importance. In consultation with theatre owners, school teachers organized screening times to enable the attendance of their entire school. Pronouncements were made in journals of the classical community that historical films were “the finest kind of publicity for the Classics” and *Julius Caesar* “perhaps the most interesting as an aid to high-school Latin.” The film was regularly screened at conferences of Classics teachers and lecturers and, as late as 1922, the Chair of Latin at one high school on Long Island declared *Julius Caesar* to be “the finest educational motion picture I have ever witnessed. It is historically accurate and is a most wonderful visual lesson. It should be shown in every high school in the country.” The lesson that teachers and academics hoped spectators would learn, however, evidently concerns not so much wars in Gaul, dictatorship, and political assassination, but the merits of Classics itself. School-room Caesar could epitomize the dryness of a classical education, silver-screen Caesar spiced up that education with captivating entertainment:

Children going to school, to whom Caesar is the awful author of involved sentences and grammar-crammed paragraphs, will with keener zest sharpen their wits trying to find out how the very human lover of Cornelia and Calpurnia captured the gigantic wily Gaul, and won the love of every soldier under his command.

In the 1910s, the relationship between Caesar, cinema, and classical education became more intimate and mutually beneficial even than this. The motion picture industry was as quick as the educational establishment to see what filmed Caesar could do for it and as eager to take that advantage. Whereas *Julius Caesar* seemed capable of conferring popular appeal on Classics, it could in contrast confer on the motion picture industry the sheen of cultural authority and utility which it so eagerly sought and which the Better Films Movement was currently demanding that it develop. In counterpoint to the pedagogic rhetoric of classicists, the publicity of Kleine’s own company began to call *Julius Caesar* “the greatest educational subject on film,” and the trade papers talked of it as the kind of “high-class production” that would strengthen the hold of the motion picture in American society. Endorsed enthusiastically by the National Better Films Committee, *Caesar* was chosen for inclusion in

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the cycle of “film classics” which the George Kleine Company regularly selected for additional non-theatrical distribution through state university and other institutional film exchanges to local schools, colleges, churches, and civic associations which had no auditoria equipped for film projection. Alongside this special distribution system, local exhibitors were strongly encouraged by the company to take advantage of the “tremendous pedagogic powers” of Caesar to advertise it in novel ways and thus enhance its evident commercial appeal; suggestions included offering prizes to young spectators for the best essay on the life of the Roman dictator.44

George Kleine’s scrapbooks contain vivid testimony to both the cultural and the commercial success of this moment of symbiosis between Caesar, Classics, and cinema that lasted from late 1914 on at least into the early 1920s. They contain many letters sent to film exchanges or to Kleine directly from grateful teachers, academics, and local exhibitors describing the extraordinary enthusiasm with which Julius Caesar was consumed by its young American audiences. On January 19, 1922, for example, the State University of Montana Film Exchange wrote to Kleine quoting a school principal who (as the letter noted) was undertaking to bring moving pictures for the first time to the little town of Southern Cross:

The picture exceeded my expectations in a number of ways and it certainly pleased the spectators. Even yet the children drape themselves in rugs and blankets, in toga style, carry wash-boiler lids for shields and relive the scenes of the film. Julius Caesar is the first film to have been exhibited here and was the first “movie” for many of the youngsters. I wish to thank you for having secured a production of such high class for our initial exhibition.

Curiously, though, among all the documents contained in Kleine’s scrapbooks for this eight-year period, only one expresses any disquiet over the evident militarism of the film’s hero or wonders whether playing at Caesar might have a detrimental impact on the political outlook of young Americans.

Graver concern might have been anticipated over such enthusiastic heroization of the Roman dictator for, outside the school room, the lecture theatre, and the military training camp, Caesar had always been America’s villain. From the time of George Washington and the War of Independence (as Margaret Malamud has delineated in the preceding chapter), Julius Caesar’s function in American political discourse had
been to epitomize what the new nation stood against: unchecked ambition and tyranny, the destruction of republics. Even after the pursuit of an American empire, Caesarism was customarily a term of abuse to be levied against presidents who appeared to be dangerous demagogues, arrogant autocrats, or aggressive imperialists (from Andrew Jackson to Abraham Lincoln, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Lyndon B. Johnson, and on up to George W. Bush). In contrast to his glorious standing in the rhetoric of Italian nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century, Julius Caesar seems to have had no positive political significance in the same period in the United States. Caesar could be found a place in American national identity, but culturally, not politically. Thus, even as the cinematic portrayal of the Roman general, statesman, and dictator was utilized to further the interests of an American classical education and the American motion picture industry, it was simultaneously recognized as essentially foreign. Trade and press reviews regularly commented on the Italian flavor of Julius Caesar in its landscapes, its plotline, its spectacle, its actors, their emotive acting style, and even their genealogical connection with the Roman past: “who knows but that many of the participants in the picture may not be lineal descendants of the very Romans whose part they play?”

On February 12, 1922, however, the critic James O. Spearing reported in the *New York Times* on audience reaction to the re-release of the film when it was shown in a Broadway theatre to a house half full of schoolboys. He did not appreciate that Caesar was the man of the hour:

The boys took no time at all in making up their minds that Caesar was a satisfactory hero for them, and throughout the showing of the photoplay they were his ardent partisans. They cheered his victories and his triumphal entry into Rome, they booted the Gauls and hissed Pompey off the screen. . . . And should the alacrity with which Young America gave their heart to a purely military and political hero be taken as an indictment of an educational method which still makes heroes of the favourites of Mars, or as a manifestation of the congenital bellicosity of man against which the Conference for the Limitations of Armament can be of no avail?

Perhaps the *New York Times* critic had an inkling of what was soon to come. The treaty intended to limit armaments and keep general peace had been signed in Washington by the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan only six days earlier, but within a matter of months
Mussolini would be marching on Rome to launch a new quest for Italian empire and, in his own words, “a new Caesarian epoch.”

NOTES

1 To my knowledge, no copy of the original Italian version of the film appears to have survived (ca. 104 minutes long). A sixty-minute version with English intertitles can be found in both the Library of Congress and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington. This American version can be contrasted with a longer seventy-eight-minute version, with German intertitles, that survives in the National Film and Television Archive in London. In its George Kleine Collection, the Library of Congress (Motion Pictures Archive) also preserves English translations of the original Italian intertitles, translations which I reproduce here when referring to the Italian version of the film.

2 For the invocation of romanità in this period, see for example Bondanella (1987), 158–65; Falasca-Zamponi (1997), 90; Wyke (1997), 17–18 and (1999a), 189–90; Atkinson et al. (1999); Doumanis (2001), 86–106.


4 I quote from the abridged English translation of the volumes on Caesar’s life, Ferrero (1933), 514–15.

5 On Ferrero, see Yavetz (1983), 23–4; Mangoni (1985), 224–8.

6 On Napoleon and Caesar, see Hemmerle (in this volume).

7 Ferrero (1933), 9–13.

8 Quoted in Mangoni (1985), 227 from Enrico Corradini’s review of the first volume of Grandezza, in the nationalist literary review Il Marzocco 24 (June 15), 1902.

9 On early Italian nationalism and Corradini’s part in it, see Thayer (1964), 192–232; Seton-Watson (1967), 351–2; Atkinson et al. (1999); Doumanis (2001), 107–31; Dunnett (in this volume). A renewed fascination with Julius Caesar in Italian culture is noted by a reviewer of Corradini’s play in Marzocco for June 8, 1902 (cited in Mangoni [1985], 227).

10 Corradini (1926), 310. I quote from the later, revised version of the play, for which see further Dunnett (in this volume). The translation is my own.


12 On romanità and the Libyan war of 1911–12, see Bondanella (1987), 165–6; Wyke (1999a); Munzi (2001), 17–28.


14 See Redi (1991), 9 and 37–8, who notes the close relationship of Cines with elite Italian life, the Vatican bank, and the state; Wyke (1997) and (1999a).
Maria Wyke

15 Francesco Giuffrida in *L’Alba Cinematografica* (Catania) for April 1, 1915, quoted in Martinelli (1992), 81. The translation is my own.

16 As Siarri (1985), 485. Others variously suggest as author of the script Ettore Romagnoli or, even, Raffaello Giovagnoli, for which see Redi (1991), 44 and n. 8; Prolo (1951), 75; Martinelli (1992), 80.

17 See Redi (1991), 44–5, who notes that the opening, almost modern, middle-class drama distinguishes this film from other Cines historical epics like *Marcantonio e Cleopatra*.

18 On nineteenth-century representations of the surrender of Vercingetorix, see Pucci (in this volume).

19 On Mantegna’s paintings, see Martindale (1979).


21 The emphasis is my own.

22 For other traditions in which Caesar and Christ are linked, see Royle (in this volume).

23 Francesco Giuffrida in *L’Alba Cinematografica* (Catania), for April 1, 1915, cited in Martinelli (1992), 81.

24 The documents can now be found in the George Kleine Collection, the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress (esp. Subject Files 1886–1946). Similar Kleine documents are available in the New York Public Library for Performing Arts, Theatre Collection. A copy of the version of the film exhibited in the United States is also available for viewing in the Motion Picture Archive (Library of Congress), where the English translations of the original Italian intertitles are to be found, as mentioned in n. 1 above.


28 Curiously the very last Italian intertitle which epitomizes Caesar as the embodiment of Rome’s imperial dominion has, in the American version, been replaced by “Mount, mount, O soul of Caesar, Thy seat is up on high!” The latter is an adaptation of the dying words of Richard II in another Shakespeare play: “Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high” (*Richard II* 5.5). Of course, nothing suitable can be supplied from the concluding scenes of *Julius Caesar* because it ends with preparations for the last rites of Brutus and the celebrated acknowledgment of his nobility.

29 As noted in the *Chicago Herald* (November 21, 1914).


31 Winterer (2002), 152–78.


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34 See, just for a few selective examples, Classical Weekly 8 (1914), 42–3 and 69–70; Bangor (ME.) Commercial (January 23, 1915); The World’s Work (October 1917), 629–35; Classical Journal 13 (1918), 447–9; Classical Weekly (January 27, 1919), 99–102.

35 This tremendous enthusiasm was noted in, for example, the Atlantic Constitution (December 13, 1914).

36 As described, for example, in the San Francisco Bulletin (November 28, 1914).

37 Reported, for example, in George Kleine’s own publicity for the film.

38 Classical Weekly (May 8, 1915).

39 Such as at the Third Annual Conference of the Latin Teachers of Iowa held over March 4–5, 1921, and at the Classical Association Conference in Richmond, in April 1921.

40 This quotation, along with several others, appears as an endorsement of Caesar in the first edition of The Film Classic (ca. 1922), a newsletter produced by the Kleine company to advertise its own productions.

41 Exhibitors Trade Review (February 18, 1922).

42 See, for example, the New York Times (February 12, 1922): “It is doubtful whether [Caesar] has ever evoked half the enthusiasm as a textbook figure that he enjoyed in his screen embodiment. Does this, then, mean anything to the advocates, or the opponents, of visual education?”

43 Kleine publicity (n.d.); Motion Picture World (November 21, 1914).

44 Details of the special distribution and exhibition strategies employed for Julius Caesar can be found in the papers of the Kleine collection. I am very grateful to Christopher Wagstaff for drawing my attention to the commercial value of Caesar for the Kleine company.


46 See Bondanella (1987), 152–8 and 166–9; Miller (1990); Malamud (2000), (2001), and (in this volume). For Caesarism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century America, see the Afterword (in this volume).

47 Exhibitors Trade Review (February 18, 1922). Cf., for example, Boston (Mass.) Morning Globe (November 3, 1914) and the New York Dramatic Mirror (November 11, 1914).

48 For which see Wyke (1999b); Dunnett (in this volume).
According to La Fontaine, by defeating the Gauls Caesar had done them great honor. The sentiment that the Roman conquest had been to the advantage of the French was widespread and undisputed before 1789. Voltaire put it neatly: “uncivilized France needed to be subdued, and the Gauls were fortunate to be conquered by the Romans.” Nor was the Roman legacy to be rejected by the protagonists of the Revolution, all imbued with classical culture. The General who eventually transformed the young republic into an empire, Napoleon Bonaparte, was understandably an outspoken admirer of Caesar. He actually identified himself with the Roman dictator, and the comparison between the two soldiers and statesmen became a commonplace for both supporters and detractors of Napoleon’s regime long before the term “Caesarism” was coined by the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the comments on Caesar’s *Gallic War* that he dictated in his exile on St. Helena, Napoleon praised highly the political genius of the Roman leader; yet, in his mind, the campaigns in Gaul did not really provide absolute evidence of his military skill, since he had obviously had the advantage of a better-trained army and superior technology. Moreover, Napoleon openly criticized Caesar’s unjustified cruelty toward the vanquished enemy, as in the case of the inhabitants of Uxellodunum, who had their hands cut off on Caesar’s orders. Thus, in spite of the very high esteem in which Napoleon held his predecessor, he had serious reservations when it came to the conquest of Gaul. Nevertheless, he did not
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go so far as to extol those like Vercingetorix who resisted the Roman invaders as Gallic patriots.

This theme became manifest for the first time in the work of the historian Amedée Thierry. In the *Histoire des Gaulois* (published in 1828), the author, who shared the romantic enthusiasm of all European nations for their national past, duly exalted the bravery of the Gauls whom he perceived as ancient Frenchmen (whereas, nearly a century before in 1714, Nicolas Fréret had been imprisoned in the Bastille for having sung the praises of the Gallic fatherland). Thierry’s sympathy went to Brennus and, above all, to Caesar’s unfortunate antagonist, Vercingetorix. In fact, Thierry’s work – which went through a number of editions during the nineteenth century and exerted an enormous influence on novelists, playwrights, and politicians – established the cult of the first national hero, the forerunner of Jeanne d’Arc, to the detriment of Caesar, now the foreign aggressor.

It was at this point that Caesar’s image began to be tarnished. The great Jules Michelet, who in 1831 still attributed a positive role to Caesar, in later editions of his *Histoire de France* made a retraction. At the same time, Vercingetorix’s deeds were being increasingly emphasized in popular literature. A good example is provided by the *Veillées gauloises* by Jean-Louis Vincent (1839), where the sublime saga of the heroes of Alesia is delivered in installments to a village’s young people by their parson.

Another, much more influential work was *Les Mystères du peuple*, by Eugène Sue, author of the better-known *Les Mystères de Paris*. It started appearing as a feuilleton in 1849, but was conceived in the inflamed climate of 1848. For Sue, who did not conceal his progressive ideas, the Gauls were a people belonging to an oppressed class, victimized by foreign dominators, first the Romans and then the Franks. The Romans, in particular, are here said to have invaded Gaul “like the Prussians and the Cossacks in 1814.” As for Caesar, Sue blames him for insulting and abusing the unarmed Vercingetorix (obviously following Cassius Dio’s dramatic account of the latter’s surrender) and curses the Roman as the “coward executioner of a hero.” Brutus’ dagger is the just reward for the man who has strangled the freedom of so many peoples.

By 1852, however, France was an empire again, and a new Napoleon sat on the throne. The sovereign admired Caesar even more than his uncle did, as the two huge volumes which he devoted to his idol definitely prove. He tended to gloss over the conqueror’s atrocities, and saw the subjugation of Gaul as the manifest destiny of civilization.
the collaborators of the emperor, a major role was played by the famous novelist Prosper Merimée, who had himself begun writing a biography of Caesar as early as 1838 but never completed it.\(^6\) In the opposite camp, the poet Alphonse de Lamartine, a fierce republican, portrayed Caesar in 1856 as a demagogue and an execrable citizen.\(^7\)

However, while hunting with the hounds, Napoleon III could not avoid running with the hare. By sponsoring the archaeological quest for the site of Alesia, and unearthing that fateful theatre where the ultimate resistance of the Gauls had been played out, he helped to corroborate the myth of Vercingetorix. Caesar’s opponent, on the other hand, had already become so popular that it would have been a significant political mistake not to acknowledge the Gaul’s bravery and patriotism. Thus, whereas the *Histoire de Jules César* is a paper monument to the victor, the statue of Vercingetorix by Aimé Millet at Alesia (1867) – paid for by Napoleon out of his own pocket – is a bronze monument to the vanquished hero whom, not entirely coincidentally, the artist endowed with the emperor’s own features (figure 11.1).\(^8\)

Popular literature could afford to be less ambivalent than politics. In a dramatized verse history by Jean-Jacques Ampère (1859), Caesar appears in a rather poor light in comparison with Vercingetorix; in Michel-Antoine Girard (1863) Caesar is a brigand and an enemy of mankind, while A. Bréan (1864a, b) bluntly calls him “a murderer.”

Henri Martin, a very prolific author, consolidated across all his historical works the nationalistic connotation of Vercingetorix.\(^9\) In a drama devoted to the latter,\(^10\) he emphasized how Caesar resorted to the Germans in order to defeat the Gallic hero, who, in surrendering, foretold the fall of Rome under the assault of those same Germans. Loathing toward the “Latin adventurer,” whose memory is bound to be “buried under the mud of history,” is the leitmotif of a novel by Arthur Ponroy (1868). According to Bathild Bouniol (1869), Caesar is the merciless invader who fights the so-called barbarians with a taste for atrocities unknown to the barbarians themselves, whereas the Germans are mercenaries with no God or fatherland. ForHenri Bernard (1869), the Roman general is the representative of a wicked people, whose virtues were always against nature: the first Brutus slew his sons, the second murdered his father.

The trauma of the collapse of the empire, in 1870, could only reinforce these patriotic sentiments. More than ever, Caesar, now perceived as the forerunner of Moltke and Bismarck, is the embodiment of defeat and slavery. Félix Mahon (1882) explicitly equates the situation of Gaul
invaded by the Romans and Germans with that of France after Sedan. And if the Romans are the Prussians, Vercingetorix is Gambetta, the hero of the resistance. The patriotism of the Third Republic resumed Eugène Sue’s thesis: only a few of the Gaulish aristocracy were pro-Roman, the people were firmly anti-Roman. For the popular historian Lionel Bonnemère (1882), Caesar is a rascal who showed the “savage sons of Germany, the ancestors of the Prussians, the way to our fatherland.” In a portrait by the polemicist François Coppée (1880), this damning image of Caesar is condensed as follows:
Caesar was a monster of ambition, who uprooted the old Gallic oak to add a leaf to his triumphal crown and spill a lake of blood to dye with purple his imperial mantle. The millions of prisoners that he sold to slave traders remind us of the five billions paid [to the Prussians] at Strasbourg, and the Roman trumpets that ironically played Gallic marches under the ramparts of Alesia on the day of the surrender, of the German army that played the Marseillaise the evening of Sedan.

For Pierre-Louis Lemière (1881), “Caesar’s lies, insulting our ancestors, are not to be relied upon.” For Marc Bonnefoy (1884), “our duty is to curse Caesar and to exalt Vercingetorix.” Through this contempt for Caesar, the whole legacy of Rome was in fact rejected, while the above authors’ efforts aimed to dispute the idea that the Gauls were “Latin bastards,” as had been claimed. Caesar and Napoleon share the same damnation. For Paul-Émile Reveillère (1895), “the inevitable issue of the idolatry of Rome was Caesarism.”

In 1881 Italy joined the Triple Alliance. This instigated a wave of anti-Italian feeling that concerned, in retrospect, the whole history of France. Émile Lambin (1897) neatly summarized relations with Rome: “republican Rome crushed us, imperial Rome ruined us, pontifical Rome betrayed us, royal Rome of today allies herself with our worst enemies.” Popular literature quickly appropriated this theme. In Georges Bruno’s story for children Le Tour de France par deux enfants (1877), a book which subsequently went through countless editions and sold more than seven million copies, Caesar was depicted as Bismarck (the siege of Alesia was overtly compared to the siege of Paris, strangled by the Prussians), and Vercingetorix was portrayed as the brave hero who resisted the vicious intruder: “Ask yourselves, my children,” writes Bruno, “which one of these two men was the greatest? Would you like to have within yourselves the heroic soul of the young Gaul, defender of your ancestors, or the ambitious, insensitive soul of the Roman conqueror?” “Oh,” is the predictable answer, “I’d prefer to undergo all that Vercingetorix endured rather than be as cruel as Caesar!”

Bruno was actually the nom de plume of a woman, Madame Fouillé. Another female writer, Madame Richenet-Bayard (1903), herself from the Auvergne, turned the battle of Alesia into a token of revenge, not upon the Romans, but upon the eternal foe, the Germans. In the years immediately preceding World War I, the danger was perceived as once again imminent, and Vercingetorix’s glorious feats as commendably momentous, although “nowadays it is not the Roman to be feared: it is the Man
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of the North, the German.” As for Caesar, “his memory,” Richenet-Bayard maintained, “must inspire horror in honest republicans, since marching in his steps another talentless Caesar led France to catastrophe.” Similarly, for the erection of the bronze statue of Vercingetorix by Bartholdi at Clermont-Ferrand,11 the abbe Maries wrote a poem.12 A few lines suffice to make its message clear: “Why are you raising there this fierce horseman, whose fiery mount is stretching to spring? . . . Can you hear the giant roaring? Forward, Forward! Gauls, attack the Romans! Get out, you sons of the she-wolf; get out, you Germans!” A survey of contemporary history textbooks is also instructive. In a very popular textbook, written by Gauthier-Deschamps, the following questions are asked at the end of the chapter on the Roman conquest: “Why do you love Vercingetorix? Why do you not love Caesar?” Obviously, the right answers are abundantly suggested in the preceding pages.

The war of 1914 excited in France a paroxysm of nationalism. A reputable scholar, Jules Toutain (1916), in a book whose title – Héros et bandit. Vercingétorix et Arminius – speaks volumes, compares the Gallic and the German leaders and concludes that the latter has “the natural cruelty of the Germans, perfidy in preparation, cowardice in execution.” But what of Caesar? Caesar’s star is definitely on the wane at the dawn of twentieth-century France. In the scholarly context, this is largely due to an outstanding historian, Camille Jullian. In his early seminal essay,13 Caesar, far from showing a superior dignity in victory, proves his meanness in reproaching an unarmed Vercingetorix. But it is in the third volume of his major work on the history of Gaul that Jullian presents the most extensive indictment of Caesar: to the tremendous number of slaughtered and enslaved Gauls, Jullian adds the unnecessary massacres, acts of inhumanity, and robberies, and concludes:

he left no memory of his permanence in Gaul that deserves any esteem. No episode of goodness is attached to his legend. Neither courage nor weakness nor misfortune were to him causes of clemency . . . Now there is nothing for Caesar to worry about: once the treasures have been pillaged, the warriors slain, the lands devastated, the families destroyed, Gaul, exhausted, miserable, scared, will stir no more.14

No wonder that in Jullian’s outline of French history, De la Gaule à la France, Caesar is dismissed in a few lines as a “bandit.”15 A novel by Marius-Ary Leblond (1937) may be considered the literary equivalent
of this attitude. In addition to the charges of meanness, rapacity, and cruelty, the story once again stresses dramatically the nefarious effects of Caesar’s execrable alliance with the Germans. The book’s promotional advertisement even read: “When Germans and Romans united to fight Gaul.” Two years later France was invaded again by Germans, allied with Italians, and Marshal Pétain pretended to emulate Vercingetorix’s ultimate sacrifice to secure the survival of the nation. It is no surprise, therefore, that the pro-German Vichy regime had many statues of Vercingetorix melted down.

After World War II, Caesar and Rome’s conquest of Gaul might no longer be a hot political issue, but popular culture had not filed them away just yet. A novel by André Chamson (1958) imagines a situation when one day, out of the blue, newspapers, radio, and television announce that France no longer exists and must be replaced on all world maps by a country called Gaul. Twenty centuries of history have been erased. Caesar has never existed and Romanization has never taken place. The ambassador of the young nation, proudly parading a bronze winged helmet and long moustache, arrives in New York to occupy a seat at the United Nations. The civilized nations are shocked. They fear the spread of a contagious disease: would Italians become Etruscans, the English Picts, Peruvians Incas? In the end they understand: each country hides in itself its inner Gaul, each country can contribute to the world’s progress with its own energies and resources, regardless of any superimposed civilization.

The following year, in 1959, two cartoonists named Goscinny and Uderzo had a stroke of genius, and invented Asterix. He first appeared in the magazine Pilote, then, in 1961, in the first of his own albums: Asterix the Gaul. The twenty-eight other albums that have followed so far, not to mention the films, have earned the character and his cartoon fellows worldwide popularity. Caesar appears in no fewer than twenty-two albums.16 His features clearly recall those of his ancient iconography, but Uderzo’s pen accentuates the haughtiness and superciliousness.17 Of course, there is no place in Asterix’s humorous adventures for real cruelty; nevertheless, Caesar is represented as hot-tempered, irritable, vengeful, and, more often than not, enraged by the refusal of a bunch of invincible Gauls to acknowledge his power. The stories in fact take place after Alesia, when the whole country has been conquered. The scene of Vercingetorix’s surrender appears only in a flashback, which the authors, tickling their readers’ chauvinism, transform into scoffing slapstick: the
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hero throws down his weapons not at, but upon, Caesar’s feet, making the latter scream with pain. As for Asterix, while he mocks Caesar’s authority, he nonetheless takes it for granted. To the chief Abraracourcix who wonders: “Are we Roman? Since when?” he calmly replies: “since Julius conquered Gaul. He made a lot of commentaries about that!”

There is, however, a certain ambiguity in Asterix’s Caesar, for, while remaining basically a foreign foe, he is at the same time the prototype of the French emperor. The inevitable foreshadowing of Napoleon is humorously exploited, in particular, in the volume Asterix in Corsica. Here the Corsican chief Ocatarinétablatchitchix fiercely declares: “Tell Caesar that, whatever his ambitions, he will never be emperor. In order to make Corsicans accept an emperor, he must be a Corsican himself!” In general, in Asterix Caesar appears as the lesser evil in comparison to the Germans. In fact, Roman spears protect Gaul from the assaults of the Germans, even though the latter warn: “OK, we’re going . . . but we’ll be back!”

Other cartoonists are less good-humoured. In the series of Alix adventures, Jacques Martin has devoted an album to Caesar and Vercingetorix. Here Caesar is so cruel that he conceives the baroque idea of killing Vercingetorix’s son by having him pushed from a tower in his camp (in his megalomania, he wants to reenact the death of Astyanax at Troy). In the end, however, he changes his mind and decides to make a Roman of him, which is – one must suppose – a subtler form of revenge. In another cartoon version of Vercingetorix’s story, in the crucial scene of the Gallic chieftain’s surrender, inspired by a famous painting by Royer, Caesar neither acts nor speaks: he sits motionless, draped in a black cloak, with a bony face, hollow cheeks, and thin drawn lips, a sort of Count Dracula ante litteram.

A French book for children published as recently as 1999 proves that the prejudice against Caesar in Gaul is hard to extirpate: young readers are told that the Romans used to take Gallic children hostages, and “at the least annoyance, torture them!” It goes without saying that Caesar was victorious only thanks to the Germans. It seems that even nowadays French teachers are not ready to give up the negative image of Caesar handed down through so many generations.

Recently Christian Goudineau, professor of national antiquities at the Collège de France, published Le Dossier Vercingétorix, an excellent scholarly reappraisal of the whole problem of Romanization and resistance in Gaul. Goudineau puts the subject in a modern perspective, and tries to give Caesar what is Caesar’s. Yet immediately an indignant review
appeared on the Internet, written by a former officer and self-styled “Latinist” named M. Mourey from Bibracte. It summed up once again the massacres perpetrated by Caesar, and ended up wondering how the minister of culture, Madame Tasca, could tolerate such misbehavior at the Collège de France.

Nor is such an attitude confined to teachers and retired military personnel. A prime example is the film made by French Canadian director Jacques Dorfmann in 2000. Entitled *Vercingétorix*, the English and Italian versions appeared under the rather misleading title *Druids*. The script is based on a book by Anne de Leseluc, a novelist as well as a historian at CNRS. The Caesar outlined by Leseluc was not mean enough for the director, so two other professional screenwriters, Rospo Pallenberg and Norman Spinrad, were hired to make it absolutely clear who were the good guys and who were the bad. Vercingetorix had to be the courageous and blameless knight, and therefore we see none of the atrocities against his fellow-countrymen that Caesar records: the putting out of eyes, the amputations, and the stakes are ignored as enemy propaganda. Caesar, on the other hand, is charged with the cruelty and treachery to which he himself admits in his commentaries, plus a bonus accorded by the filmmakers, who draw partly on the repertoire we have examined so far, and partly on their own imagination. Thus we see Caesar luring the Gallic chieftains to invade Britain, then learn that he will not be going himself: he just wants cynically to dispose of them. He opens his speech by reminding the Gauls that it was he who liberated them from the Germans. In fact he says “from the Teutons,” as they are referred to throughout the film, perhaps because “Germans” would sound politically incorrect to a contemporary audience.

Caesar is played by Klaus Maria Brandauer, the Austrian actor who has specialized in playing villains and tyrants (he played Nero in Franco Rossi’s 1985 television version of *Quo Vadis*?), and he makes Caesar as perfidious as the screenwriters could have wished. Although Brandauer can act perfectly well in English, in this film he is dubbed, in obedience to the rule that in historical films Roman aristocrats must speak with an upper-class English accent. The positive hero, on the other hand, preferably has an American accent, and such is indeed the case here, where Vercingetorix is played by French American actor Christophe Lambert.

The authors emphasize Caesar’s narcissism, greed (an interview conducted by Caesar with Roman bankers is clearly reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht’s *Die Geschäfte der Herrn Julius Cäsar*), and political shrewdness. To
Figure 11.2  Vercingétorix se rendant au Camp de César (1886) by Henri-Paul Motte. Le Puy, Musée Crozatier. Courtesy of Cranston Fine Arts
make his portrait even darker, the film does not hesitate to ascribe to Caesar a crime he could hardly have been responsible for: the murder of Celtill, the father of Vercingetorix. Celtill was executed by his brother Gobannitio in 60 BCE, two years before Caesar arrived in Gaul. However, this anachronism is instrumental to the plot, since it is the discovery of this alleged treachery by his former friend and protector thatprovokes the hero to take up arms against him. The film also insists on the nationalistic topos of the Germans – here the Teutons – as responsible for the defeat of the Gauls. At one point Vercingetorix considers using the Germans against Caesar’s army, but the dialogue makes it clear that the Gauls hate them even more than they hate the Romans. By contrast, Caesar is completely devoid of scruples, and on a dark night a deadly pact is made on the banks of the Rhine. No word is spoken. Only the gold speaks. The suggested atmosphere is that of conspiracy, or a mafia summit.

As a result, it is the German cavalry – Caesar’s secret weapon – that decides the battle of Alesia. The final scene closely follows the famous painting by Henri-Paul Motte (figure 11.2) and brings vividly to life the nationalistic tradition outlined in this chapter.27 The brave hero does not disgrace himself, but, dignified in his distress, dwarfs the conqueror. The glance that Caesar gives at one point admits his own defeat. Caesar may have vanquished Vercingetorix, but he has failed to conquer the Gauls, and it is not without significance that the film’s last words are neither for Caesar, who did not long outlive his victim, nor for Vercingetorix, but for the people, nos ancêtres les Gaulois. In the film’s final frame an epigraph to Vercingetorix reads: “He did not win the Gallic war, but for the first time he had united all the people, who still live on today in our memory.”

NOTES

1 Cited in Simon (1989), 102. To this outstanding work I am much indebted.
2 Momigliano (1956).
3 Poignault (1985).
4 Momigliano (1956), 224.
5 Napoleon III (1865–6).
6 Gabba (1956); Annequin (1996).
7 Momigliano (1956), 223.
9 Especially in Martin (1854–9).
10 Martin (1856).
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12 Maries (1903).
13 Jullian (1901).
14 Jullian (1909), 569.
15 Jullian (1922).
16 Martin (1985). See also the online version (with more illustrations) at www.idee-k.com/historiart/asterix.html (accessed January 31, 2005).
17 As in some commercial posters of the early twentieth century: see Vercingétorix et Alésia (1994), 373, no. 349.
20 Zarka (1999), 20.
22 Goudineau (2001). I have benefited greatly from reading it.
24 On Caesar and the cinema in general, see Siarri (1985); Dumont (1998), 149ff.
25 Vercingétorix, la Légende du Druide Roi/Druids, France, Canada. Co-starring Max von Sydow (the Druid Guttuart) and Inès Sastre (Epona).
Part V
Theatrical Performance
This chapter is an attempt to explore the question of appropriations of the figure of Julius Caesar in the context of Shakespeare’s play of 1599 (a singularly uncontentious, “clean” text deriving solely from the 1623 Folio).¹ If it is a truism to say that, at least in the English-speaking world, the popular cultural conception of Julius Caesar is inextricably bound up with Shakespeare’s play, that Shakespeare’s play is the single most influential work in shaping the public imagination of this historical figure, the question of how the play itself figures Caesar (in other words, how it accommodates, how it harbors, provokes, and also resists different appropriations) remains powerfully enigmatic. What is going on when the nominally central character of a play (the character after whom it is named) is dead before the halfway point (3.1.77)? Is Caesar good or bad? Is the central character of the play not rather Brutus, in any case? And what is the significance of Caesar’s Ghost? As Mildred Hartsock once remarked: “Every [Shakespeare] play has its problems; but [in the case of Julius Caesar] we cannot even agree upon who the central character is or whether, whoever he is, he is good or bad, or whether the play as a whole has any semblance of unity or clarity.”²

In an essay entitled “Accents yet unknown: Canonization and the claiming of Julius Caesar,” Michael Dobson makes a compelling case for the crucial significance of the figure of Caesar in the historical process of the
canonization of Shakespeare. At issue here is nothing less than the way in which Shakespeare’s plays historically shift to what Dobson calls “a status ‘above’ politics” (21). He argues that this process of canonization involves two different kinds of appropriation. From the late seventeenth and through the eighteenth centuries there was, Dobson contends, “a trend away from adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays which present them in the light of contemporary politics . . . towards alternative forms of appropriation which present contemporary politics in the light of Shakespeare’s plays” (21). My concern in the following pages is with how *Julius Caesar* makes these different sorts of appropriation possible. In other words, I want to consider the singularly fluid, but also the cryptic and enigmatic, qualities of Shakespeare’s play, insofar as these seem to encourage but also resist, put off, or overflow such appropriations. I want to argue that *Julius Caesar* is not only about the use and abuse of history (most explicit perhaps in Shakespeare’s extraordinary exploitations of anachronism), but also, and more pointedly, about the use and abuse of the future. In this way I seek to elaborate a new reading of the politics of *Julius Caesar*.

At the heart of this reading will be an attempt to illuminate the notion of what Jacques Derrida has referred to as “the democracy to come.” This notion is linked to that of modern democracy but differs from any conventional thinking of the political insofar as it is committed to a thinking of democracy as “an endless promise.” It is not endless in a negative sense (“promises, promises”), as if the fact that democracy is never fully realized could be construed as a basis for undermining or even doing away with it. Rather, it is a question of trying to be faithful to what Derrida calls “the being-promise of a promise.” As he writes in *Politics of Friendship*:

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence insofar as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept.

The “democracy to come” is closely bound up with other important aspects of Derrida’s later work, in particular the idea of a “New International” (explicitly in the spirit of a certain reading of Marx) and new ways of thinking about the “politics of friendship” (above all, in ways
that would not ultimately conform to the homo-fraternal: think, for instance, current US president and his cronies, or US president and British prime minister).7

At the same time, Derrida’s concern is to affirm and elaborate a thinking of political freedom that has, as he makes clear, intimate connections with the kind of freedom of expression or freedom of speech associated with the concept of literature.8 Nowhere, we could suggest, is the radically open and many-voiced character of literature more palpable than in the writing of Shakespeare. What Derrida says of politics might also serve as the basis for a model of literary criticism, and in particular of how to approach the reading of a work such as Julius Caesar. As he comments, in wryly peremptory fashion: “the only politics” that he “would absolutely condemn is one which, directly or indirectly, cuts off the possibility of an essentially interminable questioning, that is, an effective and thus transforming questioning.”9 Finally, it should be stressed that Derrida’s notion of the “democracy to come” is not a turning away from the past or from history: on the contrary, the “effective and transforming questioning” he evokes is deeply bound up with trying to acknowledge the ways in which “reading,” “politics,” and “literature,” for example, are haunted. There is no “democracy to come” without attending to the power of ghosts and spectrality. Whence the special interest here in trying to read Julius Caesar.

Michael Dobson offers a valuable account of what he calls the “irresistible impulse” (especially in the early eighteenth century) to identify “the figure of Shakespeare the Author [with] the image of Caesar’s ghost” (23). The identification between Shakespeare and Caesar’s Ghost is provoking in at least two ways. First, because the figure of the Ghost in Shakespeare generates feelings of deep uncertainty concerning the question of how it (or, perhaps, “he”) should be read. What does the Ghost want? What does it mean? How does one respond to it? These are the sorts of “anxiety of reading” provoked by Caesar as Ghost. And what goes for Caesar’s Ghost would implicitly go also for Shakespeare’s play as a whole, for how we read “Shakespeare.” How should we think about the inferred correspondence between the ghostly authority and influence of Caesar, on the one hand, and that of Shakespeare, on the other? Second, and conjoined with this, how is the figure of the Ghost linked to the sorts of disturbances of temporality that seem to characterize this play? And in what ways do such disturbances affect a political reading of this work?
These may sound like complicated and perhaps also oblique questions; but Shakespeare’s masterpiece is a complicated and in many ways oblique play. Indeed, I think it is necessary to add at least one further angle to the ghostly picture. To explore Shakespeare’s presentation or representation of Caesar and to elaborate a political reading of *Julius Caesar*, I believe that we need to consider the place of an apparently quite different character in the play, namely, the unfortunate man known as Cinna the poet. This is a character about whom Michael Dobson’s essay, for example, remains strikingly silent, and yet he is, I will argue, crucial to an understanding of how Shakespeare encourages us to think about Caesar and about his assassination. The significance of Cinna has to do, in the first place, with the fact that he is a poet. The Plebeians who assault him in 3.3 are initially inclined to do so because they think he is another Cinna, in other words, one of the conspirators. But when Cinna tries to remonstrate and explain that he is innocent, the Plebeians don’t seem to care: Cinna is apparently going to be torn to pieces in any case, indeed torn to pieces *on account of the very fact that he is a poet*. It is significant, as I will try to show, that Cinna is not murdered on stage and indeed that, in contrast to the account in Plutarch on which Shakespeare draws, we never hear exactly what happens to him; but Cinna’s apparent or threatened fate clearly identifies him with Caesar. The scene in which Cinna is confronted by the Plebeians is an obvious and deeply resonant replaying of the scene in which Caesar himself is confronted by the conspirators. What this identification in turn prompts us to think about is the seemingly obvious – yet very frequently ignored or overlooked – fact that Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is the work of a poet. To follow these links between Caesar and Cinna, and between Caesar’s Ghost and Shakespeare, is to engage with the power of *Julius Caesar* as poetic writing, as a work of dramatic poetry. In a celebrated essay first published in 1823, Thomas De Quincey remarked of the experience of reading Shakespeare: “the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident.” In the spirit of De Quincey, I shall be trying to attend in particular to the strange effects of a single word, the poetry and sound-effects of “to.”

How are we to murder the poet today? Tear him to pieces?

“Today”: what a word, already in pieces. “To”: to day. “Today,” that is to say this, now, these “present times,” this “today” that is a double word, prepositionally a bit mad, touched by “to” as toward, in the direction of,
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as far as, until, at, for, of, before, before the hour of, this “today” is perhaps not yet. What is the place, if there is one, of this “to”? What is this “to” that marks time, in English, from Shakespeare to this day? How to hear “to” in the democracy to come? “In question, when it comes to the ‘democracy to come,’” is “something that remains to be thought,” Derrida declares, “not something that is certain to happen tomorrow, not the democracy (national or international, state or trans-state) of the future, but a democracy that must have the structure of a promise – and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now.”11 It is a question of another thinking and experience of time.

“What is’t o’clock?” (2.2.114, 2.4.23). As Hélène Cixous remarks in her extraordinary essay “What is it o’clock?,” this is the question at the heart of Julius Caesar.12 “What, Lucius, ho! / I cannot by the progress of the stars / Give guess how near to day” (2.1.1–3). Brutus’ words, their curiously unfinished syntax, mark the uncertain beginning of the great “orchard scene.” How near “to day” is this now? Is this today? “Today” is the day of murder, of what is planned, feared, waited for. Calpurnia, Caesar’s wife, tells him: “You shall not stir out of your house today” (2.2.9). “What say the augurers?” asks Caesar. To which his servant replies: “They would not have you to stir forth today” (2.2.37–8). “Do not go forth today” (2.2.50), Calpurnia insists: “We’ll send Mark Antony to the Senate House / And he shall say you are not well today” (2.2.52–3). Caesar appears to have decided: “tell [the senators] I will not come today . . . / I will not come today. Tell them so, Decius” (2.2.62, 64).

At the end of 2.2, Caesar says:

I am to blame to be thus waited for.
Now, Cinna, now, Metellus. What, Trebonius,
I have an hour’s talk in store for you.
Remember that you call on me today. (2.2.119–22)

As Marvin Spevack observes, “blame” here is perhaps an adjective: the First Folio (1623) has “too blame.”13 How much to blame is Caesar to be thus waited for? “Remember . . . today”: the “to” of “today” signals motion toward, at the same time as excess, hyperbole, exorbitance. Of the movement from “to” to “too,” E. A. Abbott concludes: ‘The transition from the meaning of progressive motion to that of ‘increasingly’ or ‘excessively,’ and from ‘excessively’ to the modern ‘to excess,’ is too natural to require more than mention.”14 “To” is “too natural.” “Too”:
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untranslatable hyperbole, supplement or addition invisible in Shakespearean English. “Too,” as Abbott notes, “is only an emphatic form of ‘to’ . . . [It] is often spelt ‘to’ by Elizabethan writers (Sonnets 38, 86); and conversely, ‘too’ is found for ‘to’ (Sonnets 56, 135)” (§73). Thus, in Sonnet 56, “today” is “too daie”: “although too daie thou fill/Thy hungrie eies.”15 There is a “to”-effect to Julius Caesar. “To”: how to translate?

“The time is out of joint.” Derrida suggests that, in saying this, Hamlet “thereby opened one of those breaches, often they are poetic and thinking peepholes [meurtrières], through which Shakespeare will have kept watch over the English language and at the same time signed its body, with the same unprecedented stroke of some arrow” (SM 18). Peggy Kamuf translates “meurtrières” as “peepholes”: one might also think of “murderesses” and “murder-holes.” “To” would, perhaps, be a murder-hole. “Meurtrière” appears already to generate a sense of strangeness, to do with an act (the act of murdering) that is prescribed but has perhaps not (yet) taken place.16 Julius Caesar gives us to question the time, the time of today as the time of murder: when does Caesar die?

Brutus Let me see, let me see, is not the leaf turned down
Where I left reading? Here it is, I think.

Enter the Ghost of Caesar

How ill this taper burns! Ha, who comes here?
I think it is the weakness of my eyes
That shapes this monstrous apparition.
It comes upon me. Art thou any thing?
Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,
That mak’st my blood cold and my hair to stare?
Speak to me what thou art.

Ghost Thy evil spirit, Brutus.

Brutus Why com’st thou?

Ghost To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi.

Brutus Well, then I shall see thee again?

Ghost Ay, at Philippi.

Brutus Why, I will see thee at Philippi then.

[Exit Ghost] (4.3.273–87)

For Brutus, in this passage, the act of reading would appear to belong to the time of the ghost: it is as if reading can call up a ghost. (The book, with its “leaf turned down,” is itself of course a ghostly Shakespearean
anachronism.) How does Caesar’s ghost affect our understanding of Caesar’s assassination? The appearance of Caesar as ghost can be readily construed, at least in part, as a manifestation of guilt, the return of the repressed, the insisting symptom of an ultimately unrepressible crime. The authority of the dead leader lives on. As Freud makes clear in *Totem and Taboo*, the male leader or father-figure who has been murdered by the primal horde is in certain respects more powerful dead than when he was alive. This logic pervades the second half of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. It is hauntingly significant, first of all, that in his great funeral speech Antony continues to address Caesar as though he were still listening: “That I did love thee, Caesar, O, ‘tis true” (3.1.194). Similarly, it is notable that the famous line “Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war” is spoken by Antony but projected as being in the voice of “Caesar’s spirit” (3.1.270–3). The “spirit” or “ghost” of Caesar is already speaking in 3.1. Cassius also makes clear the disquieting, enduring power of the dead. As he puts it at one point: “When Caesar lived, he durst not thus have moved me” (4.3.58).

But it is Brutus who is most obviously spooked. In a sense the time of the assassination of Caesar never ends: Brutus is an intriguing precursor of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in this respect. What’s done is done, and as a result everything is undone. What’s done is done, and yet the effects can never be trammeled up. Brutus is like one of those characters Freud elsewhere talks about as “wrecked by success”: he manages to do the very thing he is apparently most driven to do (kill Caesar), yet quickly discovers he cannot cope with the consequences of this success. Moreover, Brutus seems to be markedly affected by the insidious force of what Freud calls “deferred obedience,” in other words the paradoxical process by which someone attempts to refuse, evade, or overturn the influence or authority of another (especially a parental figure) but ends up conforming to it, acting it out, in this case in the most deadly (suicidal) fashion. Like Antony, Brutus continues to address Caesar, even (or especially) when he is dead: “O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet, / Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords / In our own proper entrails” (5.3.94–6). Everything leads inexorably to Brutus’ resonant final words, another apostrophe to the dead Caesar, as he runs on his own sword: “Caesar, now be still, / I killed not thee with half so good a will” (5.5.51–2).

Jacques Derrida looks to *Hamlet* in order to think about the legacies of Marxism in the “new world order” following the end of the Cold War, and to illustrate and explore his notions of haunting and spectrality, the
democracy to come, the New International, and so on: “The time is out of joint” is the epigraph that watches over *Spectres of Marx* and comes back, as a kind of ghostly refrain, in numerous other texts as well. 21 *Julius Caesar* is an especially provoking play in this respect. Indeed, in its staging of questions of friendship, tyranny, and the destruction of the Roman Republic, the mob, the epitaph or funeral speech, the power of spirits and spectrality, and what Derrida has termed “the homo-fraternal and phallogocentric schema” (*PF* 306), *Julius Caesar* might appear to offer a more obvious focus for the exploration of Derrida’s concerns. But before anything else, *Julius Caesar* is a sort of sister-play to *Hamlet* in its out of jointness by the clock. “Indeed, it is a strange-disposèd time” (1.3.33), observes Cicero, letting this “disposèd” sound in at least doubly antithetical fashion. “Disposed” means both “inclined” (time anthropomorphized, as if in a strange affair of internal time consciousness) and “settled” or “ordered” (time as what we might call external, spatialized, objective). Cicero’s formulation suggests how “disposèd” is already strange to itself: the posing is at once a disposing, placing a dis-placing, time apart from itself, time (in) pieces.

The insane anachronism of the clock in *Julius Caesar*. This medieval invention that strikes in 2.1 is one of Shakespeare’s most dramatic, metadramatic anachronisms. 22 It takes us to the heart perhaps of what Derrida has called the stroke [le coup], the “unprecedented stroke of some arrow” (*SM* 18), the “stroke of genius,” “the signature of the Thing ‘Shakespeare’” (*SM* 22). What is this Shakespearean stroke, this coup of the signature of the poet? What is the time of this coup de théâtre? What is’t o’clock?

**Clock strikes**

**BRUTUS** Peace, count the clock.

**CASSIUS** The clock hath stricken three.

**TREBONIUS** ’Tis time to part.

**CASSIUS** But it is doubtful yet
Whether Caesar will come forth today or no. (2.1.192–4)

The anachronism of the Elizabethan clock in ancient Rome strikes the note of artifice, of that “contretemps of ironic consciousness” that Derrida detects elsewhere in Shakespeare. 23 We might link this to Thomas M. Greene’s contention that “[a] text that somehow acknowledges its historicity self-consciously would seem better fitted to survive its potential estrangement than a text that represses history.” 24
Caesar, then, will have been Shakespeare’s anachronism. This anachronicity is at least double. On the one hand, it has to do with the Ghost, “his” ghost, the ghost or spirit of Caesar: the ghost is always a figure of anachronism; anachronism inevitably summons up a sense of the ghostly. On the other hand, and at the “same” strangely disposed time, the anachronicity of Caesar involves the way in which Shakespeare’s play appears to identify him with Christ. The Christification of Caesar is suggested perhaps above all in the context of Calpurnia’s dream and the Christian typology of Caesar’s blood. As Decius tells him, this dream “Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck / Reviving blood and that great men shall press / For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance” (2.2.87–9). The editors of the Norton Shakespeare gloss the final line: “Heraldic colours and emblems (‘tinctures,’ ‘stains,’ and ‘cognizance’); venerated properties of saints (‘tinctures,’ ‘stains,’ and ‘relics’).”25 These lines have generated much critical discussion and speculative elaboration. Thus, for example, David Kaula has argued that the account of Calpurnia’s dream is strongly suggestive of “the medieval cult of the Holy Blood, which featured not only the proliferation of phials of Christ’s blood but also stories about bleeding statues and paintings of Christ.”26 And in another essay focusing on blood in Julius Caesar, Gail Kern Paster observes: “Caesar, as Decius Brutus anticipates, responds positively to this sacerdotal image of himself (perhaps even becoming a victim of witty anachronism on Shakespeare’s part in Caesar’s ignorance of basic Christian typology about the self-sacrificial nature of the Christ he is made to resemble here).”27

Shakespeare sets his play, with the assassination of Caesar at its heart, in a time of its own, a time out of time, a jangling, strange-disposed multiplicity of times. Shakespearean anachronism inscribes its own ghostly “to come,” at once affirming and submitting to the incalculable and “unknown.” Thus Cassius remarks of the assassination: “How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown!” (3.1.111–13). Phyllis Rackin comments that at this moment “Shakespeare’s English audience would have been reminded of their situation in the playhouse and the actors’ status as actors representing an event that had taken place so long ago that even the English language the actors were in fact speaking was yet unknown.” She suggests that an anachronistic moment such as this “invades the time-frame of the audience . . . its effect is no less striking than that of a character stepping off the stage to invade the audience’s physical space or addressing them
directly to invade their psychological space.” Rackin foregrounds the disruptive and dislocating effects of anachronisms: they “can dissolve the distance between past events and present audience in the eternal present of dramatic performance.” But the terms of this claim raise other questions: to whom does she think she is addressing these words? And what is this “eternal present” to which she refers? Shakespeare’s play evokes, reacts to, and enacts a sense of time as constitutively double, and as engaging with a kind of “experience of the impossible.” We cannot vouch for “states unborn and accents yet unknown” any more than could Shakespeare’s first audiences and first readers. *Julius Caesar* suggests that there is no present that is not in some way beside itself, at once anachronistic and subject to a deathly logic of repeatability. Having assassinated Caesar, the conspirators cry out: “Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!” (3.1.78), but the cry is already doubled, theatrical, an iteration, crying out to be cried out. The theatrical and metatheatrical run together. Cinna: “Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets” (3.1.78–9); Cassius: “Some to the common pulpits, and cry out, ‘liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!’” (3.1.80–1); Brutus: “Let’s all cry, ‘Peace, freedom, and liberty!’” (3.1.110).

For Phyllis Rackin, there appear to be two sorts of present, each implicitly pure and distinguishable from the other and from any other. On the one hand there is the “eternal present of dramatic performance”; on the other hand, we are told that Shakespeare’s “plebeian characters” in particular “belong to the ephemeral present moment of theatrical performance, the modern, and socially degraded, world of the Renaissance public theatre.” If it is difficult to see how these distinctions between different modes of “the present” can be rigorously sustained, Rackin’s account is nevertheless indicative of a more general presentism characteristic of Shakespearean criticism and historiography. *Julius Caesar* leads us forth into an impossible experience of anachronism, into an encounter with the deathly machine-like power of repetition, and into an apprehension of the unknown and unheard of. There is no simple single present in this play. The Plebeians or “tag-rag people,” as Casca calls them, are always already “in the theatre” (1.2.252–4). Shakespeare’s poetry cries out for another thinking of what we are here trying to explore under the rubric of the “strange-disposèd time” of his “poetic or thinking peepholes.”

“Tear him to pieces.”

It is a matter of poetry, after all. It is a matter of trying to reckon with the force of Shakespeare’s play as poetry. What is going on when we
speak of loving Shakespeare’s work? Why might it still seem apposite ("after" new historicism, deconstructionism, postmodernism, post-theory, and whatever other post-isms and post-post-isms) to talk of Shakespeare’s (ghostly) genius and of his poetry as a kind of incredible gift? What is going on in the desire to read and know his work, even to the point of wanting to learn it by heart (the basis, after all, of every performance of Julius Caesar)? What is this thing called poetry? Jacques Derrida has made a memorable attempt to respond to the last of these questions in particular, in a brief text entitled “Che cos’è la poesia?” For Derrida the poem says, in effect, tear me to pieces – “destroy me” (227). It says: “Eat, drink, swallow my letter, carry it, transport it in you” (229). In Derrida’s elliptical but brilliantly provocative essay, the word “poetry” itself becomes radically displaced, first by the term “poetic,” then by the neologism of the “poematic” (233). The poematic might entail a single word or (in so many pieces) the entire text of a Shakespeare play. The poematic is characterized by a desire to “learn by heart.” It involves the logic and experience of what Derrida calls the “demon of the heart.” He writes: “This ‘demon of the heart’ never gathers itself together, rather it loses itself and goes astray (delirium or mania), it exposes itself to chance, it would rather let itself be torn to pieces by what bears down upon it” (235). You want to make a word, a name, a line, a play your own, you love it, you want to have it in your heart, by heart, but this is possible only by acknowledging that logic of repeatability according to which “learning by heart” is never simply and purely distinguishable from “learning by rote.” The capacity for “reproducing the beloved trace” is necessarily confided “to a certain exteriority of the automaton” (231), a machine-like and deathly repeatability.

Derrida affirms a demonic poematic or poematic demonization, the madness of the poem, which is also to say a notion of poetry as gift. How might we try to think the “gift of the poem” (227, 235) in the context of Julius Caesar? If a poem is experienced as a gift, this is also a madness, without reason. As Derrida says elsewhere regarding the enigmatic experience of a gift: “There is no reason for there ever to be the least gift.” A gift is always “immoderate,” “excessive in advance.” Moreover a gift “must remain unforeseeable,” out of the blue: it must “appear” as “chancy.” “Che cos’è la poesia?” is written in the second person (“tu”). It addresses itself to you, regarding the time of a signature and its dispersion, a certain “now” which would call for the experience of an unforeseeable “to come”: in French “désormais” (a word Derrida elsewhere describes as “one of the most beautiful, and one of the most untranslatable, words
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... in the French language”), in English “henceforth,” “henceforward,” “from now on.” Derrida writes: “You will call poem from now on [my emphasis] a certain passion of the singular mark, the signature that repeats its dispersion, each time beyond the logos, a human, barely domestic, not reappropriable into the family of the subject” (235).

No Julius Caesar, no Shakespeare, no drama without “learning by heart,” we could say, but also no love of Julius Caesar, no sense of Shakespeare’s genius, no chance of trying to think the play as gift, without opening oneself to what is beyond reason, to the absolutely unforeseeable, to what can never be appropriated by an “I” or subject. From now on.

It is a question of a “political” translation” (a translation into and of the political, a new sense of the political) that would twist the “history of friendship,” a “scansion,” as Derrida names it, “which would have introduced dissymmetry, separation and infinite distance in a Greek philía [friendship] which did not tolerate them but nevertheless called for them” (PF 232). The democracy to come is “a matter of thinking an alterity without hierarchical difference at the root of democracy”: “this democracy would free a certain interpretation of equality by removing it from the phallogocentric schema of fraternity” (PF 232). The question of poetry, the poetic or poematic offers, perhaps, a way of scanning this “political” translation. Speaking of rhyme, of “the insane linking [appariement, ‘matching,’ ‘mating,’ ‘coupling’] of a couple,” Derrida notes that “a friendship should always be poetic. Before being philosophical, friendship concerns the gift of the poem” (PF 166). Before engaging with what Julius Caesar might be explicitly analyzing with regard to questions of monarchy, democracy, republicanism, and a well-established view of Rome as “the best historical model of the mixed regime,” it would be a matter of trying to construe the logic of multiple voices that is the condition of any such engagement. Before encountering the apparent division of social space into public and private, a division on which (as Richard Halpern stresses) all classical political theory has relied, there is the question of what Derrida calls “writing in the voice,” its “differential vibration,” together with a sense of what might be named dramaturgic telepathy or iteraphonics. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will try to elaborate on this last idea in particular, in other words concerning the strange ways in which Julius Caesar recites, composes, and disposes itself in the dramatic effects of many voices (including, perhaps, “accents yet unknown”). Julius Caesar would thus perhaps open to another thinking of writing and “the political,” to some new space of inventiveness, to that
“call to come” which, as Derrida evokes it in the polyphonic drama of quotation marks at the end of “Psyche: Inventions of the Other,” “happens only in multiple voices.”

What are we to make of that singular interweaving and proliferation of voices in Shakespeare, above all in the crucial association (which we stressed at the outset) between Caesar and Cinna the poet?

Where will *Julius Caesar* have begun? As Samuel Weber shows in an admirable recent essay on “uncanny thinking,” the uncanny (strange familiarity) and the theatrical belong together. He writes: “A theatrical scenario . . . never takes place ‘once and for all’ but rather ‘one scene at a time.’ It is singular and yet repetitive, ongoing and yet never complete. It is both nearby and distant, familiar and strange.” But can we even speak of “‘one scene at a time,’” a phrase that Weber is careful to put in quotation marks? We have perhaps not yet begun to take the measure of the strange dispositions of language in Shakespeare’s work. We require another vocabulary, new “concepts” to elaborate what is going on where, for example, criticism has for so many years, even centuries, talked about “mirror scenes in Shakespeare,” larger scenes “in miniature” or “vignette,” one speech or phrase or character or episode “echoing” another.

Here is Act 3 scene 3, what is often referred to as “the Cinna episode.” The location is a street in Rome:

*Enter Cinna the poet, and after him the plebeians*

*Cinna the poet* I dreamt tonight that I did feast with Caesar, And things unluckily charge my fantasy. I have no will to wander forth of doors, Yet something leads me forth.

1 Plebeian What is your name?
2 Plebeian Whither are you going?
3 Plebeian Where do you dwell?
4 Plebeian Are you a married man or a bachelor?
2 Plebeian Answer every man directly.
1 Plebeian Ay, and briefly.
4 Plebeian Ay, and wisely.
3 Plebeian Ay, and truly, you were best.
*Cinna the poet* What is my name? Whither am I going? Where do I dwell? Am I a married man or a bachelor? Then to answer every man directly and briefly, wisely and truly. Wisely I say I am a bachelor.
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2 PLEBEIAN That’s as much as to say they are fools that marry. You’ll bear me a bang for that, I fear. Proceed directly.

CINNA THE POET Directly I am going to Caesar’s funeral.

1 PLEBEIAN As a friend or an enemy?

CINNA THE POET As a friend.

2 PLEBEIAN That matter is answered directly.

4 PLEBEIAN For your dwelling – briefly.

CINNA THE POET Briefly, I dwell by the Capitol.

3 PLEBEIAN Your name, sir, truly.

CINNA THE POET Truly, my name is Cinna.

1 PLEBEIAN Tear him to pieces, he’s a conspirator.

CINNA THE POET I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.

4 PLEBEIAN Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.

CINNA THE POET I am not Cinna the conspirator.

4 PLEBEIAN It is no matter, his name’s Cinna. Pluck but his name out of his heart and turn him going.

3 PLEBEIAN Tear him, tear him! Come, brands ho, firebrands! To Brutus’, to Cassius’, burn all! Some to Decius’ house, and some to Casca’s, some to Ligarius’! Away, go!

Exeunt all the Plebeians [forcing out Cinna]

In Romeo and Juliet, Romeo remarks of his name: “Had I it written, I would tear the word” (2.1.99). But the name can only be plucked out of your heart. In the name of the name (not only “Cinna” but also “the poet”), Cinna is to be torn to pieces. In North’s translation of Plutarch (from which Shakespeare is borrowing here) we read:

But there was a poet called Cinna, who had been no partaker of the conspiracy but was alway one of Caesar’s chiefest friends. He dreamed, the night before, that Caesar bade him to supper with him and that, he refusing to go, Caesar was very importunate with him and compelled him, so that at length he led him by the hand into a great dark place, where, being marvellously afraid, he was driven to follow him in spite of his heart. This dream put him all night into a fever. And yet, notwithstanding, the next morning when he heard that they carried Caesar’s body to burial, being ashamed not to accompany his funerals, he went out of his house, and thrust himself into the press of the common people that were in a great uproar. And because some one called him by his name, Cinna, the people thinking he had been that Cinna who in an oration he made had spoken
very evil of Caesar, they falling upon him in their rage slew him outright in
the market-place."42

North’s Plutarch goes on to state that the “fickle and unconstant multi-
tude” had “torn poor Cinna the poet in pieces.”43 “In pieces” or “to
pieces”? Shakespeare prefers “to” – “Tear him to pieces, he’s a conspira-
tor.” But Shakespeare also keeps to a strangely shadowy now; he hollows
out and encrypts it, we might say. From now on. The poet is to be torn to
pieces, perhaps. The tearing to pieces is to come. We never hear anything
more of the poet.44 But we also will never have heard about anything
else. Such would be the “strange-disposèd time” in which the poet is to
be torn to pieces. From Orpheus to Cinna and beyond, the poet is to be
torn to pieces. But this “to be torn to pieces” is also, already, traced or
haunted by the “strange-disposèd time” of the murder of Caesar.

Norman N. Holland remarks that “Cinna’s death serves as an echo to
Caesar’s” and argues that “[t]he Cinna episode, as a miniature of Cae-
sar’s death, identifies Brutus’ motives with those of the mob and estab-
lishes the attitude of the play toward the assassination.”45 We categorize
it by Act and scene number (3.3: is it by chance, I wonder, that the
Christological 33 imprints itself here, just as Shakespeare’s Caesar, unlike
Suetonius’ or Plutarch’s, is said to have “three and thirty wounds”
[5.1.53]?). It is termed “episode,” “miniature,” or even (in the phrasing of
Frank Kermode) “a little insertion.”46 Holland speaks of Cinna’s death
“echoing” Caesar’s and “establish[ing] the attitude of the play toward
[this] assassination.” While broadly agreeing with Holland’s argument
here, I also think that things are stranger, more complex and cryptic than
his wording might suggest. The “to be torn to pieces” of Cinna directs us
to an experience of what we might call (borrowing a resonant phrase
from Samuel Weber) “theatrical derangement.”47 At issue is a ghostly
composite figuration of Caesar with Cinna with Shakespeare. “Then to
answer”: What is the name? What is your destination? Where do you
come from? What are the politics of Julius Caesar? Answer directly, an-
swer all of these questions at once, briefly, wisely, and truly.

How “to answer”? As William Archer put it in a theatre review in
1898, Julius Caesar has “no comic relief.”48 At once because and in spite of
appearing so close to comical, this is the stuff of terror.49 The poet’s life
is suspended, paralyzed in the time of this “to,” picking up from the
spectral “to” that lingers tacitly at the end of the initial barrage of the
Plebeians’ questions: “you were best [to].” Cinna knows: “to answer every
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man directly and briefly, wisely and truly”: it is impossible. The scene, if it is one, the “to be torn to pieces” of the poet (which is also the time of the today of the murder of Caesar, the “strange-disposèd time” of the play) might be read as a theatrical prefiguring of a remark Derrida makes in Politics of Friendship: “it is impossible to address only one person, only one man, only one woman. To put it bluntly and without pathos, such an address would have to be each time one single time, and all iterability would have to be excluded from the structure of the trace.” Derrida goes on to refer to this as precisely a “drama” (PF 215). Julius Caesar seems to inscribe a thinking of “theatrical derangement” in terms of what I propose we might call the iteraphonic. There is a spectrality of address already under way. The words of one character eerily repeat, singularly, without that character’s knowledge or control. This would be the language of peepholes, an uncanny thinking of contagion prior to the socius or mass, or to any distinction between public and private, or indeed between one character and another.

“I dreamt tonight that I did feast with Caesar,” begins Cinna the poet, in that astonishing four-line soliloquy the fourth line of which leads him, finds him led forth, into the madness of the day. In North’s Plutarch you read that Cinna “dreamed, the night before, that Caesar bade him to supper.” Shakespeare interrupts, or we might say iterrupts the time. “Tonight,” at this strange moment in Julius Caesar, is strangely before today. The “to” comes to belong to a past that never existed. As Abbott observes apropos this rare usage of “to”: “To was [on occasion] used [by Shakespeare] without any notion of ‘motion toward the future’ in to-night (last night)” (§190). But the singular, dreaming “tonight” in 3.3 is already iteraphonic, a striking repetition of the account of Calpurnia’s dream, earlier in the play, before the assassination, but at the same time, the same “tonight.” It is as if they have the same dream, telepathically dreaming “tonight.” As Caesar says: “She dreamt tonight she saw my statue, / Which like a fountain with an hundred spouts / Did run pure blood” (2.2.76–8). Who saying “I dreamt tonight”? At least three speakers, we might suppose. Caesar may appear to speak for Calpurnia, in place of her (“She dreamt tonight”), but this in fact only underscores the dream’s peculiarity and power. The almost incredible effacement of the presence of woman in Julius Caesar is integral to the cold, lucid exposition of its homo-fraternal, phallogocentric schema. Prior to any determination of Portia as “female terrorist,” or blood as a “trope of gender,” or Brutus as (in Antony’s final declaration) “a man!” (5.5.75), however, the logic
of the iteraphonic would entail turning our ears to what Derrida has described as “sexual differences in the plural.” He writes: “Why don’t we turn our ears toward a call which addresses and provokes _above all else_, above and beyond whatever says ‘me,’ my ‘body,’ as a ‘man’ or a ‘woman,’ or my sex? To turn one’s ears to the other when it speaks to ‘whom,’ to ‘what,’ to ‘this’ ‘who’ which has not yet been assigned an identity or, for example, since we have to speak of it, to either one sex or the other?”55 In the weave and dissemination of voices, Caesar and Calpurnia, Calpurnia and Cinna, and Caesar and Portia are commingling – turning us, perhaps, toward the time of a quite new, quite other tone. “What is’t o’clock?” Iteraphonically this question recurs, or occurs twice, in separate scenes involving two characters who never hear each other speak: “What is’t o’clock?” (2.2.114), asks Caesar; “What is’t o’clock?,” asks Portia (2.4.23).

I have been trying to evoke a few, perhaps especially explicit, instances of the iteraphonic in _Julius Caesar_. If the signature of the poet is to be felt here, we should also have to reckon with a thinking of the iteraphonic as “unbounded generalization”:56 in Cinna’s four-line soliloquy at the start of 3.3 we might also pick up on the strange appearance or reappearance of “will” (a celebrated signature-word that occurs twenty-seven times in thirty-six lines in the preceding scene: see 3.2.126–61)57 or the phrase “forth of doors” that weirdly iterates Antony’s description of the blood leaving Caesar’s body as “rushing out of doors” (3.2.170). It would be possible to elaborate notions of the iteraphonic or, perhaps, _iteraesthesia_ (for it is a matter of a spectralization of sense and feeling) across the entirety of Shakespeare’s text, thus engaging with micrological analyses of apparently single words such as “blood,” “noble,” “honourable,” “man,” “friend,” or, perhaps, “to.”

_Julius Caesar_ is an inexhaustibly rich and strange text for any attempt to think about the nature and politics of friendship. In this play, perhaps more deliberately and succinctly than in any other of Shakespeare’s works, we are brought up against the strangeness of a friend and friends. In _Julius Caesar_ Trebonius, Brutus, and Caesar can be “like friends” (2.2.127), uncertainly “as” friends, similar to but not the same as “friends”; it is apparently possible to “befriend [one]self” (2.4.29); “friend” can mean “lover” or vice versa (2.3.6); yet at other moments the distinction between “lovers” (“Romans, countrymen, and lovers” [3.2.13], as Brutus addresses the people) and “friends” (“Friends, Romans, countrymen” [3.2.65], as Antony addresses them) can appear decisive; and above all,
perhaps, friends can do you a good turn by turning against you, indeed by disposing of you altogether (as Brutus puts it, in what is perhaps the most shocking formulation of friendship in the play: “So are we Caesar’s friends, that have abridged / His time of fearing death” [3.1.103–4]). “Friendship would be . . . uncanny” (PF 178), suggests Derrida. Nowhere in Julius Caesar – indeed, perhaps nowhere in Shakespeare’s œuvre – would this be more palpable and striking than in the manner and effects of Caesar’s assassination by his “friends.”

Kirby Farrell has suggested that there is a “deep taboo in [Shakespeare’s] plays against attempts to seize the future by force.”58 We should perhaps understand this in a double sense. The reading of Julius Caesar that I have been elaborating here would indeed seem to accord with Farrell’s claim, but the seizing in question would also have to do with the very experience of reading the play (on page, stage, or screen). What is the time of a work of poetry? What is the time of “the poet”? To seize a Caesar: is it possible to read Shakespeare’s play in such a way that the reader (or spectator) does not “seize the future by force”? As I have been trying to suggest in these pages, Julius Caesar dramatizes the “strange-disposed time” of the “being-promise of a promise” (SM 105), the suspension of the life and identity of the poet “to be torn to pieces.” It is a play about attempts to predict and seize the future, of course, and above all about faith and betrayal in friendship. In the aftermath of Caesar’s murder Brutus claims to know the future, as regards the friendship of Antony. He tells Cassius: “I know that we shall have him well to friend” (3.1.143). Abbott notes of the “to” in “to friend” here: “To, from meaning ‘like,’ came into the meaning of ‘representation,’ ‘equivalence,’ ‘apposition’” (§189). Has the meaning of “to” come, or is it still to come? What is this “to friend”? It is as if Brutus says to Cassius: O my friend, there are friends: I know the future, we will certainly have Antony as friend. Ironized by the knowledge that there can be no such knowledge, no grounds for such knowledge, the “to” is the mark of interruption, the very disjunction with any future that would be predictable, calculable, or foreseeable.

Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar is a stranger to friend. The play can, perhaps must, always be torn to pieces. As is obvious from its stage history, it is susceptible to innumerable different “political” renderings, including those of ostensibly “politically opposing” kinds and including its alleged attainment to “a status ‘above’ politics.”59 Eighteenth-century productions presenting Brutus as hero and thus promoting what Francis Gentleman
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(writing in 1770) called “one of the noblest principles that actuates the human mind, the love of national liberty” generally entailed tearing the play to pieces by omitting, in particular, the so-called Cinna episode.60 The time of Shakespeare’s play is haunted by the “to be torn to pieces” of Cinna, just as strangely as it is by the ghost of Caesar, by the ghost of Caesar in the play but also by the ghost of Caesar as Shakespeare, the play as the ghost of Caesar. Double is the ghost, the ghost is always (at least) double. Great play of the two: a play of two parts, two “central characters,” two poets, two Caesars.61 How to read? How to answer? Julius Caesar keeps “to,” keeps to itself. “Et tu, Brute?” (3.1.76). This familiar but strange, strangely familiar, anachronistic foreign language at the heart of Julius Caesar is the only Latin in all of Shakespeare’s so-called Roman plays.62 How should one hear this “tu”? How would it have sounded, how should it sound, in what language or languages? Rhyming with “you” (you, too?): a new international, in “accents yet unknown.”63

NOTES

1 References to Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar are based on the New Cambridge text, Slevack (1988), hereafter JC. This chapter was originally presented as a paper at the Cerisy-la-Salle conference on “La démocratie à venir (autour Jacques Derrida),” in July 2002. I dedicate it to Geoffrey Bennington, who very kindly provided the French translation of the text for that occasion. The original version of the essay was published in French (2004) and in English (2003). The version of the essay that appears here has been significantly modified in a number of respects, and I wish to express my gratitude to Maria Wyke and Christopher Pelling for their careful reading and helpful suggestions.
2 Hartsock (1966), 57–8.
3 Dobson (1991). Further references to this essay are given parenthetically in the text.
4 Derrida (1992a), 38.
5 Derrida (1994), 105. Further references appear in the text, abbreviated SM.
6 Derrida (1997), 306. Hereafter abbreviated PF in the text, where appropriate.
7 For more on these topics, see in particular Derrida (1994) and (1997).
8 For more on the relationship between the “democracy to come” and the question of literature, see Derrida (1992a).
9 Derrida (1995a), 239.
De Quincey (1998), 640.
Derrida (1992b), 78.
See *JC*, 92n. Compare also “too blame” in *Othello* (3.3.214): see Honigmann (1999), 222n.
Abbott (1870), §73. Further references are to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.
See Booth (1977), 50. In the earliest (1623 First Folio) version of *Julius Caesar*, “today” is consistently printed as “to day.”
The *meurtrière* is also of course a question of writing: to whom is Shakespeare’s work addressed? In the “Envois” Derrida writes: “for me this is the only *meurtrière*: one kills someone by addressing a letter to him that is not destined to him, and thereby declaring one’s love or even one’s hatred. And I kill you at every moment, but I love you.” See Derrida (1987), 112.
See Freud (1985b). The tradition according to which Brutus was Caesar’s illegitimate son is perhaps pertinent here: see Spevack (1988), 98n. The elucidatory power of Freud’s account, of course, does not depend on the literality of this “not uncommon belief” (as Spevack calls it).
I am alluding here to Lady Macbeth’s “what’s done is done” (3.2.14) and Macbeth’s earlier soliloquy: “If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well / It were done quickly. If th’assassination / Could trammel up the consequence and catch / With his surcease success – that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all!” (1.7.1–5). Quotations are from Miola (2004).
On “deferred obedience” in Freud, see for example (1985b), 204–5; and (1985a), 198.
See, for example, Derrida (1995b); (1997), 103; and Derrida (2001), 6–7, 56–7. For Gilles Deleuze also, Hamlet’s “The time is out of joint” marks a crucial moment in the history of philosophy and conceptions of temporality: “Time out of joint, the door off its hinges, signifies the first great Kantian reversal: movement is now subordinated to time. Time is no longer related to the movement it measures, but rather movement to the time that conditions it . . . It is Hamlet . . . who completes the emancipation of time . . . Hamlet is the first hero who truly needed time in order to act, whereas earlier heroes were subject to time as the consequence of an original movement (Aeschylus) or an aberrant action (Sophocles) . . . Time is no longer the cosmic time of an original celestial movement, nor is it the rural time of derived meteorological movements. It has become the time of the city and nothing other, the pure order of time.” See Deleuze (1998), 27–8.
Cf. Wikander (1995), 149. Further examples of anachronism in *Julius Caesar* would include the hats that are worn by the conspirators (2.1.73); the kerchief worn by the sick Ligarius (2.1.322); the “watch” or night watchmen
who have seen “most horrid sights” (2.2.16) during the night before the murder; and, as we will see in a moment, the apparent, if decidedly cryptic, identification of Caesar with Christ.

24 Greene (1986), 224. Shakespeare’s exploration of “strange-disposèd time” is, however, perhaps more radical than is suggested by Greene’s conception of “potential estrangement,” which would seem to imply some logic of originary non-estrangement.

26 Kaula (1981), 204.
27 Paster (1989), 294. I would suggest that anachronism here is not simply a matter of being “witty,” however: the Christification of Caesar would participate in the play’s more general dramatization and questioning of what Derrida has referred to as “the Christianization of fraternization, or fraternization as the essential structure of Christianization” (PF 96).

28 Rackin (1990), 94.
29 Ibid.
30 “The experience of the impossible” is, of course, one of Derrida’s most celebrated formulations for what he understands by the word “deconstruction.” See, for example, Derrida (1989).

31 Rackin (1990), 103.
35 For a discussion of republicanism and the “mixed regime” in particular, see Kayser and Lettieri (1980). They argue that “[t]he essence of Roman republicanism consisted of its mixed constitution or regime” (198). They thus follow Kurt von Fritz (1954) who provides an especially detailed account of the notion of the mixed constitution or regime as comprising the three elements of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. Kayser and Lettieri seek to situate Shakespeare’s work in an Elizabethan context: “Fully conscious of the depraved conditions of monarchy gone awry (tyranny) and the bestial proclivity of democracy (anarchy), many late sixteenth-century Englishmen advanced the notion that some semblance of a mixed regime was necessary to establish an effective and stable polity” (200).

36 Halpern (1997), 78.
37 Derrida (1995a), 140.
38 I have sought elsewhere to explore Shakespeare’s work in relation to a notion of theatrical or dramaturgic telepathy. See, in particular, Royle (1991), 142–59; (2003b), 126–7, 249–50; and (2005). The notion of the “iteraphonic,” which I shall go on to develop here, is a neologism.

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40 Weber (2000), 7. He goes on to say that the theatrical scenario is “present and passing. It is marked not by acts or even by actors but rather by acting. Its tense and temporality is that of the present participle. [It is] ‘presenting’ rather than ‘present’” (7). I would associate this thinking of the present participle with the “to” (the “coming” as never completely come, as still keeping, indeed as structured by, the “to come”).

41 The phrase “mirror scenes in Shakespeare” is Hereward T. Price’s. See Price (1948).


43 Ibid., 171.

44 Rather, in 4.3, we are presented with the figure of another poet, a “cynic,” a “jigging fool” who is dismissed by Brutus for not knowing his time: “Get you hence, sirrah; saucy fellow, hence! / . . . / I’ll know his humour when he knows his time” (4.3.134–6). “Time” here of course carries a double sense, both “proper occasion” and sense of rhythm or “poetic meter” (see Spevack [1988], 126n.). The question remains: what is the time of the poet?

45 Holland (1960), 441, 443.

46 He suggests, without elaborating further on the irony of doing so, that the “little insertion” of this scene (3.3) “was meant as an ironic denial that poets, except by unhappy chance, have anything to do with politics,” before adding: “yet this is an intensely political play, a fact that has a controlling influence over its language.” See Kermode (2000), 86.


49 On the question “Where are you from?” as a “terroristic” question, see Punter (2000), vii and passim.

50 Elsewhere, “tonight” indeed carries this sense of “motion toward the future” – hence, for example, Cassius’ asking Casca: “Will you sup with me tonight?” (1.2.277) or Brutus’ telling Lucilius and Titinius: “bid the commanders / Prepare to lodge their companies tonight” (4.3.139–40). Cassius’ death is described specifically in terms of a movement “to night” (retained as two words in Spevack’s edition). Titinius declares: “But Cassius is no more. O setting sun, / As in thy red rays thou dost sink to night, / So in his red blood Cassius’ day is set” (5.3.60–2).

51 Cynthia Marshall picks up on a similar sense of paradox in this context, though she reads the scene and the “place” of Calpurnia rather differently: “That [Calpurnia] is denied even the articulation of her dream, which is narrated by the appropriating Caesar, demonstrates an effacement of her linguistic presence; Calpurnia is largely without the power of words in the
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But her relative muteness also confers on Calpurnia the paradoxical freedom of one unconfined by limiting verbal structures.” See Marshall (1994), 483–4.

53 I refer here in particular to the thought-provoking essay by Paster (1989).
54 On “man” and “manliness” in particular, see Blits (1981).
60 See Sinfied (1992), 11.
61 My thanks here to Avital Ronell who, in the discussion at Cerisy, helpfully stressed the importance of the “two” in the context of Julius Caesar.
62 See Kayser and Lettieri (1980), who also remark on the “obviously anachronistic” nature of this Latin phrase (219).
63 Derrida’s notion of the “New International” is, in part, elaborated out of Shakespeare: it is, we are told, “‘out of joint,’ without coordination, without party, without country, without national community (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class” (SM 85).
Shaw’s Caesars

Niall W. Slater

Caesar is really the only great man of history to whom the Shaw theories apply. Caesar was a Shaw hero.

G. K. Chesterton

His manner is frivolous because he is an Italian; but he means what he says.

Britannus, Caesar and Cleopatra, Act 3

Throughout his career as a playwright, George Bernard Shaw struggled against the shade and influence of Shakespeare and toward a new conception of heroism. His next to last script, the puppet play Shakes vs. Shav, directly staged his rivalry with Shakespeare. One of the earliest bouts, Caesar and Cleopatra, written in 1898 but first produced only eight years later, attempted to rethink the role of the world conqueror, employing Shaw’s characteristic sense of irony as well as recent historical research to reclaim Caesar from the grasp of contemporary Bardolators and the dominance of spectacle. Though he nowhere employs the word, it was also Shaw’s first major essay in the figure of the “Superman” to which he would recur. The performance history of Shaw’s own play, however, illustrates how audience expectation and the culture of star performance often functioned to mute the author’s radical conception of Caesar.

Shaw conceived the play in reaction to the “pictorial” productions of late Victorian Shakespeare, especially the 1897 production of Antony and Cleopatra featuring Louis Calvert and Janet Achurch, and Beerbohm Tree’s 1898 production of Julius Caesar with backgrounds by the celebrated painter Lawrence Alma Tadema, “the real hero of the revival,” according
to Shaw. Indeed, Shaw’s play is a “prequel,” forming in effect a trilogy with the narratively subsequent Shakespearean dramas – and thoroughly undermining their views of both the title characters.

Shaw emphasizes throughout the play the age gap between the title characters, portraying Cleopatra as a very girlish 16-year-old and Caesar an often weary man of 50. The play’s plot is the anerotic antithesis of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Much as in the first of Shaw’s “Plays Pleasant,” *Arms and the Man* (written and produced in 1894), the plot throws its leading characters into conventionally “romantic” situations (their first night encounter beneath the Sphinx, Cleopatra’s arrival by carpet) only to emphasize their complete lack of attraction to each other (especially when Cleopatra insists on addressing Caesar as “Old gentleman” in their first encounter). Yet Caesar is far more than the resolutely pragmatic and unromantic Bluntschli of the earlier play, for the author offers in the later play’s hero the political counterstroke to Shakespeare’s “travestying” of Caesar “as a silly braggart” who spoke nothing, in Shaw’s view, “even worthy of an average Tammany boss.”

Shaw hoped his play would be done by the one actor-manager of the period he admired, Johnston Forbes Robertson, along with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, of whom both he and Forbes Robertson were deeply enamored. Shaw had especially valued Forbes Robertson’s *Hamlet*, which he saw in October 1897. He praised the great actor-manager as:

> essentially a classical actor . . . What I mean by classical is that he can present a dramatic hero as a man whose passions are those which have produced the philosophy, the poetry, the art and the statecraft of the world, and not merely those which have produced its weddings, coroners’ inquests and executions.

In fact, Forbes Robertson was not able to perform the play until almost eight years later. Its premiere (minus parts of the second and fourth acts) was staged in March 1906 in a German-language production by the great Max Reinhardt in Berlin. In October of that same year Forbes Robertson played the English-language premiere with his wife, Gertrude Elliot, in New York; the same duo finally staged the London premiere a year later. Forbes Robertson continued to tour in productions of the script until 1914.

Shaw’s notes to the original script, while not employing the term “Superman,” make it clear that his Caesar is to be such a figure:
I cannot cite all the stories about Caesar which seem to me to show that he was genuinely original; but let me at least point out that I have been careful to attribute nothing but originality to him... He knows that the real moment of success is not the moment apparent to the crowd. Hence, in order to produce an impression of complete disinterestedness and magnanimity, he has only to act with entire selfishness; and this is perhaps the only sense in which a man can be said to be naturally great. It is in this sense that I have represented Caesar as great. Having virtue, he has no need of goodness... This distinction between virtue and goodness is not understood in England: hence the poverty of our drama in heroes.¹

Compare G. K. Chesterton’s analysis of Caesar’s greatness in Shaw:

[Shaw’s] primary and defiant proposition is the Calvinistic proposition: that the elect do not earn virtue, but possess it. The goodness of a man does not consist in trying to be good, but in being good. Julius Caesar prevails over other people by possessing more virtus than they; not by having striven or suffered or bought his virtue; not because he has struggled heroically, but because he is a hero.⁹

The production history even in Shaw’s lifetime shows some of the difficulty in making Caesar’s “natural” greatness the central theme. Shaw’s original script begins with a lengthy dialogue scene among Cleopatra’s guards and a messenger who brings news of Caesar’s victory in battle and imminent arrival. The atmosphere of crisis recalls that in the opening scene of Antony and Cleopatra, as well as that play’s numerous messenger scenes, but the tone quickly veers from the heroic to the comic.¹⁰ Along with general background the scene establishes that Caesar does not fight as the Egyptians do, that Cleopatra is “a girl of sixteen” of whom “the priests and the nurses and the rest of them can pretend she is a queen...and put their commands into her mouth” – and that she is missing from the palace, a discovery which contributes to a general rout.

In 1912 Shaw provided an alternate new prologue, spoken by the god Ra, which engages metatheatrically with the contemporary audience (“ye are packed in rows without freedom to move”) and rebukes them for their interest in romance (“Do ye crave for the story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted ye hither?”) and attempts to focus on Caesar (“ye are about to hear a man speak, and a great man he was”). While the new prologue was shorter, in order to make room for a
full performance of Act 3, its more didactic format, a direct descendant of the prologues of New Comedy, suggests that Shaw also had been less than perfectly happy with the public reception of the earliest productions and the audience’s apparently abiding interest in the potential romance of the protagonists rather than Caesar as proto-Superman.

Producing Shaw’s plays with their massive casts has always been an expensive proposition, and so the reliance on the drawing power of “stars” is not surprising. Still, more than most of Shaw’s plays, notable productions of Caesar and Cleopatra in the first half of the twentieth century relied on such star power. These included Cedric Hardwicke and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies in 1925 (with a distinctly Art Deco Sphinx), Peggy Ashcroft and Malcolm Keen in 1932, and Cedric Hardwicke and Lilli Palmer in 1949. In 1951 Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh transferred both Antony and Cleopatra and Caesar and Cleopatra from a triumphant run in London to Broadway, where the Shakespeare production garnered unanimous praise, though two of the major critics preferred the Hardwicke–Palmer production over Olivier and Leigh. Shaw himself approved the 1945 film (bearing the credit “Scenario and Dialogue by Bernard Shaw”), directed by Gabriel Pascal and starring Claude Rains and Vivien Leigh. The producer J. Arthur Rank bought Miss Leigh out of her contract with David O. Selznick just for this production. Its lavish production budget went for serried ranks of soldiers and grand backdrops, but the result is much more static than cinematic.

Major productions in the second half of the twentieth century were less common, perhaps in keeping with the decline of star culture on the live stage and rising costs, but a 2002 production at the Shaw Festival in Canada, directed by Christopher Newton, added an important new chapter to the play’s reception by resetting the play in an imagined World War I milieu. Such a concept, while now common in Shakespeare productions, remains innovative for Shaw. Costume was employed to make explicitly visible the colonial politics implicit in the text, with most Romans clad in puttees and Sam Browne belts (though Britannus wore a dark blue business suit), while the Egyptians were represented as their colonized early twentieth-century counterparts (see figure 13.2 below, for the effect of the contrast). The constructed nature of monarchy, fundamental to Caesar’s lessons in queenship to the young Cleopatra, was further underscored by the portrayal of young Ptolemy, whose suit-and-fez-clad advisors displayed him to his subjects only in ancient Egyptian dress.
The Shaw Festival production, like the 1945 film, used a heavily abbre-viated and partly wordless version of the original prologue only to prepare for Act 1’s striking first image of Caesar coming alone to speak with the Sphinx, whom he addresses as an equal:

Hail, Sphinx: salutation from Julius Caesar! . . . In the little world yonder, Sphinx, my place is as high as yours in this great desert; only I wander, and you sit still; I conquer, and you endure; I work and wonder, you watch and wait; I look up and am dazzled, look down and am darkened, look round and am puzzled, whilst your eyes never turn from looking out – out of the world – to the lost region – the home from which we have strayed. Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of men, are no strangers to one another.

He concludes:

I am he of whose genius you are the symbol: part brute, part woman, and part God – nothing of man in me at all. Have I read your riddle, Sphinx?

Only now does Cleopatra, who has hidden herself in the Sphinx’s bosom for fear of the approaching Romans, address Caesar as “Old gentleman.” Shaw has carefully set up the joke: he cannot see her and at first mistakes her childish voice for that of the (mythologically female) Sphinx, answering his question.15 Only when she urges him to join her in hiding from the Romans who “will come and eat you” does he discover the human source of the voice. She identifies herself as Cleopatra and rather casually exposes the fact that this Sphinx whom Caesar has addressed as his equal is not the great Sphinx but only “a dear little kitten of the Sphinx” and her “pet Sphinx.” Caesar has not read the riddle aright; he may be part God and yet no more unique than the Sphinx he addressed. His revenge for this discovery is to terrify her with the revelation that he is one of the very Romans she fears – but he omits to tell her which Roman. He offers instead to teach her how to confront Caesar, not as the child she now is, but “as a brave woman and a great queen” and follows her off to the palace.

Teaching Cleopatra to be a queen is in no small part a theatrical pro cess. Caesar first shows her how to rule her own servants, including her formidable nurse, Ftateeta. With the latter’s help, Caesar costumes her in her royal robes to meet the advancing Romans – and stiffens her spine when, like the child she is, she would rather run (figure 13.1).
As figure 13.1 shows, the period costuming in the 2002 Shaw Festival production underscored the text’s implicit contrast between the western, “modern” Roman conquerors and the native Egyptians. The Indiana Jones-style fedora and leather jacket of Caesar, neither military uniform nor ordinary dress, read as “real,” while the familiar royal regalia of the ancient pharaohs, the crook, the flail, and the uraeus headdress, layered one by one onto Cleopatra’s simple and childlike white costume, read as theatrical props intended to conjure up a political authority which had long since departed. The Cleopatra of the first act lacks the acting ability to sustain such an illusion – but Caesar is prepared to show her how the trick is done. As Caesar’s troops arrive, Shaw’s stage directions spell out the first act curtain:

*The Roman soldiers . . . stare in amazement at the throne; dress into ordered rank opposite it; draw their swords and lift them in the air with a shout of hail Caesar. Cleopatra turns and stares wildly at Caesar; grasps the situation; and, with a great sob of relief, falls into his arms.*
In good Aristotelian fashion, the peripety in her fortunes coincides with Cleopatra’s recognition that the Roman protecting her (and incidentally sitting on her throne) is the feared Caesar himself.

Act 2 carries forward the game of musical thrones while building to open military, rather than philosophical, conflict. Caesar arrives at the Alexandrian palace of King Ptolemy, Cleopatra’s 10-year-old brother and husband, who is propped up on his throne only by his self-interested advisors. On any reading of Shaw’s text, these Egyptian authorities, led by Pothinus, the king’s guardian, have their own interests first and foremost. They have played one Roman faction against another before and expect to go on doing so. Here the temporal resetting of the 2002 production made much more explicit the colonialist critique that Shaw only adumbrates. As figure 13.2 shows, these Egyptians have already westernized/Romanized their values along with their dress.

Just as they write the boy king Ptolemy’s speech for him, so too they stage him as an “authentic” Egyptian monarch in traditional dress – but word and image are equally theatrical illusion. The stage picture places Ptolemy at the apex of a visual pyramid – but he does not know how to

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Figure 13.2  The palace in Alexandria from **Caesar and Cleopatra**, Shaw Festival, 2002. Photo by André Lanthier
stay there. The boy king is so unaware of the realities of politics that, when Caesar asks for a chair, he offers him the throne.

PTOLEMY (rising shyly to offer his chair) Caesar –
CAESAR (kindly) No, no, my boy: that is your chair of state. Sit down.

He makes Ptolemy sit down again. Meanwhile Rufio, looking about him, sees in the nearest corner an image of the god Ra, represented as a seated man with the head of a hawk. Before the image is a bronze tripod, about as large as a three-legged stool, with a stick of incense burning on it. Rufio, with Roman resourcefulness and indifference to foreign superstitions, promptly seizes the tripod; shakes off the incense; blows away the ash; and dumps it down behind Caesar, nearly in the middle of the hall.

RUFIO Sit on that, Caesar.

A shiver runs through the court, followed by a hissing whisper of Sacrilege!

The joke here is multi-layered: not just Rufio’s lack of cultural sensitivity nor the visual comedy of Caesar on the hot seat, but doubtless also an allusion to the Delphic tripod, as Caesar offers to solve the dispute over the throne by making Ptolemy and Cleopatra joint rulers. Neither is pleased with this solution. While Ptolemy’s advisors dispute with Caesar, Shaw’s stage directions note first that “Cleopatra . . . takes no part in the scene which follows, but watches it with curiosity and wonder,. . . sitting down on Caesar’s tripod when he rises.” Though offered his throne back by Caesar (and, spitefully, by Cleopatra), Ptolemy eventually chooses to leave the palace with his courtiers, while Caesar “goes with a sigh to Ptolemy’s chair.”

Before long, the palace is besieged by the same Egyptians, foregrounding a theme central to the play and to Caesar’s image since antiquity: his clemency. The word first appears in a stage direction (“RUFIO [aghast at this clemency]”), but sounds repeatedly in the dialogue as well. When Caesar expresses horror at the Egyptians’ execution of his fleeing enemy Pompey, the king’s tutor Theodotus proffers this flattering sophistry:

The deed was not yours, Caesar, but ours – nay, mine; for it was done by my counsel. Thanks to us, you keep your reputation for clemency, and have your vengeance too.

To Theodotus, vengeance is real, clemency a conveniently attractive fiction. While vengeance is more in the mouths of Egyptians in the play, it is no
stranger to Romans other than Caesar. When Caesar orders the Roman mercenary Lucius Septimius, the actual slayer of Pompey, out of his sight, Lucius reminds Caesar of his own atrocities in Gaul – and Caesar acknowledges the rebuke.

Initially this exchange sets up an important turn of events near the end of the act. Fighting has already broken out in the city, and ships are on fire in the harbor. The king’s guardian Pothinus reappears to demand Caesar’s surrender, while the same Theodotus returns in horror to report the city’s great library is burning and begs Caesar’s help. He refuses but, while holding Pothinus as a prisoner, releases Theodotus to go and appeal to the besieging general Achillas for help to save the books. Rufio, who denounced the clemency behind Caesar’s first release of the Egyptian military leaders, now demands: “Where are those Egyptians? Is this more clemency?” The Caesar who rejected clemency and vengeance combined now reveals how clemency and success go together. As Cleopatra and others arm him for the fighting, Rufio looks onto the battle:

RUFIO (hastening to look) It is true. The Egyptian army! Crawling over the edge of the west harbor like locusts. (With sudden anger he strides down to Caesar.) This is your accursed clemency, Caesar. Theodotus has brought them.

CAESAR (delighted at his own cleverness) I meant him to, Rufio. They have come to put out the fire. The library will keep them busy whilst we seize the lighthouse. Eh? (He rushes out buoyantly through the loggia, followed by Britannus.)

Act 3 stages one of the most famous incidents from Plutarch’s romanticized account of Caesar’s relationship with Cleopatra, where the queen has herself delivered to Caesar wrapped in a carpet. Less spectacularly, but more significantly, it carries forward the theme of Caesar’s “celebrated clemency.” The act begins on shore where Cleopatra, prevented by sentries from going to Caesar, conceives of the carpet scheme, enlisting the help of the Sicilian carpet merchant Apollodorus. Then the scene shifts to the Pharos, the great lighthouse in the harbor, which Caesar has seized. In the midst of the conflict Britannus delivers to Caesar a captured bag of letters, containing the names and machinations of the Pompeian party and their correspondence with the forces besieging Caesar. Far from seizing the proffered chance to expose and proscribe his
enemies, Caesar demands that the letters be burnt unread. When Britannus fails to obey, Caesar responds:

Since you will not burn these, at least I can drown them.  

(He picks up the bag and throws it over the parapet into the sea.)

Almost immediately, Apollodorus arrives with the carpet for Caesar, which must be hoisted up carefully from the boat and then unrolled. When his companions see movement in the shawls within, they suspect a serpent and a plot to kill Caesar; the nod to Cleopatra’s eventual suicide is unmistakable. Caesar, however, observes that “your serpent seems to breathe very regularly” and extracts Cleopatra from her coverings (figure 13.3).

As Robin Loon Seong Yun has observed, Cleopatra’s arrival by crane mirrors and parodies Antony being hoisted into Cleopatra’s tower in Act 4 of Antony and Cleopatra. Not only do we have the visual inversions of
gender and genre, as the dying Antony’s ascent to his tragic end becomes the young queen’s farcical pursuit of romance and adventure. There is another layer, as we discover that Caesar’s grand gesture renouncing the possibilities of vengeance had other potential consequences as well. When Caesar tries to refuse the gift unopened, Apollodorus explains why he cannot:

**CAESAR**  
Apollodorus: this is no time for playing with presents. Pray you, go back to the Queen, and tell her that if all goes well I shall return to the palace this evening.

**APOLLODORUS**  
Caesar: I cannot return. As I approached the lighthouse, some fool threw a great leathern bag into the sea. It broke the nose of my boat; and I had hardly time to get myself and my charge to the shore before the poor little cockleshell sank.

**CAESAR**  
I am sorry, Apollodorus. The fool shall be rebuked. Well, well: what have you brought me?

Shaw even underscores the joke with Cleopatra’s complaint, once released from the carpet, that: “Oh, I’m smothered . . . a great sack of something fell upon me out of the sky; and then the boat sank.” Caesar’s gesture has nearly drowned the queen. Nothing deterred, Caesar’s spirits rise even as a landing force cuts him off from his troops, and the act ends with Caesar diving after Apollodorus to swim for safety – and Cleopatra at his orders thrown in after him to be hauled along.

Modern productions often take their single intermission between Acts 3 and 4, underscoring the lapse of months in the play’s action. It is also a natural gap between the most overtly comic scenes of the play and the explicit violence of the latter part, which looks forward to the events of the Shakespearean plays. When Act 3 begins, Caesar and Cleopatra are still besieged in the palace, while the captive Pothinus, afforded every opportunity to escape, has chosen to stay. As Rufio says:

He prefers to stay and spy on us. So would I if I had to do with generals subject to fits of clemency.

Pothinus seeks to suborn Cleopatra but fails, and then attempts to denounce her in turn to Caesar. Cleopatra is furious, Caesar unmoved, but
he uses the occasion of his birthday as an excuse to release Pothinus to
the besieging forces and get rid of him. Cleopatra derides his mercy
as “foolish” and, unmarked by Caesar, orders Ftateeta to assassinate
Pothinus before he can leave the palace. Ftateeta succeeds. The discov-
ery of Pothinus’ body, however, again produces riots, the admission of
Cleopatra’s role in the death, and Caesar’s most famous lines in the play
in reply:\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Cleopatra (vehemently)}  Listen to me, Caesar. If one man in all Alexan-
dria can be found to say that I did wrong, I swear to have myself
 crucified on the door of the palace by my own slaves.

\textbf{Caesar} If one man in all the world can be found, now or forever, to
know that you did wrong, that man will have either to conquer the
world as I have, or be crucified by it. (\textit{The uproar in the streets again
reaches them.}) Do you hear? These knockers at your gate are also believ-
ers in vengeance and in stabbing. You have slain their leader: it is right
that they shall slay you. If you doubt it, ask your four counselors here.
And then in the name of that \textit{right} (\textit{He emphasizes the word with great
scorn.}) shall I not slay them for murdering their Queen, and be slain in
my turn by their countrymen as the invader of their fatherland? Can
Rome do less than than slay these slayers too, to show the world how
Rome avenges her sons and her honor? And so, to the end of history,
murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor
and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can
understand.

Isolated in the play as the only believer in clemency rather than ven-
geance, Caesar proclaims himself the avatar of one who would \textit{both
“conquer the world” and “be crucified by it.”} Ready to “[look] his fate
in the face,” Caesar is called back to action by news of Mithridates’ re-
lieving forces, almost absent-mindedly leaving Cleopatra behind – to
discover the body of Ftateeta, quite silently killed by Rufio.

The fifth act wraps things up very quickly, as Caesar departs from
Egypt, leaving Rufio behind as governor. To the surprise of his enemies,
Caesar has spared rather than slain the rebellious priests, one final exam-
ple of his clemency. To bid him farewell Cleopatra appears in mourning,
not for her brother and husband, drowned when his barge sank in battle,
but for the slain Ftateeta. She attempts to expose Rufio as a murderer in
defiance of Caesar’s principles:
CLEOPATRA  Ask the Roman governor whom you have left us.

CAESAR  Rufio?

CLEOPATRA  Yes: Rufio. (She points at him with deadly scorn.) He who is to rule here in Caesar’s name, in Caesar’s way, according to Caesar’s boasted laws of life.

Rufio, however, successfully defends his decision to kill Ftatateeta as he would have a hungry lion, “without malice.” Cleopatra refuses to forgive Caesar but is won over by his promise to send her Mark Antony, and the play closes with their parting.

Shaw’s Caesar remains a troublesome figure. Apart from Saint Joan, he never again essayed a historical figure as protagonist, and the saint has none of Caesar’s sense of humor. The Shavian Caesar’s refusal to take seriously some principles that those around him live, fight, and die by has led many to see him as a comic or ironic figure and his play as “a comedy about a tragedy.” In a postcolonial world and, a fortiori, in a postcolonial production such as the Shaw Festival’s 2002 version, it is hard not to hear “the truth” in Cleopatra’s charge against Caesar over Ftatateeta’s killing:

CAESAR  (energetically)  On my head be it, then; for it was well done.

Rufio: had you set yourself in the seat of the judge, and with hateful ceremonies and appeals to the gods handed that woman over to some hired executioner to be slain before the people in the name of justice, never again would I have touched your hand without a shudder. But this was natural slaying: I feel no horror at it.

Rufio, satisfied, nods at Cleopatra, mutely inviting her to mark that.

CLEOPATRA  (pettish and childish in her impotence)  No: not when a Roman slays an Egyptian.

Yet this is precisely the distinction Shaw demands that his audience make: the issue is not the ethnicity of the victim but the intent of the violence. The murder of Pothinus serves no end but vengeance for wounded vanity; the killing of Ftatateeta removes a conscienceless assassin from the midst of the besieged Roman command. Shaw is never sentimental, nor is his Superman. Ftatateeta is one of the great roles in his canon, but she matters no more to Caesar than would Cleopatra’s pet cat. No alternative emerges in the play to Caesar and his values, and his
parting promise to Cleopatra to send Antony in his stead must be, for an audience which knows its Shakespeare, just as it is for Rufio, “a bad . . . bargain.”

Shaw’s attempt to rehabilitate Caesar as a political genius has had but mixed success, yet has kept him an important part of the past century’s theatrical canon. The concept of Caesar as political genius enjoyed considerable currency in the later nineteenth century, thanks to the portrait in Theodor Mommsen’s monumental *Roman History*, published 1854–6, and the work for which he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1902. For Mommsen, Caesar was the personification of historical necessity and the high point of Roman history, 27 and Stanley Weintraub has argued persuasively for the influence of the Mommsenite Caesar on Shaw’s. 28 Yet it is a selective influence. For Mommsen Caesar was simultaneously the last and best expression of both democracy and monarchy. 29 Shaw listened more eagerly to Mommsen’s encomium of Julius Caesar the individual, “the sole creative genius produced by Rome, and the last produced by the ancient world.” 30 For Shaw that creativity consisted, not in jokes at the expense of blue-togaed Britons or Egyptian superstitions, but in the ability to conceive of power beyond vengeance, the capacity to imagine a world disjunct from its past of reciprocal violence. Its seeds lay in the discourse of the ancient sources about Caesar’s clemency, but Shaw shaped this figure into the first avatar of his Superman. It is unclear how many readers or spectators his Caesar has won over – but his regular return to the stage suggests an abiding interest in the experiment. 31

NOTES

1 Chesterton (1909), 154.
4 The historical Cleopatra was 21 when she met Caesar. Bryden (2002) suggests her age not only may show the influence of a mistake by the Victorian historian J. A. Froude on Shaw, but also is fundamental to the play’s concept of the title characters as two who could not possibly fall in love.
5 Shaw (1959), 274, reviewing Tree’s *Julius Caesar*.
6 Ibid., 252.
7 Dukore (1973), 193; Wisenthal in Shaw (1981), xviii.
8 *Caesar and Cleopatra* endnotes.
9 Chesterton (1909), 160–1.
Loon Seong Yun (2002), 230–1.
Dukore (1973).
Mander and Mitchenson (1955).
Some photos in Shaw (1952). For contemporary critical responses see Venezky (1952), 121.
Shaw’s stage directions say Britannus is “carefully dressed in blue, with portfolio, inkhorn, and reed pen at his girdle.” The color sets up this later exchange:

CLEOPATRA Is it true that when Caesar caught you on that island, you were painted all over blue?
BRITANNUS Blue is the color worn by all Britons of good standing. In war we stain our bodies blue; so that though our enemies may strip us of our clothes and our lives, they cannot strip us of our respectability.

The 2002 production thus literalized the text’s allusion to the archetypal business suit.

See especially Reinert (1960).
For a thorough historical treatment see Weinstock (1971), 233–43. If Bryden (2002) is right about Froude’s influence on Shaw’s view of Caesar, the theme of his clemency may be a notable part. Another Victorian reader, Anthony Trollope, attacked Froude for just this emphasis: see Booth (1946) esp. 39, 41–2.

“Clemency is very well for you; but what is it for your soldiers, who have to fight tomorrow the men you spared yesterday?”
See Bertolini (1981), 334 on the visual parallel to the end of Act 1, Caesar’s costuming of Cleopatra.
One wonders if the line might echo a famous (and hubristic?) Roman commander of another age, Claudius Pulcher. On the eve of the sea battle off Drepanum, the sacred chickens on board his ship refused to eat, a bad omen for the battle. Claudius had them thrown overboard, saying: “If they will not eat, let them drink” (Suetonius, Tiberius 2) – and promptly lost the battle.
Loon Seong Yun (2002), 234.
Bertolini (1981); Reardon (1971); cf. Chesterton (1909), 169–70: “And the impression that Shaw, the most savagely serious man of his time, is a mere music-hall artist must have reference to such rare outbreaks as these . . . there does run through him this erratic levity, an explosion of ineptitude. It is a queer quality in literature. It is a sort of cold extravagance; and it has made him all his enemies.”
Bryden (2002).
So the *Globe and Mail* reviewer thought (Taylor 2002): “As Caesar argues for a form of benign despotism that includes dispatching a murderer without a trial, a postcolonial audience is going to have a hard time believing that any form of imperialism is a good thing.”

Compare the far more sympathetic figures of the burglar Billy Dunn and the millionaire Boss Mangan in Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, whom he casually disintegrates by dynamite and aerial bombardment at play’s end – and has the Nurse, the estranged wife of the burglar, exult over the explosion.

Rebenich (2002), 86 and passim.

Weintraub (1962).


Mommsen (1911), 422.

I am most grateful to the Shaw Festival (Canada) and to Patti Broughton for their generous permission to reproduce the production photographs from their 2002 staging of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Credits for the individual photographers are noted under each.
If, in post-Unification Italy, the country’s Roman heritage had often been invoked by figures as diverse as Giuseppe Mazzini, Vincenzo Gioberti, and Gabriele D’Annunzio to promote and to justify a range of political visions, a veritable cult of romanità developed under Fascism. From the outset Mussolini’s political movement had sought to associate itself with the preeminence of ancient Rome and to bask in its reflected glory. A central aspect of the desire to exploit Italy’s prestigious past was the reappraisal of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus; their military distinction and their roles as, respectively, herald and founder of the Roman Empire undoubtedly made them the most apt figureheads for a regime intent on constructing an ideal genealogy for itself.

This chapter explores connections between the discourse on romanità and the instrumental use that was made of Julius Caesar in particular, drawing on a number of theatrical texts from the period. I shall begin by situating the concept of romanità within the context of Fascist ideology, and go on to discuss the renewed interest in, and perceived relevance of, Julius Caesar in Italy at the time, both as a historical and as a literary figure. I shall then focus on two plays which take him as their subject, one by Enrico Corradini, and the other by Giovacchino Forzano. I shall look at the ways in which these authors approached their material, paying close attention to analogies between Caesar and Mussolini, between ancient Rome and contemporary Italy. Finally, I shall attempt to analyze this preoccupation with Caesarism in the light of Fascist politics and, more specifically, to interpret the message that Corradini’s and Forzano’s works were likely to have conveyed.
It hardly needs stressing that some of the features that are most readily identified with the image of Fascism owe their origin to Roman traditions. The so-called saluto romano, or Fascist salute, is perhaps the most obvious example of a custom that was borrowed (apparently) from ancient Rome. D’Annunzio had revived this gesture at Fiume in 1919 to dramatic effect, thereby paving the way for its later adoption by the Fascist Party. Introduced in 1925, initially it was compulsory only for civil servants and for those working in state institutions, including schools; by 1932, however, its use had been extended to everyone: as the directive setting out this new measure put it, the “Roman salute” now replaced the “bourgeois handshake.”

An even more visible manifestation of romanità was the ubiquitous fascio littorio, or axe and bundle – the emblem of Fascism par excellence – which designated Mussolini’s first movement, the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento and, later, his party, giving it both a name and a history. Not only did this emblem appear on the Fascist badge and uniform, but it could also be found on currency and stamps, on books and banners, on monuments and on the façades of public buildings. By appropriating thus the fasces, Italy’s new regime drew on a potent symbol that alluded to the disciplinary measures enforced in Roman times, when a bundle of rods bound together around an axe had been carried by the lictors who preceded high magistrates in processions as a sign that the power to punish was vested in the people.

The architecture of the period also bore the unmistakable imprint of romanità. It sought to echo characteristic features of classical edifices, either by borrowing details such as columns and arches, or by using materials and designs that recalled the severity of ancient monuments. Moreover, the regime set great stock on archaeological digs aimed at reappraising Italy’s Roman heritage; significant areas of the capital were restructured in order to give greater prominence to the ruins of antiquity, and any medieval buildings that might have obscured them were destroyed, as was the case when the Fori Imperiali connecting the Colosseum to Piazza Venezia were opened up. Yet other elements of romanità permeated Italian society. Within six months of seizing power, for example, Mussolini’s government had turned the anniversary of the foundation of Rome (April 21) into a Fascist public holiday, the first such official
celebration. And, in 1925, an Institute for Roman Studies was founded. Nor were the arts in general immune to the influence of romanità; painting, sculpture, literature, the world of theatre and opera drew readily on classical themes.

Whilst the signs and symbols of romanità were everywhere to be seen, so too was there a proliferation of discourse on the subject. Reinvented by Fascism, romanità had become a quasi-mystical concept, intended to suggest a quality or an essence that encapsulated those values bestowed upon the modern world by ancient Rome. What romanità meant in practice was often harder to pin down. Nevertheless, its very lack of semantic precision allowed the term to be applied to countless spheres of activity, as we shall see, bringing together under one broad heading diverse aspects of, for example, the military, social, and cultural life of Fascist Italy. The frequency with which the word romanità came to be used, however, implied the existence of an overarching ideological homogeneity for the duration of the dictatorship that was more apparent than real.

In a widely publicized speech which he delivered in April 1922, that is to say some six months before his March on Rome, Mussolini positioned himself firmly as the natural heir to a prestigious tradition, echoing with rhetorical emphasis sentiments not altogether dissimilar to those expressed by earlier generations of Italian writers and thinkers. He proclaimed: “Rome is our point of departure, our point of reference, it is our symbol or, if you like, our myth. . . . The littorio is Roman, our organization of combatants is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman. Civis romanus sum.” Unlike his predecessors, however, he was arrogating for his party a classical nobility that had little in common with its day-to-day practices, and claiming for himself a respectability that he still lacked but was actively seeking.

Over a decade later, the approaching bimillennium of the emperor Augustus’ birth (1938) provided the regime with an opportunity to reinforce the concept of romanità, and at the same time to underscore the existence of an unbroken line that could be traced from ancient Rome right up to the present day in Fascist Italy. This reevocation of the past was intended to serve as a spur for the future, a challenge issued to contemporary Italians to surpass the achievements of their celebrated ancestors. Mindful, therefore, of the propaganda value of a carefully guided reading of history, the organizers of the Mostra Augustea della Romanità (the Augustan Exhibition of Romanness), which ran from September 23, 1937 to September 23, 1938, had set the tone by placing at
the entrance to the exhibition a phrase of Mussolini’s in which he called
upon his fellow countrymen, urging them: “Italians, strive to ensure that
the glories of the past are outstripped by the glories of the future!” Such
a slogan summed up the programmatic nature of the exhibition, with its
exhortation to learn from history, suggesting that it was only by emulating
the example of Rome that Fascist Italy would achieve supremacy.

One section of the exhibition, in particular, made explicit the link be-
tween Roman imperialism and Fascist expansionism. Entitled “Immor-
tality of the idea of Rome. Rebirth of the Empire in Fascist Italy,” it spelt
out this connection by referring to Italy’s recent conquest of Ethiopia.
Statements such as the following are typical of the crudely reductive
approach to history on which the exhibition was based:

Rome’s imperial vision did not die out with the fall of the Western empire.
It lived on in the hearts of future generations. . . . With Fascism, thanks to
the Duce, every ideal, every institution, every endeavor associated with
Rome now shines again in the new Italy, and after the epic enterprise
of our combatants on African soil, on the ruins of a barbaric empire the
Roman Empire has been revived.12

Mussolini himself had, of course, made a similar point in the famous
speech that he gave from Palazzo Venezia on May 9, 1936, in which he
proclaimed that Italy had an empire once more. He told the vast crowds
before him, singling out the military amongst them, that they were wit-
nessing a historical moment – no less an event than the resurgence of the
Roman Empire:

The Italian people have created the empire with their own blood, they will
make it fertile with their labor and will defend it against anyone with their
weapons. With this supreme certainty raise high your banners, your swords,
and your hearts, oh legionaries, and salute, after fifteen centuries, the re-
appearance of the empire on the fateful hills of Rome.13

Reappraising Caesar under Fascism

Given that contemporary events were being viewed increasingly through
the prism of romanità, Mussolini’s status could only benefit.14 At the inaug-
guration of the aforementioned Mostra Augustea della Romanità, its chief
The curator, Giulio Quirino Giglioli, did not fail to pay tribute to the Duce, as was customary on such occasions; noteworthy, however, was the way in which he lauded Mussolini by describing his deeds as worthy of the greatest of great Romans. Giglioli was at pains to stress the extent to which the exhibition reflected his “achievements as a *civis romanus*.” In short, Mussolini represented the embodiment of the cult of Rome and, as such, his acts were comparable to those of its most celebrated heroes.

Thus, amid the generalized tendency to capitalize on Roman history, Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus also became the focus of renewed attention. If the anniversary of the birth of the Roman emperor was marked by a variety of celebrations including an exhibition, Julius Caesar himself was by no means neglected. Indeed, the curators of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* devoted an entire room to him in order to provide an “austere and solemn exaltation of the Dictator whose figure stands out, unparalleled in Roman history” (*severa e solenne esaltazione del Dittatore, la cui figura resta isolata senza confronti nella storia romana*). Considering the context, it is telling that Julius Caesar is not only praised, but also described as peerless. Indeed, the appeal of this charismatic figure – confirmed over the centuries by his literary apotheosis in works from Shakespeare to Handel – was such that his reputation remained unchallenged.

Whilst Caesarism had its roots in nineteenth-century France and Germany, the Fascist period saw Italian scholars drawing on the concept and reinterpreting it in the light of political developments at home. Articles were written on the subject and new lives of Caesar were published. One, in particular, by Umberto Silvagni (1930), refers explicitly to Mussolini as following in the footsteps of Julius Caesar, with the March on Rome being figured as a reenactment of the crossing of the Rubicon. Silvagni’s is ostensibly a scholarly work (unlike many of the other biographies, it contains copious notes) written with the specific aim of rebutting much of the criticism directed at Caesar in the past by Italian and French historians. In the preface, Silvagni states that his aim is to demonstrate “the preeminence of the Protagonist and the inveterate hatred and injustice of his opponents over the past twenty centuries” (*la grandezza del Protagonista e l’acanimento e l’ingiustizia degli avversari suoi da venti secoli in qua*). His study is premissed on the “need for Caesar’s dictatorship and for the institution of a supreme leader at the head of the republican government” (*necessità della dittatura di Cesare e della istituzione d’un capo supremo nel reggimento repubblicano*).
Silvagni makes an analogy between Caesar crossing the Rubicon in 49 BCE, Bonaparte overturning the Directoire and taking control of the government in 1799, and Mussolini marching on Rome in 1922. He recalls that, shortly after the March on Rome, Mussolini went to the Forum to pay homage to Caesar, standing before the ruins of the temple erected for him where his funeral pyre had been burnt. By seizing power, he argued, Mussolini “had restored to honor, amongst Italians, ancient Rome and its great men!” (aveva rimesso in onore, fra gli Italiani, Roma antica e suoi Grandi). One finds further intrusions in the text on several other occasions when Silvagni feels compelled to point out a similarity with Mussolini. It should come as no surprise, then, that the author is of the opinion that “those who write history should first and foremost serve their country.”

Although Silvagni’s study is a particularly blatant attempt to subjugate history to ideology, allusions to Mussolini are not lacking in other accounts. Saverio Anfuso’s study of Julius Caesar, published in 1935, was dedicated to “Caesarian and Fascist Imperial Rome,” and has as its epigraph a quotation from Mussolini – “I love Caesar” (Io amo Cesare) – taken from Emil Ludwig’s famous interview with the Duce. Certainly, Mussolini claimed to admire Caesar enormously because, as he told Ludwig in 1932, he had “the resolve of a warrior and the resourcefulness of a wise man” (egli solo riuniva in sé la volontà del guerriero con l’ingegno del saggio). Publicly, Mussolini ensured that statues of Caesar were put in symbolic locations. Thus, he ordered a bronze statue of Julius Caesar, portrayed as imperator – a copy of the statue in the Palazzo Senatorio on the Campidoglio – to be placed on the Via dell’Impero in front of Caesar’s Forum (figure 14.1). He also saw to it that a statue of Julius Caesar was donated to the city of Rimini and positioned on the very spot from where Caesar is believed to have addressed his soldiers.

Amid all the opportunistic adulation of Caesar/Mussolini, there was, however, the odd dissenting voice. In 1934, for example, the young scholar Piero Treves wrote a highly polemical article in which he took issue with what he regarded as a veritable Caesarian mania:

Today’s exaltation of Caesar celebrates in him the victor, the founder of an autocratic Empire, “the man of the Rubicon.” But the word that is repeated most often is, alas, equivocal . . . : [the word is] revolution. Caesar, crossing the Rubicon illegally, setting himself against Rome and the Senate, accomplished a revolutionary action: he destroyed with arms a state that was
Figure 14.1 Postcard of the bronze statue of Julius Caesar placed on the Via dell’Impero during the Fascist era. From the private collection of Ray Laurence
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republican and representative; in its place he put another that was reconciliatory and dictatorial: “the strong state,” as it is generally referred to. This is the thesis that is now in fashion.²⁹

Treves’s reference to Mussolini’s illegal assumption of power is implicit. Unfortunately, the journal in which his article appeared, La Cultura, would soon be forced to close; the entire group of anti-Fascist members of Giustizia e libertà who comprised its editorial board had been under surveillance for some time and, by the following year, all had been given lengthy prison sentences.³⁰

As the founder of Fascism and the architect of an Italy that was being rebuilt according to his specifications, Mussolini was also credited with engineering a new breed of Italian, one fit to be part of a nation that he envisaged playing a leading role in world politics. He himself was held up as a paragon of Italy’s “new man” and was portrayed as “the sum and the superior synthesis of every type of greatness”; he was depicted as “a statesman, a legislator, a philosopher, a writer, an artist, a universal genius but also a prophet, a messiah, an apostle, an infallible master, sent by God, elected by destiny and the bearer of destiny.”³¹

Examples of the kind of hagiographic description referred to here were legion. Take, for instance, the following comments written in 1927 by Giorgio Pini: “Since time immemorial Italy needed a great figure who would rise up as a national symbol, a divinity, a unifying and animating myth of our history: and then Mussolini came along . . . The myth of Mussolini will last as long as that of Romulus and Caesar.”³² Pini, a journalist who would later be appointed editor of the official Fascist daily, Il Popolo d’Italia, clearly had an insight into the kind of leader many Italians had been waiting for.³³ He had just published what was to become a bestselling biography of Mussolini (1926).

The comparison gained even greater currency when, in 1936, the American journalist George Seldes published a study of Mussolini entitled Sawdust Caesar: The Untold History of Mussolini and Fascism.³⁴ The book, which circulated widely in the United States and in Britain, portrayed the Italian dictator as an “opportunist in search of an image”³⁵ or, as another historian put it more recently, “a latter-day Caesar, impressive for a time perhaps, but whose empire was composed more of sawdust than of marble.”³⁶

Several years later, the Germanist, literary critic, and writer Giuseppe Antonio Borgese also drew an analogy – albeit an unfavorable one –
between Mussolini and Caesar. In self-imposed exile in the United States from the early 1930s, Borgese wrote several books dissecting and denouncing the regime he had left behind. One of these works in particular, *Goliath: The March of Fascism* (1937), contains just such an allusion. In the final pages Borgese urges Italians to rebel against Mussolini; he castigates his compatriots, saying that hitherto they have “looked to many people and institutions for salvation, and have placed anxious hopes in the assassin’s bullet. . . . Yet it is not through accidental agencies that the Spirit does its works. Even Brutus’ blade did not cut. He was better than are most Italians today, and Caesar was a much bigger man than is their tyrant. Yet Caesar died, and tyranny lived on. For the seat of tyranny was not in the heart of Caesar; it was in the hearts of the Romans.”

**Theatrical Representations of Julius Caesar**

Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was available throughout the Fascist period and could be read in a number of versions; at least five different translations circulated between 1922 and 1943. Detailed information about actual performances is harder to come by, but we do know that in 1935, for example, a lavish production of *Julius Caesar* was staged in the Basilica di Massenzio. Leopoldo Zurlo, the state censor with responsibility for the theatre, expressed some doubts about the appropriateness of putting on Shakespeare’s play because of the prominence that it gives to the character of Brutus; he was particularly concerned about the ending which exalts Brutus for his “greatness.” Nevertheless, Galeazzo Ciano, the then under-secretary for press and propaganda, gave the go-ahead. It is worth pointing out that Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw were the only British playwrights whose work was not banned in response to the Society of Nations sanctions against Italy in 1935, following its invasion of Ethiopia.

Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, dating from 1899, was translated into Italian in the late 1920s. However, its performance was discouraged because the treatment of Caesar was considered to be too intimate, revealing at times a seemingly feeble character. Moreover, the frequent references to Caesar’s baldness made the censor uneasy: the public might have been prompted to see an embarrassing physical likeness to Mussolini. Zurlo also recalls receiving a play entitled *Ritorno di Cesare* (*The Return of Caesar*), and notes that he did not grant permission for it to be performed, this time on aesthetic grounds, despite the fact that the text included a March on
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Rome. It was, he complained, full of allegorical figures representing Italy, Liberty, Common Sense, the War Veteran, and the Communist, and the dialogue was equally replete with banalities.43

In 1936, an opera by Gian Francesco Malipiero entitled Giulio Cesare was premiered at the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa. The composer had written his own libretto, based on Shakespeare’s play but with some striking differences: after Brutus’ suicide, Octavius is carried through the streets of Rome in triumph, accompanied by a crowd chanting verses from Horace’s Carmen saeculare (“Alme sol, curru nitido diem”). This finale effectively constitutes a “Hymn to Rome” in praise of Fascist Italy, and blatantly pays homage to Mussolini’s imperial designs. For good measure, however, Malipiero also dedicated his opera to the Duce.

“In the Name of Our Rome”:
Enrico Corradini’s Nationalism

The figure of Julius Caesar inspired two other dramatic works which were produced at critical stages in the evolution of Fascism. The first, Enrico Corradini’s Giulio Cesare, was a reworking of his earlier play of the same name (1902), and was published during the mid-1920s, shortly after the imposition of Mussolini’s dictatorship, whereas the second, Giovacchino Forzano’s Cesare, was performed at the end of the 1930s when, as an ally of Nazi Germany, Italy had recently introduced its own racial laws, and had become increasingly belligerent abroad.

One of the founding members of the Italian Nationalist Association (1910), the writer Enrico Corradini (1865–1931) was regarded as a precursor and even a prophet of Fascism.44 He had supported the Libyan campaign (1911–12) and vociferously advocated Italy’s intervention in World War I, criticizing the neutral stance of the prime minister, Giovanni Giolitti, whose liberal government he strongly disapproved of. With the advent of Fascism, Corradini had seen the opportunity to give greater impetus to his nationalist movement, negotiating an alliance between the two political groupings in 1923. That same year, he was elected to the Fascist Grand Council and appointed senator.

Corradini had frequently stressed the importance of the lesson imparted by Roman civilization insofar as it could lead Italy to flourish again artistically and, at the same time, restore its standing in the world. In 1908 he declared:
Our history begins with Rome: all significant pathways start from Rome and all great nations originate in Rome. And Roman history is but the first chapter of our European history. In the name of our Rome, if we Italians began to sense the virtue of this city, our classical art would be revived, in a victorious Italy in the modern world.45

It is worth recalling that Corradini had previously written a play entitled *La Leonessa* (1899) whose main character, Paolo Emo, is a heroic soldier and adventurer-colonizer in Africa; in his youth, we are told, Emo had venerated the memory of ancient Rome, thereby earning for himself the nickname of Julius Caesar (2.2).

In his preface to the new version of *Giulio Cesare* (1926), Corradini explained that over the years he had returned continually to this subject: it had been, he wrote, “a fundamental theme of [his] inner life” (*tema fondamentale della mia attività interiore*)46 and now he wanted to make it relevant to the new Italy that had come into existence.47 Thus, he set out to compose what he referred to as a “drama of the race” (*dramma della Stirpe*), that is to say a play about the Roman people and their descendants.48 Picking up on this, one contemporary critic, Pier Ludovico Occhini, went so far as to claim that, with *Giulio Cesare*, Corradini had succeeded in creating a “mystery play for our race” (*rappresentazione sacra della nostra stirpe*).49

Neither the plot nor the structure of the 1902 version has been altered; the play is still arranged according to the same sequence of five acts, with the locations unchanged: the action opens with the arrival of Caesar and his soldiers at the Rubicon. Act 2 takes place in the Roman Senate; Act 3 evokes the battle of Pharsalus; Act 4, Caesar’s triumph; and Act 5, the Ides of March. However, Corradini has rewritten parts of the dialogue and, as a result, there are at times significant differences between the two texts. Frequently, it is merely a question of emphasis, with the revised version sounding more self-assured, and also gaining in political complexity. One finds occasional omissions but, more often than not, additions; indeed, the second version is substantially longer than the first. Furthermore, in preparing the 1926 edition, far greater attention was paid to detail; the volume now also contained illustrations and a selection of extracts from the author’s sources (Suetonius, Plutarch, Cicero, and Julius Caesar).50

Corradini’s Julius Caesar has “a thousand souls and a thousand pupils” (*Cesare dalle mille anime e dalle mille pupille*), according to Pollione’s
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description in 1.5. This somewhat unsettling characterization of Caesar derives from a mythologized view of the hero as god-like – all-knowing and all-seeing. Whilst Caesar prepares to cross the Rubicon, his men are shown to be on the verge of mutiny; they demand their pay, saying they want to go home. Caesar manages to avert a rebellion by resorting to a rhetorical device: he pretends to agree to their requests and to dismiss them. Dismayed at Caesar’s attitude, his soldiers implore him to allow them to remain with him – a pointed comment by Corradini on the need for strong leadership over the masses. Compared with the 1902 version where he depicts Caesar as a military leader who has to negotiate with the rank and file, in the 1926 version he does not present Caesar entering into discussion with his men, which makes him come across as more decisive.

In Act 2, we are afforded a fascinating portrait of Caesar by Dolabella who declares:

When I am near him, even though I do not greatly love the man, I feel myself swayed by his unmatched vitality. He is not a man, but a cosmos, a myriad humanity, solid as iron, sinuous as the wind, marvelously sensitive to the very slightest change, ready to be molded by all things in order to assimilate them.

Elsewhere, Caesar is likened at one and the same time to Mars, Apollo, and Bacchus; we also learn that he has a powerful impact on the crowds. In other words, Caesar emerges as a far more charismatic leader than in the earlier play.

Occasionally, however, Corradini reveals the failings as well as the strengths of Julius Caesar. After the battle of Pharsalus, for instance, when Caesar has to decide on the fate of the Roman prisoners, he tells Dolabella: “I can extinguish them, O Dolabella, and be Caesar, and I can save them all and still be Caesar. Caesar can take any side, because all the power resides in him, and in him alone. Let no one dare doubt it!” Thus, his legendary clemency is shown to stem from an excess of self-confidence which makes him believe himself to be invulnerable, and therefore run unnecessary risks. This comment on Caesar’s character is perhaps less a criticism of him personally than a reflection on the limitations of a dictatorial regime which is, Corradini seems to suggest, prey to an inner circle of servile and frequently venal politicians.
Nevertheless, Caesar’s destiny is presented as inextricably linked to that of Rome, and therefore his tragedy becomes, as the reviewer Occhini puts it, “the tragedy of the entire race” (la tragedia di tutta la stirpe). The figure of Caesar is “imperious” (imperiosa); he embodies “a superior idea” (una idea superiore) and he wants to achieve “internal unity for external power” (la unione interna per la potenza esterna) – in short, Caesar is Rome. On the other hand, the conspirators, driven by dogmatism, are extremists who kill for ideological reasons but whose action is purely destructive. Brutus, in particular, is portrayed as a man of letters, an intransigent Robespierre-type figure; although attractive in many ways, he is also undoubtedly a fanatic. Some of Caesar’s political followers do not escape severe criticism, either, and are presented as self-interested, motivated chiefly by financial gain. Celio says revealingly: “Caesar is not a man, he is a consortium, our consortium” (Cesare non è un uomo, è un consorzio, il nostro consorzio). Nor does Dolabella conceal his desire to profit from circumstances: “Today, Rome has two great things: Caesar’s exploits and my debts. I need to make money” (Oggi due grandi cose ha Roma: le imprese di Cesare e i miei debiti. Ho bisogno di rifarmi).

Parallels with Fascist Italy can be detected in various aspects of the play. In Caesar’s speech in general there is an echo of Mussolini’s staccato form of delivery, an effect that Corradini achieves mainly through the use of short, clipped sentences. Thus, before crossing the Rubicon, Caesar addresses his men adopting a style that contemporary audiences could not have failed to recognize: “Comrades-in-arms. Men of the provinces, men of Italy. Romans. I take upon myself and upon my army the cause of the tribunate, the republic and freedom. Do all of you have faith in me?”

On his return to Rome, Caesar goes to the Senate and addresses his supporters. Immediately, the young men among them appeal to him: “Caesar, free the lives of the people and our youth from the corruption of senile men and the wreckage that is in our way.” This would clearly have resonated with the prevailing rhetoric of youth and renewal, as evinced in the hymn adopted by the Fascist Party, “Giovinezza giovinezza” (O youth). It is not hard to see why, in his 1926 review, Occhini should have hailed Corradini’s new version of Giulio Cesare as the most significant attempt thus far to create a new Fascist theatre aesthetics which drew on the classical tradition – one whose function was that of celebrating heroes, and glorifying the Motherland.
Giovacchino Forzano: Theatre as Propaganda

Forzano (1884–1970) began his career as a librettist in 1903, working with Mascagni and Puccini (Gianni Schicchi and Suor Angelica), and also wrote musical reviews such as Monopoleone (on the relationship between Giolitti and the Socialists), which enjoyed enormous success. He oversaw the mise-en-scène of his librettos closely and had a penchant for spectacular effects, using large casts to represent the masses; his plays, too, reflect this populist approach. He made Camicia nera in 1933; commissioned by the Istituto Luce, it was one of the few overtly propagandistic feature films made under Fascism.

Entitled simply Cesare, Forzano’s play was first performed on April 29, 1939 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, where it ran for ten days (figure 14.2). In May it transferred to Milan and was performed at the Teatro Lirico as well as at La Scala. The production then toured Italy for the rest of the season. In January 1940, it was staged in Budapest, and in April in Berlin. The text is of considerable historical, if not literary, interest since it was written by Forzano in collaboration with Mussolini. This was not the first time that the two had worked together on a theatrical project; previously, they had collaborated on Campo di maggio (1930), a play about Napoleon, and Villafranca (1932), a play about Cavour.

As early as 1932 Francesco Giunta, undersecretary in the Cabinet Office, had sent Forzano an outline of a play about Julius Caesar prepared by Mussolini. In a letter dated February 19, 1932, Forzano congratulated the Duce on what he described as a highly coherent and visionary project, hinting heavily at the importance of his work:

Excellency, I have been studying your Caesar for the past two days and I feel I must let you know the extent of my admiration. Yours is a superb synopsis, on account both of its clarity and its effectiveness. In but a few typewritten pages you have carved a series of bas-reliefs which, once they are set in motion, will bestow upon the world the entire view of a most glorious world. Moreover, this is almost always what happens when you address a given historical moment theatrically. (And also when you do not address it theatrically.) Thank you for thinking of me for the material execution.

As discussions proceeded, a film of the play was even planned, to be made at Forzano’s Tirrenia studios, with Forzano as director, and Mussolini
Figure 14.2  Cesare by Giovacchino Forzano ("in collaboration with Benito Mussolini"), directed by Giovacchino Forzano. Premiered at the Teatro Argentina, Rome, April 25, 1939. By kind permission of the Burcardo Library, Rome
granted permission to produce both an Italian and a German version.\textsuperscript{67} Mussolini prepared a eulogy of Caesar which was to have been used for the ending of the film; he lauded the Roman dictator as an “unsurpassed genius in war and politics” (\textit{genio insuperato nella guerra e nella politica}), and reminded audiences that Dante had placed his assassins “in hell for eternity” (\textit{negli inferni per sempre}).\textsuperscript{68} The film was never made, however, presumably on account of the outbreak of the war.

\textit{Cesare} consists of three self-contained acts, each divided into \textit{quadri}. A series of distinct episodes illustrate Julius Caesar’s life from 49 BCE up to his assassination in 44 BCE. The play focuses on him as a beleaguered solitary hero, forced to keep an eye on even his closest allies for fear of betrayal. Act 1 describes the climate of political and military confrontation that preceded Caesar’s decision to cross the Rubicon. Act 2 emphasizes Caesar’s clemency after the battle of Pharsalus as well as his leadership qualities during the Egyptian campaign. In Act 3 Caesar is preparing to conquer the Parthians as part of his plan to consolidate Rome’s dominion and to bring peace to its territories when he is tragically cut down.

Forzano appears to have done his utmost to ensure that \textit{Cesare} was not compared with Shakespeare’s \textit{Julius Caesar}. His play contains many reported scenes, notably the murder of Caesar; presumably, he judged tyrannicide too sensitive a subject to be shown directly. He is clearly less interested in the dramatic potential of the story than in its potential as propaganda. Thus, we find parallels with the Fascist version of Italy’s recent history, from the so-called “revolution” that overthrew a corrupt “democratic” system, to the creation of an empire and, finally, the start of a new era. The identification of the Duce with Caesar is self-evident in the references to, for instance, the draining of the Pontine marshes, the reforming of the calendar, and Caesar’s literary talent (\textit{de bello Gallico} is presented as a bestseller in Act 2).\textsuperscript{69} One of the much-vaunted achievements of Fascism was its success at land reclamation, and here Mussolini was depicted as having completed the work begun by Caesar some two thousand years earlier. Whilst the regime’s introduction of Roman numerals to indicate the year, with the first year dating from the March on Rome in October 1922, cannot be compared to the introduction of the Julian calendar, such an allusion hints at a similarity between the two leaders. And, as for literary skills, Mussolini’s speeches were considered models of writing to be studied.

\textit{Cesare} was conceived as a vehicle for the regime’s self-aggrandizement, a display of grandeur that reflected the greatness of the past and, by
implication, suggested a present that was capable of recreating such splendour. It enjoyed a spectacular staging, comparable, albeit on a smaller scale, with the extravagance of the epic film Scipione l’Africano; it had a large cast, augmented by an enormous number of extras (one thousand soldiers were drafted in to act as legionaries). And Forzano readily lent himself to this exercise in sycophancy. Zurlo recalls: “As for Giovacchino Forzano’s Cesare I could have authorized it with my eyes shut since I knew that it had received the approval of the Duce. Nevertheless . . . I asked the author to cut something. In one scene Potino tells Caesar who is commemorating Pompey: ‘It is very noble to weep for an enemy . . . when he’s dead.’ The last three words might have hinted at something that was not flattering for Mussolini.” Matteotti’s death springs to mind here: his kidnapping and subsequent assassination was officially condemned in Parliament by Mussolini who, moreover, always sought to present himself as a responsible head of state, one who deplored violence.

According to Griffiths, if Cesare is less successful artistically than most of Forzano’s other dramatic works, it was because he was “deluded in his admiration for Mussolini.” However, the critical response was enthusiastic as it was widely known that Mussolini was the co-author of Cesare; the theatre critic Leonida Répaci, for instance, described Caesar’s solitude as that of a demi-god, noting that the play is at its strongest when the tragic hero is on stage. Predictably, perhaps, his review bears the title “Another victory for Caesar” (“Un’altra vittoria di Cesare”).

Conclusion

Under Fascism there was, as we have seen, a variety of uses to which the figure of Caesar might be put. Corradini’s play coincides with an early phase in the formation and consolidation of Mussolini’s dictatorship. As someone working from within the Fascist establishment, and with the credibility afforded him by his status – he remained the father of Italian nationalism – Corradini was in a position to critique some aspects of the regime. In this process, events from the life of Caesar could be employed to suggest, for example, the potential dangers of servility and even corruption that might emerge from the new political system.

The case of Forzano is quite different. He was writing over a decade later, by which time Fascism had undergone considerable transformations, and was moving toward totalitarianism. Its growing complacency,
strength-ened by the consensus it had enjoyed following the annexation of Ethiopia, made it blind to its own defects and impervious to criticism from younger generations of Fascists. Forzano’s play, ghost-written for Mussolini, seems to sum up the extent to which the regime, and in particular its leader, had sunk into a form of narcissistic torpor where self-celebration was the order of the day. Yet popular support for Mussolini was already waning.

Forzano’s representation of Caesar/Mussolini is hagiographic to the point of being grotesque, thereby defeating its purpose; ultimately, in his Julius Caesar we see, rather than a hero, the caricature of an authoritative leader whose stance merely serves to alienate. This suggests that the value of using Caesar to legitimize Mussolini’s dictatorship had all but diminished; by now, the overinflation of the “genre” was destroying any impact it might reasonably have been expected to produce on the general public. Henceforth, Mussolini’s regime would be in need of far more than the heroic exploits of Caesar to prop it up.

NOTES

1 Falasca-Zamponi (1997), 90–1.
2 Even though it is employed in a number of silent films on classical themes – such as Quo Vadis (1912), Marcantonio e Cleopatra (1913), and Caio Giulio Cesare (1914), all directed by Enrico Guazzoni – there does not appear to be any historical basis for its use in Roman times. On the Rome-inspired subject matter of early Italian cinema, see Wyke (1997). For discussion of the film Caio Giulio Cesare, better known as Cajus Julius Caesar, see Wyke (chapter 10 in this volume).
3 By contrast the passo romano, or Roman step, was not introduced until February 1938, arguably as Italy’s answer to the German goose step. It was used for military parades, another expression of order and discipline intended to connect the rituals of the Fascist regime with those of ancient Rome. See Falasca-Zamponi (1997), 113–16.
4 Originally, the term fascio simply meant a political association. It tended to be used by workers and peasants who organized in order to improve their conditions, as had been the case most notably with the Sicilian fasci dei lavoratori during the early 1890s.
6 It is worth noting, however, that this emblem had already been adopted – to serve radically different political systems – by republican France and by the United States.
For an account of the transformation of Rome under Fascism, see Cederna (1979).

See in particular Canfora (1980); Cofrancesco (1980).

As Marla Stone points out, romanità and italianità were both “fluid categories that changed meaning over time and which did not prescribe a specific style. With the greatest force and the least grace, after the declaration of empire in 1935 the regime encouraged a rich iconography of romanità and empire.” Stone (1998), 194.

Quoted in Gentile (2001), 131. All translations from Italian are my own. The speech was originally published in “Passato e avvenire,” Il Popolo d’Italia (April 21, 1922), and it was cited frequently as evidence of Mussolini’s innate romanità.

Honorary Roman citizenship was bestowed on Mussolini in 1924.

Mostra Augustea della Romanità, exhibition catalogue (1937), 361.

Quoted in ibid., 369.

On the way historical parallels were found by the Fascist regime in order to legitimate its rule, see Visser (1992), 14: “The ‘Roman revolution’ (133–27 BC), as a ‘permanent revolution’ (just like fascism pretended to be) which transformed the republican society into an imperial one, leading to the golden age of Augustus and the pax romana, was treated as a ‘model’ on which the fascist revolution and the totalitarian imperialistic society should be based and which, very important for fascism, showed how the mistakes made by its Roman counterparts could be avoided.”

Giglioli (1938), vii. Giglioli’s inaugural speech was published in the second edition of the exhibition catalogue.

Their images, too, were reproduced on stamps during the 1920s.

Giglioli (1938), 77.

For a historical analysis of Caesarism, see Momigliano (1956).

Lives of Caesar written under Fascism include: Allulli (1926); Silvagni (1930); Anfuso (1935); Foschini (1936). In addition, there is a historical novel about Caesar by Violini (1935). Allulli’s biography of Caesar is narrated in a lively style, illustrated with reproductions from Mantegna’s affresco cycle, “Il trionfo di Cesare.”

Silvagni has in mind, in particular, Guglielmo Ferrero’s five-volume Grandeza e decadenza di Roma (in six volumes in the more complete French edition). Volume 2 was published in 1902.

Silvagni (1930), ix.

Ibid., x.

Ibid., 411.

See, for example, chapter 6, entitled “Il legislatore e l’uomo di Stato.”

Silvagni (1930), xxx; emphasis added.

Ludwig (1965), 80.
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27 See Campana (1933); Pasquini (1933). The significance of these symbolic gestures is explored in Laurence (1999); Wyke (1999b). Many thanks are due to Ray Laurence for the illustration of the statue included in this volume.

28 Born in 1911, he was the son of the Socialist leader Claudio Treves, a fierce opponent of the regime. Piero Treves had recently published a book on the concept of freedom under the Greeks (1933), and went on to become a professor in ancient history in the postwar period.

29 "L'odierna esaltazione italiana di Cesare celebra in lui il vincitore, il fondatore dell'Impero autocratico, 'l'uomo del Rubicone.' Veramente la parola più ripetuta, ed ahimè quanto poco chiara, è un'altra, ambiziosa e solenne, generica e fascinatrice: rivoluzione. Cesare, varcando illegalmente il Rubicone, ponendosi contro Roma e il Senato, ha compiuto un gesto rivoluzionario: ha distrutto con le armi uno Stato, repubblicano e rappresentativo; ne ha fatto sorgere un altro, pacificatore, dittatoriale: 'lo stato forte,' come lo si chiama comunemente. Questa è la tesi in voga." Treves (1934), 129.


33 Pini took over this role after the death of Arnaldo Mussolini in 1931.

34 Seldes had begun writing the book shortly after being expelled from Italy in 1925 and had completed it in 1932, but had failed to find a publisher until Mussolini was finally discredited in the eyes of the international press, following his invasion of Ethiopia.

35 Diggins (1972), 53.


37 Borgese (1938), 88–9. It is interesting to compare Borgese’s views with those of Giuseppe Bottai, a leading member of the Fascist hierarchy, and Minister of Education between 1936 and 1943. In a diary entry for September 6, 1942, he reflects on the significance of Caesarism for Italy, suggesting that there is something innate in the Latin character that requires a strong, charismatic leader. He describes this “need” for a dictator as something constant – and harmless, provided it is tempered by other institutions. Bottai (1986), 320.

38 On Julius Caesar in Italy, see Sestito (1978).

39 Zurlo (1952), 134.

40 “I did not really have any difficulties on account of Caesar. Lyno Guarnieri’s Julius Caesar, for example, ends after the battle of Pharsalus when Caesar orders his men to pursue Pompey after his flight, and Gerardo Iovinelli’s Caio Giulio Cesare ends with an exchange between Caesar and Brutus.” Zurlo (1952), 180.
See Carlo di Stefano (1964), 115 on Shaw’s pro-Fascist stance.


Ibid., 179.

On Corradini, see Gaeta (1983).

Corradini (1980), 140.

Corradini (1926), 9.

Ibid., 9–10.

It is worth pointing out that *stirpe* can mean “descent,” “stock,” or “race,” making it a rather awkward word to translate.

For a review of the production of *Giulio Cesare* that took place in Taormina, see Marrocco (1928).

Corradini (1926), 57.

“When io che in fondo non lo amo, sto accanto a lui, mi sento preso dalla sua vitalità senza pari. Non è un uomo, ma un cosmo, una umanità innumerevole, rigida come il ferro, agile come il vento, meravigliosamente sensibile a ogni più lieve mutamento, capace di lasciarsi plasmare da tutte le cose per appropriarlese.” Corradini (1926), 76.

“Io posso spengerli tutti, o Dolabella, ed essere Cesare, e posso risparmialri tutti ed essere del pari Cesare. Cesare può prendere tutti i partiti, perché ha tutta la potenza e in sè solo. Guai a chi ne dubita!” Ibid., 168.


“Cesare, libera la vita e la giovinezza dalla corruzione della senilità e dall’ingombro delle macerie.” Corradini (1926), 131.

Occhini (1926), 441.

Forzano’s biographical details can be found in Cimmino (1997).

On Forzano’s theatrical activity, see Griffiths (2000).

May 30–June 1, 1939. A play had never before been performed in Milan’s opera house, and tickets for the event apparently sold out. Grassi (1962), 342.

Forzano published *Cesare* in 1954, together with these two other plays.

“Eccellenza, sono due giorni che studio il Suo Cesare e sento il desiderio di dirLe tutta la mia ammirazione; è una sintesi superba per chiarezza ed efficacia; in poche pagine dattilografate Ella ha martellato una serie di bas-sorlievi che, in movimento, porteranno per il mondo tutto un gloriosissimo mondo. Meraviglioso. Del resto accade sempre così quando l’E. V. considera
teatralmente un determinato momento storico. (E anche quando non lo considera teatralmente.) Grazie di aver pensato a me per la esecuzione materiale.” Quoted in Griffiths (2000), 136. ACS, SPD(CR), Forzano, 85/3, “Cesare.” Segreteria particolare del Duce (carteggio riservato). Griffiths notes that the file relating to Forzano, Giovacchino, busta 85 is in disorder. Many of the documents were photographed by Allied Military Intelligence at the end of the war and are marked with a six-figure progressive number.

67 Griffiths (2000), 175.
69 Forzano (1954), 167.
70 The implication is, of course, that Fascist soldiers are the direct descendants of Roman soldiers. Such an immediate identification confirms the analogy that was drawn by Mussolini in his 1936 declaration of empire speech. As we saw earlier, he pointedly used the term “legionaries” to address sections of the audience.
72 Moreover, he suggests that “audiences were brought together in what was in effect a collective act of worship on the altar of fascism.” Griffiths (2000), 175.
73 Répaci (1941), 104.
Part VI
Warfare and Revolution
From early modern times onwards, Caesar and his campaigns never ceased to interest military theorists and professional soldiers. Although Caesar was – and is still nowadays – most commonly associated with the application of military power for political ends, this is quite noteworthy, as he neither produced a work dedicated to military theory nor treated military matters with particular precision in his commentaries. This chapter intends to sketch the military reception of Caesar from the so-called Oranian army reforms of the early sixteenth century onwards. As for the purpose of such an overview, it is impracticable to separate strictly the reception of Caesar from that of ancient military theory in general; in some cases the latter has to be addressed as well. It will be shown that at the end of the eighteenth century the main interest in Caesar shifted from learning lessons which were directly useable on the battlefield to gaining insights into the principles of war and military leadership in general.

Machiavelli and the Oranians

Already in medieval times as well as at the beginning of the Renaissance, ancient military writers found interested readers in western Europe; in
most cases, however, this interest was of a rather antiquarian nature. This is not surprising, as in terms of numbers, organization, and training there were few similarities between ancient and medieval warfare; in fact, to an ancient observer the latter would have seemed quite a feeble affair, at least for most of the time.² It was only during the sixteenth century that contemporary warfare again approached a level of complexity that was comparable to that in antiquity. At that time, the ground was already well prepared for a new reception of ancient military thinking that sought to apply ancient military theory to the battlefield of early modern times. Editions had been produced of most of the important ancient authors who wrote on military matters; to give just a few examples, the editio princeps of Caesar had been prepared in 1469 by Giovanni Andrea de Bussi, while Aelianus Tacticus was first published in a Latin translation by Theodorus Gazes in 1487, and roughly a century later in 1589 Isaac Casaubon edited Polyaenus for the first time.³ Likewise, general studies on ancient military history were being published; among these the works of Justus Lipsius which appeared at the end of the sixteenth century were probably the most influential ones.⁴ Throughout the whole century, matters of ancient history in general and of ancient military history in particular were in constant discussion among the well-educated classes in western Europe.

One of the first important attempts at applying lessons taken from ancient military history to an army of the sixteenth century was made by Niccolò Machiavelli in his study L’arte della guerra, which was published in 1521.⁵ In it, he describes a model army which is put to the test of a theoretical battle; the army he had in mind was an infantry force of citizen soldiers that was organized along the lines of the Roman legion. One would expect Machiavelli to mention Caesar several times in a work addressing both the practical aspects of setting up an army and the political implications of such an undertaking, and indeed he does. His main interest in Caesar, however, is not centered on what the latter used his forces for, but on how he used them – it is not the “principe” Caesar that deserves attention, but the “capitano.” Machiavelli is looking for tactics or stratagems which can be used in conjunction with his model army. Thus, for example, he mentions how Caesar managed to cross the Elaver by secretly leaving a small force behind to build a bridge while drawing the attention of Vercingetorix to his main force and away from the site of the bridge.⁶ Another, more general, example is the use of temporary fieldworks, which is advocated by Machiavelli and illustrated by Caesar’s
From “Capitano” to “Great Commander”

attempt to lift the siege of Bibrax, at one point during which he pro-
tected the flanks of his army with extensive fortifications. Clearly, for
Machiavelli, Caesar was valuable not least because his works yielded
lessons which could be put into practice on a contemporary battlefield.

The next important step in the military reception of Caesar and of
ancient military theory in general – which, at the same time, happens to
be the single most important act of reform of early modern warfare – saw
ancient military thinking not merely applied to contemporary warfare
theoretically, but transferred almost directly to the battlefield. Since 1568,
the military efforts of the Netherlands in their ongoing struggle for free-
dom from Spanish rule were hampered to a great extent by the numer-
ical superiority of their opponents. In order to overcome this strategic
problem, Moritz von Oranien-Nassau and his brother Wilhelm planned
to acquire a qualitative edge over the Spanish forces by a thorough re-
organization of their military, which was put into effect from 1595 on-
wards. This reorganization, known as the Oranian army reform, centered
around the introduction of newly organized army units, new tactical
concepts, a new recruiting system (aimed at reducing the number of
mercenaries), and centrally organized training for all soldiers (something
that was almost completely unknown in Europe at that time). All these
innovations stemmed from a thorough analysis of several ancient mili-
tary writers, and as a result the “new” Oranian army was in practice
based to a great extent on ancient models.

It should come as no surprise that the Oranians turned to ancient sources
in building, equipping, and training their armies. Apart from the simple
fact that most of the literature on military theory and military practice
available to them at the time was either of ancient or of early Byzantine
origin, the Oranians, as Machiavelli before them, believed that they shared
important tactical problems with their ancient counterparts. Having armies
with a high proportion of infantry at their disposal, their thoughts mainly
concentrated on how they could defend themselves against determined
attacks by heavy, armored cavalry, a problem which also features promin-
ently in Machiavelli’s work. The cavalry charge, one is inclined to say,
was the main tactical nightmare of the sixteenth and much of the seven-
teenth centuries, although in fact – apart from a number of rare occasions,
mainly during the Thirty Years’ War – this perceived threat never mater-
ialized. As a result of this obsession with cavalry defense, infantry was
lavishly equipped with pikes, the number of pikemen among infantry
units often coming close to half their total strength.
While the similarities – real as well as perceived – between ancient and sixteenth-century warfare were a key factor in the adoption of ancient armies as role models, the general intellectual background against which the army reform took place, and which has already been briefly outlined above, was of equal importance. Both Moritz von Oranien-Nassau and his brother Wilhelm had enjoyed a thorough humanistic education. Moreover, both took great interest in antiquity in general and in ancient military history in particular. In the catalogue of Moritz’s library we find the works of Caesar, Aelianus, and others taking a prominent place, whereas Wilhelm not only wrote a study on Cannae but also thought a sound knowledge of the Latin language to be a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to become a general, if only for the simple reason that it enabled one to read the ancient sources. The new – one might say “practical” – reception of ancient military writers in the sixteenth century therefore has to be ascribed to both military and educational factors.

Turning briefly to what the Oranians actually made much use of, unsurprisingly Aelianus and Leo VI take a prominent place as far as unit organization and tactical maneuvering are concerned. For these matters, Caesar’s works, as they were not military handbooks, were in most cases not as useful; they could, however, provide lessons of a more general nature instead, as for example on the importance of topography during military action, already noted by Machiavelli, as well as on the importance of sound logistics. The latter is especially noteworthy insofar as, although nobody would deny that logistics do indeed have great importance in any military undertaking, Caesar (while constantly mentioning concerns about his corn supply) apparently never bothered about proper logistical preparation for his campaigns.

Other aspects of the commentaries of Caesar that met with great interest, again following the pattern of Machiavelli’s theoretical work, were those that nowadays would be described as combat engineering. The Kriegsbuch of Johann von Nassau-Siegen, an important source for the Oranian army reform, mentions Caesar several times, most notably in the context of bridging river obstacles and military fieldworks, on which it put a particular stress. Indeed, it suggests that everyone “who calls fieldworks a cowardly pastime should learn how the Romans artfully conquered the world through it.”

On the whole, the Oranian army reform was a striking success, and during the following thirty years its main elements found their way into every European army. With it went the thinking inspired by the
extensive discussion of ancient military matters. Thus, the Oranian commanders, and in the wake of their successes many others in western Europe, directly transferred ancient military thinking to the battlefields of the sixteenth century.

Comparing the theoretical approach of Machiavelli with the practical approach of the Oranians, two observations can be made. On the one hand, it is obvious that Caesar’s Renaissance readers turned to his works mainly in order to get direct advice for tactical and organizational problems. Although there can be little doubt that Caesar was also admired by his readers for his personality and his military and political leadership abilities, these aspects were not the focus of their attention – the role model was not the man, but his army. On the other hand, Caesar’s works could not easily be transformed into a book of military regulations; they had to be mined for useful pieces of information instead. Therefore, while he was among the ancient military writers read with great interest at the time, his works did not have the same importance as, for example, that of Aelianus Tacticus.

From Montecuccoli to Clausewitz

The second half of the seventeenth century saw important changes in European warfare. As the general introduction of firearms into all infantry units provided them with more offensive power than before, tactical thoughts shifted from the earlier obsession with defense against cavalry charges toward the development of linear infantry tactics. Theoretically, cavalry could still decide a battle, since even at the beginning of the nineteenth century infantry did not have much stopping power at its disposal against a sufficiently determined charge. However, in most cases it was the infantry action itself which decided the outcome of a battle, mainly because the operational use of cavalry during much of the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries was mostly limited to taking on the enemy’s cavalry. With these changes, any similarity to ancient warfare was soon gone, and with it went one of the main reasons Renaissance theorists had turned to ancient military writers.

At the same time, however, interest in the scientific study of warfare arose. War began to be seen as a science which had underlying principles in the same way as mathematics was ruled by mathematical axioms. Military theorists had to find and describe these general rules of war.
before turning to the more practical matters of unit organization, equipment, and tactics; as the science of war was believed to be principally unchanged throughout history, these principles were thought to be unaffected by any changes in military technology. Thus Raimondo Montecuccoli, probably the most influential seventeenth-century military theorist, stated in his famous study *Vom Kriege mit den Türken* that the invention of firearms and artillery notwithstanding, the fundamental principles of war remained unchanged from antiquity.

While this approach to military theory produced results that did not really live up to expectations – Montecuccoli’s studies were essentially confined to analyzing the wars of the second half of the seventeenth century – it kept interest in ancient military writers alive. Moreover, as attention began to shift from learning practical lessons to finding general principles, military theorists began to lose interest in those ancient works that were pure handbooks on training, tactics, or equipment and focused instead on those authors who offered a more general description of war; as a consequence, ancient historians generally gained in popularity. Naturally, not only had Caesar to figure among those authors but, as the most important ancient general whose own writings had survived, he also had to occupy a prominent place.

Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that around the middle of the eighteenth century Frederick the Great, who was arguably among the more gifted tacticians of his time, did not think that knowledge of Caesar had any great value for a professional soldier. On the one hand, he did at least partially hold to the idea that war was a science with underlying general principles; thus in his *Avant-Propos* to a commentary on Polybius’ history of Rome he praised Maurice of Orange for recovering the art of war which had been neglected for centuries. On the other hand, however, he also claimed in his *Avant-Propos* that not much could be learned from Caesar’s expeditions to Britain and his cavalry dispositions at Pharsalus.

Apart from the fact that Caesar’s success at Pharsalus had to be attributed to the use of his lightly armed foot soldiers as well as questionable leadership on his opponent’s side, not to a particularly inventive way of using his cavalry, and apart from the exceptionally poor logistics (even by Caesar’s standards) that characterized the two British expeditions, Frederick’s remarks clearly show that the concept of adopting lessons directly from ancient authors like Caesar was far from dead. Indeed, Caesar seemed to Frederick largely of no use, because, given major
differences between ancient and contemporary matters, little of any value could be adopted from him directly. That he mentions Caesar once in his *Principes généraux de la guerre* in the context of bridging a river only underlines this “practical” approach to Caesar’s works and ancient military theory in general.\(^\text{30}\)

Whereas Frederick was aware of the fact that historical change had outrun, so to speak, ancient military theory, this view was not shared by all eighteenth-century military theorists. The middle of the century had seen a sharp increase in the number of publications on military theory, and ancient military history was studied with great interest by a number of writers. The advocacy of massed formations and shock tactics by Jean Charles, Chevalier de Folard, stemmed in part from his detailed analysis of the works of Polybius.\(^\text{31}\) Paul de Maizeroy, who introduced the distinction between tactics and strategy into military theory, was one of the most eminent scholars of ancient military history at the time;\(^\text{32}\) like Montecuccoli, he believed the principles of war to be unchanged by technical developments, therefore making ancient military history still of value to the contemporary military theorist. Likewise, Jacques-François de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, claimed historical change to have no influence on the fundamental rules of war; accordingly, for his studies into operational deployment and the movement of armies, he turned to a variety of ancient sources and devoted several chapters in his *Art de la guerre par principes et par règles* to a comparison of the campaigns of Turenne and Caesar.\(^\text{33}\)

Although ancient military theory was thus still deemed to have a practical value by a significant number of theorists in the eighteenth century, by the century’s end the time for taking practical lessons from it seemed finally to have come to a close. This is perhaps best exemplified with Karl von Clausewitz, who found himself to be quite in line with Prussia’s enlightened monarch Frederick in his devastating judgment on the military history of antiquity – as far as he was concerned, of all military history that of antiquity was the least useful.\(^\text{34}\)

Looking back from Clausewitz to the Oranians, two lines of development are clearly visible. On the one hand, there was what could be called a “practical” approach to ancient military theory – Machiavelli, the Oranians, and to a certain extent even de Folard had thought lessons from it could be applied to modern warfare, as there had been few significant changes in warfare from ancient times; and although Frederick and Clausewitz discounted ancient military history as of no
use, it was because they continued to uphold a “practical” approach to it. In this way of thinking Caesar had a place, but not a very prominent one, as he had neither written a military handbook nor was a true military theorist.

On the other hand, in Montecuccoli a distinctly different line of reception can be discerned, which assumed the existence of general principles of war unchallenged by any historical change. In order to understand these, one had to look not at the technicalities of war, but at those men who through their outstanding successes had shown their mastery of the general principles – the great generals of military history. Here lay the key to Caesar’s continuing reception, as he, at least as far as antiquity was concerned, held a prominent if not the most prominent place among great commanders; Alexander may have been more successful, and Hannibal may have had a better understanding of tactics, but only Caesar offered the possibility of studying not only his campaigns, but also his own reflections on them.

The Impact of Industrialization

As the nineteenth century went on, the distance between ancient and contemporary warfare increased even more dramatically. Around the middle of the century the greatest changes took place in the fields of tactics, strategic planning, and military technology since the introduction of firearms in European armies, perhaps even since the introduction of the horse in the Mediterranean world. For the first time in history, the invention of the steam engine made rapid mobilization and the swift deployment of mass armies possible, and logistics could be enormously improved. Artillery, which even in Napoleonic times did not have the same importance as infantry and cavalry, emerged due to the invention of the rifled gun at the end of the century as the true battlefield decider. The last quarter of the nineteenth century finally saw the innovation which had, literally speaking, the most impact, and which is nonetheless probably the least recognized – the brass cartridge allowed the development of the magazine-fed bolt-action infantry rifle, which provided infantry, for the first time ever in military history, with an almost unbreakable stopping power against frontal charges. Even though French shock tactics, as well as the Prussian method of breaking up formations into smaller and more independent units, may have displayed certain
superficial similarities to ancient tactical concepts, ancient military theory clearly had now lost any practical value.

Already in the first half of the nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparté had noted in his *Précis des guerres de Jules César* that ancient warfare was completely different to contemporary warfare. Written after his exile to St. Helena, the *Précis* is a remarkable collection of military notes on Caesar’s campaigns in Gaul and it brings all of Caesar’s major military decisions under close scrutiny. Napoleon’s judgment is not particularly positive; for most parts of Caesar’s campaigns he noted a certain lack of strategic intelligence and preparation. Particularly the expeditions to Britain do not fare well; to Napoleon they were ill prepared, undertaken with insufficient forces, and – as Caesar didn’t bother to leave garrisons behind – eventually ineffective.

Napoleon’s comments are particularly interesting where he compares Caesar’s actions, or ancient military matters in general, to those of his own time. And it is in his description of Roman fieldworks (which, echoing Johann von Nassau-Siegen probably unknowingly, he considered to be one of the Roman army’s most important capabilities) that he clearly illustrates the difference between ancient and contemporary warfare. Whereas in an age when soldiers were armed with swords and pikes, building a camp at the end of each day provided security for a Roman legion, with the introduction of firearms, and particularly artillery, such a camp would have invariably turned into a deadly trap, as the defenders would have to spread their fire, while the attackers could concentrate it on one target. While a Roman legion could hold a camp even against an enemy superior in numbers, a modern force not only would succumb to the artillery of a superior force, but would even lose against an enemy of similar size, as the latter could disperse his artillery. Moreover, the Roman commander could place camp without paying too much attention to the landscape, while for the contemporary commander topography was the key to victory; pointedly, Napoleon states that entrenching a Roman legion did not require a military genius, whereas finding the most suitable positions for one’s forces on a modern battlefield was the hallmark of a modern military genius.

This passage, though not directly related to Caesar, but to Roman warfare in general, is remarkable in a number of ways. First of all, it demonstrates Napoleon’s clear understanding of the capabilities of artillery and rifle-armed infantry, which surpassed that of many nineteenth-century theorists. Secondly, it not only stresses the difference between
ancient and contemporary warfare, but also clearly states the advantages of modern warfare – Napoleon describes how a modern army could rout an encamped Roman legion with ease without even trying to storm or breach the walls, simply by using gunfire. It is also clear that to Napoleon commanding a modern army was more demanding than commanding a Roman legion. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Napoleon’s remarks, however, is only indirectly stated: due to the fundamental differences between ancient and modern military matters, ancient military theory is not merely difficult – or next to impossible – to adopt on a modern battlefield. The lessons it can offer are decidedly wrong, at least in certain situations; whereas troop concentration was desirable on an ancient battlefield, it could be potentially disastrous on a modern one.

As far as the military reception of ancient military history in general and Caesar in particular is concerned, the Précis might well be regarded as closing the case. After all, one of the greatest military leaders of the time had, after a detailed analysis of Caesar’s campaigns in Gaul, come to the conclusion that Caesar’s campaigns were fault-ridden and that ancient warfare was immeasurably inferior to modern warfare.

**Caesar at Military Academies**

Yet only a little over one hundred years later officers in most European armies had not only read the works of Caesar, but also analyzed his campaigns, since ancient military history constituted part of their officers’ training. Indeed, at the very end of the nineteenth century, the Austrian high command even went so far as to provide substantial support, both financial and organizational, for a research project on ancient military history; this resulted in the important studies of Johannes Kromeyer and Georg Veith, the latter an active Austrian army colonel at the time.  

As in the case of the Oranians, there were two quite different reasons for this turn of events. The first, already outlined above in more detail, is grounded in the line of reception that stressed the necessity of understanding the general principles of war. Montecuccoli’s view that these principles were unaffected by the differences in warfare between antiquity and the seventeenth century could just as well be applied to the nineteenth century. And, taking the evidence of the Précis into account, Napoleon again provides an interesting example. Despite the criticism expressed in his analysis of Caesar’s campaigns, he nevertheless thought
that there was ample reason to study them, not for any tactical problems, but for Caesar’s decision-making processes, character, and leadership abilities. In Caesar, Napoleon saw one of the great commanders of military history, who could not only provide insight into the general nature of war, but also serve as a role model for future military leaders. It was the man who deserved attention, not the tactics he applied or the way his troops were equipped; his principles of military leadership were unaffected by historical change and could be applied to a line of grenadiers just as well as to a formation of pikemen.

As has already been noted above, this shift in attention from Caesar the general to Caesar the military leader had the important effect of securing his reception beyond any considerations of actual usefulness. However, it also resulted in a certain conflation of military and political aspects, because in studying Caesar’s leadership it is simply not possible strictly to separate them. Moreover, a study of Caesar’s campaigns that encompassed both military and political aspects could also serve political ends, an outcome not possible (or at least not as easy) with a purely military analysis of his campaigns.

Here, Louis Napoleon’s Histoire de Jules César provides a fitting example and makes for a remarkable comparison with the Précis of his famous uncle. Louis Napoleon analyzed Caesar’s campaigns in a broadly similar way, paying more attention, however, to factual detail. Yet, while the Précis is simply a military commentary on the campaigns of Caesar in Gaul, the Histoire is not only broader in scope (as the title obviously suggests), it also serves a purpose which is stated very clearly by Louis Napoleon in the preface: the aim of his work is to prove that providence sometimes brings up persons like Caesar, Charlemagne, and Napoleon, so that such men can lead their nations into a better future, and those nations then have to decide whether to follow them or not. The inclusion of Napoleon here shows that, while ostensibly the Histoire is about Caesar and how the Romans made the wrong decision when they chose not to follow him, it is in fact also about Napoleon and the wrong decision made by Europe’s leaders to oust him. For Louis Napoleon, analyzing Caesar’s campaign was not aimed at gaining insights into the general nature of war but at justifying his politics and, through this apology, ultimately vindicating his uncle. The study of Caesar had been turned into a propaganda tool.

As was stated above, there was a second reason for interest in Caesar (particularly widespread in Germany) that lay, as with the Oranian army
reform, in a combination of military reforms and changes in the general educational background. After the defeat of 1806 at the hands of Napoleon, Prussian military reformers went about forming a new modern army. One of the key elements of the Prussian army reform was a thorough revision of the recruitment and education of future officers. While before 1806 it was noble birth combined with the right connections that virtually assured rapid advancement in the Prussian army, the new army regulations of 1808 emphasized knowledge and aptitude over class origin. For the first time in modern European history an officer’s commission was firmly tied to a certain level of education. Likewise, theoretical training for officers was reformed and greatly expanded, and a new military academy, the *Kriegsschule*, was founded in 1808; it was aimed at providing officers with both adequate training and a sound general education. As the founders of the *Kriegsschule* (and Gerhard von Scharnhorst in particular) thought the study of the general nature of war essential for future officers, students invariably had to come into contact with Caesar, if only following Napoleon’s suggestion that Caesar should be studied for his leadership abilities.

After other European countries had begun to follow suit in reforming their officers’ education and training, interest in Caesar was actively promoted to some extent at the military academies throughout Europe. In Germany, general changes in secondary school education even led to the ground being almost as well prepared for a discussion of ancient military events as had been the case under the Oranians. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw the continuous rise of the so-called humanistic grammar school to nearly total domination of secondary school education. As the curricula at the humanistic grammar schools were almost completely centered on classics, and as secondary school education was one of the prerequisites of admission to one of the military academies, many students were already acquainted with most of the more important ancient authors.

Taken together, German military reform and developments in school education made an increased interest in Caesar and ancient military theory in general both desirable and possible. It is noteworthy that in Germany military theorists, while not directly trying to extract lessons from ancient military history, did not adhere completely to Clausewitz’s judgment on its uselessness. In the case of Caesar, he was supposed to have fully understood the concepts of speed and surprise, even though a closer look at Caesar’s campaigns shows that this was very likely not the case.
Likewise, the concept of the decisive battle which in Prussia originally dated back to the days of Clausewitz and was refined from the 1860s with the introduction of encirclement tactics, created a certain fascination with the battle of Cannae.52

Conclusion

In conclusion, a fairly clear picture of Caesar’s reception by military theorists from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries emerges. In the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, he was among the ancient writers who were thought to be directly useable on the battle-field; their reception benefited greatly from a general interest in antiquity as well as similarities between ancient and sixteenth-century warfare. As those similarities rapidly disappeared during the following century, ancient military theorists began to lose their usefulness, while the emerging concept of the principles of war led to a different approach to Caesar, one that focused on his general understanding of war and his leadership abilities; Napoleon is testimony to both developments. Despite dramatic changes in warfare during the nineteenth century, Caesar did not cease to be of interest for military theorists; instead, due to reforms in the recruitment and education of officers, Caesar found his way into the curricula of war academies across Europe. In Germany, as had already been the case with the Oranians, educational changes outside the military world had a further influence on this development.

It was not until the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I that interest in Caesar at the military academies had to give way to the necessities of twentieth-century warfare. Even then, however, military theorists did not turn their attention away from him completely. In 1939 Charles Willoughby, who was to serve with General MacArthur’s staff during World War II, followed Napoleon in emphasizing the importance of the general principles of warfare, principles which could be acquired only by studying the great commanders of military history – Caesar among them.53

Notes

1 The following study has its origins in a paper on the curricula of the Bavarian military academy; in turning it into a general overview of Caesar’s military
To take just one example, the army with which Henry V soundly defeated a numerically superior French force in 1415 at Agincourt had a strength of merely 4,000 men; most probably that number would not have impressed any ancient general, even if the latter would probably have admired Henry’s handling of his troops.

3 Cf. Sandys (1908), 103–5.

4 De militia Romana libri quinque was published in 1595, Poliorketikon sive de machinis, tormentis, telis libri quinque in the following year; on the general importance of Justus Lipsius see Oestreich (1982); on the influence he exerted on seventeenth-century military theory, especially on Raimondo Montecuccoli, cf. Gat (2001), 18ff.


8 Hahlweg (1987), 13; see also Zwitzer (1998), 33–6. Still among the most valuable studies into the Oranian army reform is Hahlweg (1987), originally published in 1941; see also the bibliographical notes in Zwitzer (1998), 54ff.


10 For a good theoretical example cf. Machiavelli (2001), 2.69–77, who suggests that in a force of 6,000 infantrymen, 3,000 should be equipped with blade weapons and body armor, 2,000 with pikes, and 1,000 with firearms.

11 Their knowledge of Greek, however, was rather slim. Wilhelm von Oranien had Polybius translated for him into Latin; see Plathner (1913), 36.

12 The 1575 edition of Caesar’s commentaries used by Moritz still exists; cf. Hahlweg (1973), 58 n. 45.


16 Cf. for example Hahlweg (1973), 74.

17 The invasion of Britain provides a particularly striking example, see below n. 29.


19 Cf. Hahlweg (1973), 57–9 on bridging operations in Gaul, and ibíd., 69 on the siege of Alesia.

20 Ibíd., 69.


22 Even in the Napoleonic Wars the effective weapons range of an infantry line was barely 200 feet; cf. Strachan (1985), 37–43.
From “Capitano” to “Great Commander”

25 Veltze (1899), 200.
26 Preuss (1856), vol. 28, 101.
27 Ibid.
28 Pompey’s cavalry was driven off the field by legionary cohorts Caesar had held back; seeing his flank exposed, Pompey despaired and gave out defensive orders instead of trying to use his superiority in numbers aggressively, which might still have turned the battle.
29 Cf. for example Caes. Gall. 4.29, where, after the ships that brought the invasion force to Britain are lost in a shipwreck, Caesar’s troops suddenly are in a very precarious situation, as no replacement transports are available and the Roman line of supply is thus cut.
30 Preuss (1856), vol. 28, 61; Frederick begins the Principes stating that ancient military theory, for which he takes Vegetius as a representative, has lost its usefulness (Preuss [1856], vol. 28, 3).
31 Histoire de Polybe, originally published between 1724 and 1730.
32 Maizeroy had translated the Byzantine military classics into French; he actually took the term “strategy” from the Greek; cf. also Gat (2001), 41–5.
33 Puységur (1748), vol. 2, chs. 4, 6, and 9–11.
34 Clausewitz (1917), 125.
35 For the first time this was put into practice during the first large-scale mobilization exercise in Prussia of 1858, cf. Buchholz (1991), 40; on the importance of railways see also Wawro (1999), 80ff.
37 Provided with unprecedented firepower and a greatly increased range, an infantry line now had a “kill zone” in front of it that extended to over 1,000 feet; cf. Cleator (1967), 150–2; the bolt-action infantry rifle was the first true force multiplier and as such gave any defender a decisive advantage over any attacker.
38 As the title suggests, Napoleon had apparently planned to comment on the Civil War as well.
39 Cf. Napoleon (1869), 28 and 32ff.
40 Cf. ibid., 34–8.
41 Kromeyer and Veith (1903), 5; on Johannes Kromeyer (1859–1934) and Georg Veith (1875–1925), who was killed by two thieves while doing field research on Caesar’s campaigns in Asia Minor (Nischer [1926], 92–4), see Schulz (1936) as well as Nischer.
42 Napoleon (1870), 365.
43 The Histoire mention the results of the 1862–5 excavations at Auxois in several places.
The *Histoire* spans the time from Caesar’s birth to the crossing of the Rubicon and includes introductory chapters on the history of Rome from its foundation to the time of Sulla.

Napoleon III (1865–6), vii.

On the army reform see Craig (1955), 69ff.


On Scharnhorst, cf. Gat (2001), 158–69; like Napoleon, he thought that the principles of warfare could only be extracted from a thorough study of the campaigns of the great commanders of military history; cf. Lehmann (1886), 43.

According to Appian, Caesar, speaking at Brundisium to his soldiers, claimed “rapidity of movement [to be] the best substitute for all these things” (App. *BC* 2.53), including sufficient logistical preparations; however, as Napoleon pointed out (Napoleon I [1862], 997), speed only gave an advantage when coupled with troop numbers because it could then act as a force multiplier; it could not, however, be used as a substitute for adequate troop strength (or indeed sufficient logistical preparation).

This particular interest in Cannae – which found expression in a number of studies, most notably one by Alfred von Schlieffen, published in 1913 – has to be attributed mainly to the employment of encirclement tactics by Hannibal; nonetheless it is to some extent still puzzling, as Cannae (and indeed Hannibal’s Italian campaign in general) could well be used to question the whole concept of the *Entscheidungsschlacht*.

Willoughby (1939), 26.
Crossing the Rubicon into Paris:
Caesarian Comparisons from Napoleon to de Gaulle

Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle

When Asterix and Obelix, famous but not quite historical adversaries of Caesar, once consulted a psychiatrist, they met not only a frightened “barbarian,” but also an unknown Gaul whom neither Asterix, Obelix, nor the nurse/secretary of the psychiatrist could identify.¹ This strange Gaul was the first insane impersonator of Napoleon in (fictional) history. An allusion to Napoleon in a French comic strip which is set in the aftermath of Caesar’s conquest of Gaul is more than trivial, as André Stoll pointed out in his groundbreaking study of Astérix as the French national epic of the Fifth (de Gaulleian) Republic.² It comically exposes how frequent, familiar, and at times even bizarre have been the connections made between modern France and Gaul, Napoleon and Caesar.

Three monarchies, five republics, and two empires have marked French history since 1789. Change of government and/or state organization – on average every twenty years or so – nearly always “appears out of tragic circumstances (a coup, a revolution or a national defeat).”³ Those coups d’État⁴ (whether successful or not)⁵ always generated comparison with Roman history and more particularly with the moment when Caesar crossed the Rubicon and initiated a civil war.⁶ This chapter is concerned with those comparisons and, in particular, with their visual representation. It also seeks to explore shifts in the intersection of art and political discourse, of Caesarian iconography and Caesarism,⁷ in France since 1789 (or, perhaps more correctly, since 1799, when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power).⁸
The drawing of a parallel between Napoleon and Caesar first arose from comparisons of their military genius, as was the case for earlier comparisons with Caesar made about other victorious military leaders before Napoleon. Napoleon himself fostered this particular parallel especially during his captivity on St. Helena, when he dictated his comments about the wars of Caesar, Turenne, and Frederick (the Great) of Prussia. He thereby placed himself in a line of succession which was designed to be apolitical and focused on military genius only. Yet, while in power, Napoleon was highly critical of Caesar. In 1804 he told the French poet Fontanes: “Caesar was weak on several occasions, therefore I mistrust the praise which history accords Caesar.”

It was probably not as a result of hubris that Consul Bonaparte (who, at that very moment, was becoming Emperor Napoleon) felt that the military leadership of Caesar was still a potential role model, whereas the politics of ancient Rome and, therefore, the politician Caesar were not appropriate for a leader at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Based on his readings in the military schools and academies Napoleon attended, it was clear that Caesar and his fate were in no way a good model for a general entering politics. One could argue that Napoleon might have been attempting to whitewash his own hesitation during the coup of 1799 by criticizing Caesar: in the decisive moment, when he entered the assembly room full of angry parliamentarians, the general Bonaparte lost his nerve. His brother Lucien saved the day. When Napoleon recovered from the assaults of the parliamentary crowd, his soldiers waiting outside were told that an assassination attempt had been made against their leader. This was probably not true, but Napoleon might have felt the situation to be that dangerous. Thus Caesar’s failure to make a grab for total power and his failure to survive the plot against him might well have been seen as a precedent pressing Napoleon to be hesitant even in the decisive moment of his coup. This situation in 1799 must have left a deep impression on him, as never before and never since (up to his first abdication in 1814) did Napoleon have to face circumstances in which he had so little control.

The step of adding the politician to the military man as model was probably taken more easily as a political tactic than as an emotional response. In 1812 Napoleon told the Prefect Barante that he adored Caesar as a military commander, but disliked him as a politician: “Caesar wanted to please the people too much, therefore he failed to get complete control of political power.” It is probably not by chance that Napoleon
came back to this topic in the year of crisis 1812. The Caesarian comparison might well have worked as a tool with which to reflect on his own deficiencies. With few exceptions Napoleon was always in control of the battlefield. Only two years later (1814), when the allied armies invaded France, he showed his military genius and gained surprising victories—even though he lost the campaign. So he was not defeated primarily on the battlefield, but in the political arena (for example, the political decision concerning the continental system which forced the military might of his empire to be overstretched). Failing “to get complete control of political power” was, therefore, not only Caesar’s problem, but also that of his critic, Napoleon.

It has to be said, however, that both remarks on Caesar mentioned above are quotations from the memoirs of people Napoleon addressed on this topic and therefore might be inaccurate. A more potentially reliable comment by Napoleon about Caesar as a military commander reads: “Alexander the Great did not accomplish one single outstanding maneuver that would be worth mentioning for a great general. . . . Caesar instead had mighty enemies and by virtue of his audacity engaged in dangerous encounters; he was always saved by his military genius.” This remark supports the interpretation that Napoleon used the career of Caesar as a mirror. Despite all his political triumphs (especially during the consulate), Napoleon was always dependent on his military successes: a victorious campaign brought an extended sphere of influence, while a campaign lost was the beginning of the end for the Napoleonic Empire (as was shown in Russia in 1812). So the observation that “he was always saved by his military genius” was true not only for Caesar, but for Napoleon as well, probably even more so.

In the context of the study of military history, probably the most important comment of Napoleon concerning Caesar was published in a compilation of Military Maxims of Napoleon: “Read again and again the campaigns of Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and Frederick. Model yourself upon them. This is the only means of becoming a great captain, and of acquiring the secret of the art of war.” This maxim had a considerable influence in military academies of the nineteenth century and beyond. As historian David G. Chandler, himself a long-time teacher of military history at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, pointed out: “This is possibly the best known of all Napoleon’s maxims.” At least the function of this last comment of Napoleon about Caesar is self-explanatory in the sense that a military leader comments
on one of his famous predecessors, but they all have a political function beyond that military tradition too, as we shall see.

In comparisons of Napoleon with Caesar, the military commander always dominates over the figure of the general-turned-politician. In the famous frontispiece drawn by Horace Vernet to accompany the publication in 1852 of *The History of the Emperor Napoleon* by P. M. Laurent, the illustration introducing the first page of the history shows a spear supporting three wreaths of laurel with three swords. It establishes by its inscription the line of succession, “Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon,” which in this context is without doubt a primarily military tradition. The illustrations by Vernet are an essential part of the so-called “Napoleonic legend,” which constituted a predecessor to or an early form of Bonapartism between the period of Napoleon’s defeat and death (1815 and 1821, respectively) and the coming to power of his nephew Louis Napoleon following the revolution of 1848.

To analyze the function of the iconographic reminiscences of Caesar that appeared during the reign of the first Napoleon, one has to look at the gradual emergence of positive Caesarian allusions after the French Revolution of 1789. The Revolution cherished Brutus, but one could argue that a positive picture of Brutus did not necessarily require a negative picture of Caesar. The revolutionaries made the obvious comparison between themselves decapitating the royal family and Brutus murdering a potential one-man-ruler. Comparing Louis XVI with Caesar was another story: in revolutionary propaganda Louis XVI was an arrogant, corrupt, traitorous, and decadent tyrant, who was born to become king by an inherited line of succession. Caesar might be a tyrant of noble descent, too, but he was very much his own man. The military camps in Gaul and Britain were not Versailles. Therefore the comparison with Brutus ennobled the revolutionaries, whereas the comparison of Louis XVI with Caesar would have ennobled their enemy. Consequently, the propaganda of Napoleon needed not so much to abolish the positive image of Brutus, but to change the indifferent image of Caesar to a positive one.

The most visible and, therefore, striking sign of the shift to Caesar is the transformation of hair-fashion within the French army. Whereas the long hair favored in the Revolutionary period was seen as Greek, the short hairstyle subsequently decreed by Napoleon was seen as Roman, with the emperor Titus deployed as the role or hair model. The Revolution had made allusion not only to Greek but also to (pseudo-)Nordic mythology, as exemplified in the famous painting *L’Apothéose des héros*
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français morts pour la patrie pendant la guerre de la Liberté (1802) by Girodet-Trioson, in which Ossian greets the fallen French generals. Although these different mythologies can be seen constantly in operation during the period 1792 through 1815, a clear preference for Rome becomes visible during the consulate (from 1799) and the empire (from 1804). Even the names which designate these two periods are themselves a reference to Rome. Napoleon in the style of a Roman emperor triumphant is omnipresent in important paintings and drawings of the period: The Triumph of Bonaparte (1800) by Pierre-Paul Prudhon, the Allégorie de la Bataille d’Austerlitz (1806) by Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret, which includes a shield bearing the inscription “Veni, Vidi, Vici,” the Apotheosis of Napoleon (1853) by Jean Dominique Ingres, and the numerous works of Andrea Appiani.

How such images interacted with the self-stylization and propaganda of Napoleon is best demonstrated by the famous painting Distribution des Aigles au Champ-de-Mars (1808) by Louis David, which depicts the following event. On December 5, 1804, three days after his coronation as emperor, Napoleon, clearly dressed in the style of a Roman emperor, distributed (wooden) imperial eagles to his army. This representation of the French army in the style of the Roman legions is probably the best known and most visible classicizing icon of the Napoleonic period (figure 16.1), while the Arc de Triomphe and the Vendôme column are one-to-one adaptations of specific structures from the time of Caesar and his successors for early nineteenth-century Paris. Plans were made for the Madeleine church in Paris to be transformed into a Roman-style temple of memory for the Grande Armée, but it was later changed back to a church. But the vision of the Madeleine temple shows the degree to which the invented military signs and symbols of the Grande Armée were directly remodeled after – often idealized – Roman models, and Caesar, perceived as the greatest military genius of that time, was instrumental in connecting these two traditions in an imagined line of succession. Even in music Caesarian allusion was popular; Jean-François Lesueur, the star composer of the time, celebrated Napoleon in the opera Triomphe de Trajan. Later Napoleon surpassed the stage of comparison with Roman emperors. In a statue by Antonio Canova put on display in 1811, he even became a demi-god (this statue was later brought to the London residence of Wellington as a form of victory trophy).

It is true that these comparisons of Napoleon were more “Roman” than “Caesarian.” Although Napoleon’s educated contemporaries were much more familiar with Roman history than the present generation and
Figure 16.1  Distribution of the Imperial Eagles, 1804 by Horace Vernet, after Louis David. From P. M. Laurent, Geschichte des Kaisers Napoleon [1851], Leipzig.
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knew it in great detail, one has to assume that the “Trajan” comparison was no less a Caesarian allusion than a direct comparison with Julius Caesar. The self-stylization of the Roman Caesars after Julius Caesar undoubtedly shaped the understanding of the educated public in early nineteenth-century France. There were certainly exceptions (Nero probably best qualifying for such exclusion), but propagandistic effort and the public’s reading of it would not have distinguished greatly between the Caesars and Julius Caesar. The same would be true for the Roman-style, demi-god-like statue of Napoleon. As Julius Caesar counted divine members among his ancestry and the Caesars at times demanded, and received, worship as gods, the propagandistic value and the meaning of comparing Napoleon to Julius Caesar, Trajan, or a Roman-style demi-god were indistinguishable, as the French public would have understood the comparisons similarly and understood the underlying message. The god-like comparison, instituted in the Caesarian tradition, was highlighted by the invention of a Saint Napoleon, whose holiday was celebrated on August 15, the birthday of Emperor Napoleon.

Such military and imperial comparisons came to legitimate Napoleon’s plans for his political succession. Not only was the empire established in 1804, but Napoleon’s son, born in 1811, was also bestowed with the title “Roi de Rome” (King of Rome). A contemporary image by Bartolomeo Pinelli shows the goddess Roma holding the baby son of Napoleon, guarded by the imperial eagle and with the she-wolf and Romulus and Remus in the background. In the book L’Hymen et la Naissance ou Poésies en l’Honneur de Leurs Majestés Impériales et Royales, published in 1812, which contains poems by the leading writers of the time praising the birth of Napoleon’s son, there are numerous comparisons of Napoleon and his son with Caesar and the Caesars. One author even went so far as to write an additional book of the Aeneas epos, in order to link Troy via Caesar with Napoleon.

After the downfall of Napoleon in 1814–15, and especially after his death in 1821, popular imagination made the heroes of the past greet the fallen emperor. The most famous of these representations was distributed in large quantities by the Imagerie Pellerin of Epinal. The Epinal prints were a mass medium of nineteenth-century France, as they brought images of important historical events or persons to the homes of ordinary French families not only in the cities, but in rural areas as well. The Apotheosis of Napoleon by Georgin and Thiébault from 1834 shows Napoleon entering the heavenly temple of glory, received by his former comrades-in-arms.
on the left-hand side and by Hannibal, Caesar, Frederick the Great of Prussia, and others on the right. Although, during his lifetime, Napoleon was occasionally characterized by French opponents as “Brutus Buonaparte,”\(^\text{25}\) comparison with Caesar, both positive and negative, absolutely dominates. “Brutus Buonaparte” was only a viable comparison for those who associated the decapitation of Louis XVI with the coming to power of Emperor Napoleon. The underlying idea of such a comparison with Brutus was that Napoleon had usurped the throne belonging to the Bourbon family. The Brutus comparison was therefore only used by hard-core French Royalists, in British propaganda, and – in imitation of British models – by the German/Prussian propaganda which began in 1813.

The production of comparisons was not limited to Napoleon and his admirers. Roman and Caesarian allusions in favor of Napoleon were mostly countered by anti-Napoleonic Greek ones: Wellington, the victor of Waterloo, was commemorated on the seventh anniversary of the battle, in 1822, by a statue of Achilles by Richard Westmacott in London’s Hyde Park. Yet Lord Byron, before he became a supporter of Napoleon, contrasted the fallen French emperor with the tyrant Caesars in his “Ode to Napoleon,” while Washington was celebrated as “Yes – one – the first – the last – the best / The Cincinnatus of the West / Whom envy dared not hate / Bequeath’d the name of Washington / To make man blush there was but one!”\(^\text{26}\) Interestingly, in this opposition between Napoleon and Washington, the first American president is compared with the consul Cincinnatus as a representative of “old Roman virtues,” whereas the French emperor is compared with the imperial Caesars as a representative of the corruption of the Roman Empire.

Louis Napoleon (later Napoleon III) was the driving force behind the resurrection of the Bonaparte dynasty in France at the same time as he supported, and himself contributed to, a burgeoning of the archaeological and historiographical investigation of Roman antiquity. With the assistance of classical scholars,\(^\text{27}\) he wrote a two-volume history of Caesar. The second volume referred to the excavations conducted under the patronage of Napoleon III at Alise-Sainte-Reine in 1861–5,\(^\text{28}\) which he along with French experts identified as the historical site of Alesia.\(^\text{29}\) The excavation was initiated by imperial order under the direction of Senator de Saulcy and a commission which included historians such as Alexandre Bertrand and officers such as Colonel de Coynart. But the most influential figure working on the spot was probably Eugène Stoffel.\(^\text{30}\) The results of this archaeological effort, in addition to “competition” with the
neighboring German museums in Mainz and Nuremberg, inspired the emperor to establish the French national museum for antiquity at Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris. This museum still combines the most important Gallic, Roman, and Gallo-Roman remains on French soil, thus mingling friends and foes of a bygone era as common ancestors of the French nation. The meaning of this otherwise curious juxtaposition for the ideology of Bonapartism becomes clear in the remarks of Napoleon III that introduce his two-volume *Histoire de Jules César* (1865–6). He argues that the Romans sought the dictatorship of Caesar and of the subsequent Roman emperors to preserve the purity of the old republic long since lost. Without doubt Napoleon III was here portraying the Bonapartist explanation of his own regime rather than the actualities of Roman history. Caesar as the savior of old Roman republican virtues provides a convenient precursor for Napoleon I and Napoleon III as preserving the virtues of 1789 and of the French Republic by changing the regime to a more stable empire. Furthermore, Napoleon III wrote explicitly that neither the murder of Caesar nor the captivity of Napoleon I at St. Helena hindered the persistence of the ideals represented by those two persons.

How important this comparison between himself, the Bonaparte family, and Caesar was to Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III) is demonstrated dramatically at a very early point in his coup d’état of 1851. The evening before the coup, Louis Napoleon met with his most important allies. The dossier outlining the coup and the list of the necessary arrest warrants had been given the title “Rubicon.” An illustrator for the magazine *Punch* caught the pretensions of this analogy in a caricature published on March 11, 1865 (figure 16.2). Above the caption *Nullus aut Caesar*, the drawing positions an imposing statue of Julius Caesar high over a seated Napoleon III (here described as “Louis. An Ambitious Boy”). Louis is trying to blow up a balloon lookalike of Napoleon I to the dimensions of the impressive Caesar, meanwhile boasting to the statue: “Ah ha! Mon ami! I sall make ’im so big as you!” When, during the later 1860s, Napoleon III tried to liberalize and democratize his empire, he himself was depicted by the highly critical *Punch* staff as an aging Roman emperor.

The (nineteenth-century) modernity of Napoleon III was demonstrated in his change of historical perception: although he wrote a history of Caesar, his point of national reference was Vercingetorix, to whom he had dedicated a famous statue at Alesia that bore a striking resemblance
to his own features (figure 11.1). Although the Third French Republic, established after the downfall of Napoleon III at Sedan in 1870, was by the very nature of its coming into being staunchly anti-Napoleonic and anti-Bonapartist, the revived republican imaginary could not replace this
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Caesar–Vercingetorix pair in the conceptualization of Napoleon III. This is demonstrated, for example, in the 1899 painting by Lionel Royer of Vercingetorix delivering his arms to Caesar. This Bonapartist conception was popularized by school textbooks of the Third French Republic, insofar as respect for the fallen Gallic heroes was usually combined with appreciation of the Roman “mission civilisatrice.” Praising Caesar as well as Vercingetorix was no problem at all. This is even more astounding as, on the surface, the situation of post-Sedan France more closely resembled that of the defeated Vercingetorix than that of the victorious Julius Caesar. Again Punch made this comparison very early on when, on December 17, 1870, it published an illustration entitled “Gaul to the New Caesar” (figure 16.3). Post-Sedan France, embodied as a woman, kneels in the position of a Vercingetorix defying Julius Caesar. Caesar’s place as imperial victor is taken by the new German “emperor” Wilhelm I – even though he took this title only a month after the Punch caricature was published.

Caesar ceased to have pride of place as a reference point for French politics after the Boulanger crisis of the 1880s. General Georges Boulanger (1837–91) epitomized the “Revanche” feeling against Germany. After he became minister of war in 1886, it was Napoleon, not Caesar, who was seen and depicted as the forerunner of the coup which General Boulanger never executed. Boulanger was a staunch anti-German general and minister of defense, who rallied considerable public support especially after he was removed from office. Instead of launching a coup, which in all probability was never in his mind but only in the propagandistic imagination of his adversaries, he fled from France and later shot himself on the grave of his mistress in Brussels. Clearly, Napoleon I and sometimes Napoleon III – both by now dead and entering the realm of legendary figures – were utilized for comparisons. Both figured prominently in propagandistic images, whether pro- or anti-Boulanger. Comparison with Julius Caesar played only a minor role, but nevertheless reappeared at times in caricatures which both supported Boulanger (with titles such as “Ave Caesar”) and attacked him. As an example of the latter, a caricature of 1888 displays four figures including a general “burdened” by his supporters in various political factions who tries to cross a river called Rubicon. The caption reads: “Caesar Boulanger at the bank of a river called Rubicon – Will he be able to cross it?” Historical continuity as depicted by the Boulangists in this particular caricature shifted; by now the line of succession became Joan of Arc, Vercingetorix, Napoleon, and Boulanger. This may be understood as a search for role models from...
Figure 16.3  “Gaul to the New Caesar.” Punch (December 17, 1870)
France’s own national history, avoiding “foreigners” such as Caesar. The now well-established nationhood of united Italy and the loss of direct French influence there probably made Caesar as an “Italian” less attractive for the French. It should be mentioned that both Joan of Arc and Vercingetorix at that time were not only Boulangist idols, but also republican role models. Later both became symbols of the extreme right in France, which at this period, however, still recruited its anti-republican idols from the Bourbon dynasty.

The “last of the great Frenchmen,” Charles de Gaulle, adhered to the pattern of continuity of both Vercingetorix and Caesar. In his pre-World War II book *France and Her Army*, which he was first ordered to ghost-write for Marshal Pétain but then published under his own name, de Gaulle wrote: “La France fut faite à coups d’épée. . . . Ce sont les armes romaines qui leur portèrent la civilisation” (France was made by sword strokes. . . . It was Roman weapons that brought civilization [to our fathers]). When de Gaulle assumed power for the second time in 1958 to establish the Fifth French Republic, the comparisons de Gaulle had to face were no longer to Caesar but to Napoleon or — much worse — to Mussolini or Hitler. By then Caesar had long since almost completely ceased to be a major point or person of reference in French politics.

How should we relate this enumeration of positive and negative Caesarian comparisons in France since the nineteenth century to the ideological context of what was sometimes synonymously referred to as Caesarism and Bonapartism? This is best explained if we link it with the “myth of the savior” theory developed by the French scholar Jean Tulard, who in 1971 published a biography of Napoleon which was to remain authoritative for decades to come. It is necessary to outline the essence of this theory in order to be able to understand the function of the Caesarian comparison within its terms. The theory is materialistic and explains perfectly the role of leading personalities. It dissects the opposing forces of materialistic “necessities” and the individualistic “making of history” by a great figure.

Faced with internal or external threats to its interests, the French bourgeoisie has always been able to invent a saviour. Napoleon opened the way for Cavaignac, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, Thiers, Pétain and de Gaulle. And because the bourgeoisie’s principal virtue is ingratitude and its major defect lack of courage, the separation of the saviour from his inventors has more often than not come about through a national catastrophe.
the saviour bears the responsibility for this catastrophe. . . . The saviour appears out of tragic circumstances (a coup, a revolution or a national defeat), he disappears in an apocalyptic atmosphere. Another saviour will take his place and the wheels will start rolling again. In all this can be seen the consequences of the disappearance of the principle of legitimacy on which the old monarchy was based before 1789. . . . The only way in which the Revolution could be brought to a close was through an alliance of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry around one man or one principle. The man was found: Bonaparte. The principle was already known: property. . . . At its deepest level the founding of the Empire signified a dictatorship of public safety in favour of the well-to-do who had profited from the Revolution. For forgetting this and for imagining that he could establish a new dynasty destined to rule Europe, the saviour was condemned to writing his Mémoires. St. Helena heralded Chislehurst [the site of exile for Napoleon III], the Ile d’Yeu [Pétain’s prison] and Colombey [de Gaulle’s retreat]. . . . The first saviour was also the greatest; those that followed were mere parodies.46

The groundbreaking idea of Tulard’s biographical approach to Napoleon was to interpret him as the role model for political leadership for the history of post-revolutionary France after 1789 or, to be more precise, after 1793, when the divine line of succession – “The king is dead. Long live the king!” – ended with the execution of Louis XVI and the impossibility of Louis XVII’s taking over. This lack of succession was indeed a major event, the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Restoration may have been possible in practical terms by Louis XVIII in 1814–15, but the theoretical concept of kingship acquired only by divine grace died with Louis XVI. The real reason for his execution was to break that divine family succession. Tulard interpreted Napoleon as the answer to the question: How could this gap in legitimacy be filled? Napoleon discovered the ingredients necessary to legitimize power in a world without legitimacy by birth, by which he could fit into the expectations of the new elite of his time, the bourgeoisie. When he lost touch with this elite, he lost power. The astounding part of this explanation of Napoleon’s role in modern French history is that Tulard could demonstrate this pattern of relation between a “savior” and the elite reemerging again and again after Napoleon: Cavaignac, Napoleon III, Thiers, Pétain, and de Gaulle. The pattern concerned not only the relation between a “savior” and the elite, but also the comparable reactions within both the behavior of the elite and the personality of the “savior.” The loss of power by the “savior”
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was often overshadowed by near-apocalyptic circumstances, which resembled the situation at the time the “savior” came to power and which he had overcome as “savior.” The “savior” often ends up in some form of voluntary or involuntary exile: St. Helena, Chislehurst, the Ile d’Yeu, or Colombey. Superficially, one could argue that Brutus foreshadowed exile in a much more brutal fashion, that is, by assassination. On a much deeper level, it is possible to extract persistent patterns of the use and abuse of “Caesar” in French political discourse from 1799 to 1958. In a broader sense, this expands the “myth of the savior” theory proposed by Jean Tulard on three levels.

1 Napoleon I. Napoleon I may have detested Caesar as a politician, but his own accession to political power as a military man was nevertheless seen as a Caesarian revival. In the situation of the Revolutionary Wars, probably only a military man could have assumed power. He had to prove his worth as a soldier before he could gain the opportunity to reveal purely political capabilities. Following this “soldier first” pattern, Napoleon profited by the Caesarian comparison: the soldier turned political leader. Caesar’s own failure (literally) to stay alive as a politician was no part of this allusion.

2 Followers of Napoleon I (especially Napoleon III). While Napoleon I and Napoleon III both referred to Caesar the military leader as a role model, Napoleon III also included Vercingetorix, so that Caesar and Vercingetorix as former opponents became interlinked as role models. Gallic independence and freedom were linked to Roman civilization – as if they were historically the same and at no time in contradiction. This approach was probably only possible in France before 1870–1. The “permission” to conflate a Roman emperor and his Gallic adversary was dependent on a strong France dominating parts of Europe (especially Italy). At Sedan, France lost its position of dominance, symbolized by the integration of papal Rome into the Italian nation-state, since Napoleon III had always prevented such integration by a French military presence. After Sedan, role models had to be more French. In order to resist and take vengeance against the Prussian/German enemy, a more nationalistic reading of history was required, so that Caesar could no longer be an essential part of the French pantheon.

3 The French state after Napoleon III. During the nineteenth century, comparison with Caesar was replaced by comparison with Napoleon I
(and sometimes with Louis XIV – but that is another story) as the point or historical figure of reference. As a man of the nineteenth century, Napoleon provided a better role model to be used and abused than a Roman general murdered 2,000 years before. After his death de Gaulle inherited this role of comparison for the ongoing Fifth French Republic, whereas by that time Napoleon had held this function for eight regimes over nearly two centuries.

The most striking example of the disappearance of the Caesar comparison from French political history comes from an unexpected source: the German writer Alfred Neumann (1895–1952), who was forced to emigrate from Nazi Germany. A book written by Neumann from 1931 to 1933 about Louis Napoleon from his youth to the 1851 coup was called Neuer Caesar (New Caesar), while the second volume on Napoleon III from the coup to his exile was called Kaiserreich (Empire). But the English titles of these books were striking: New Caesar (as in the German original), followed by Man of December (for Kaiserreich). The English version demonstrates (probably involuntarily) that the Caesarian point of reference in France had, during the course of the nineteenth century, transferred into a French point of reference. The events of December 2, 1804 (the coronation of Napoleon I), of 1805 (the battle of Austerlitz), of 1851 (the coup of Louis Napoleon), and of 1852 (the accession of Napoleon III to the status of emperor) overshadowed and surpassed the person killed during the Ides of March. During the 1851 coup, the “New Caesar” became a “Man of December,” and at that moment political comparison shifted away from distant Rome to familial France.

NOTES

1 See Uderzo and Goscinny (1971).
3 Tulard (1984), 350.
4 For the model-coup of 1799, see Tulard (1999); for general thinking on coups, see Malaparte (1988).
5 The important coups d’état or attempts at a coup d’état or “semi”-coups d’état in this context are by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799 (eighteenth Brumaire), Louis Napoleon (December 2, 1851), General Boulanger (1880s, although he never executed a coup d’état, one was feared by his enemies and hoped for by his supporters), and – last but not least – Charles de Gaulle (1958).
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6 For a recent comparison between Caesar and Napoleon, see Canfora (2001). See Baehr (1998); Groh (1979); Meyer (1975); Thody (1989).
8 For the history of the comparison with Caesar in the French context before 1789, see John (1953) and Leeker (1986).
9 See Napoleon I (1942).
11 See ibid., 197.
12 See Gourgaud (1901), 276–7.
14 For comparisons between Napoleon I and Caesar in Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Essen (1998); Gleichen-Russwurm (n.d.); Gundelfinger (1904); Gundolf (1926); Reeve (1987); Schnabel (1948); Seeck (1988); Stolle (1841); Wencker (1913); Wendel (1820).
15 See Benoît, Delannoy, and Pougetoux (1990); Bibliothèque Nationale (1969); Humbert (1990); Tulard (1971).
16 See Antoni-Komar (2004), 224.
17 See Barrielle (1982); Beck (1985); Betthausen (1981); Betz (1982); Bibliothèque Nationale (1989); Franchastel (1939); Gonzalez-Palacios (1970); Grant (1917); Guicharnaud and Sorel (1989); Janneau (1965); Lankheit (1988).
18 For Caesar as a predecessor of Napoleon in using propaganda about himself, see Rambaud (1966).
21 See Mistler (1969), 54.
22 See Apolloni (2000); Brégeon (1984); Costamagna (1998); Zanella (1993).
23 See Aubry (1941); Bourgoing (n.d.); Musée de l’Orangerie (1932).
24 See Didot (1812), 105–21.
25 See “Victime de sa tyrannie” (1815), 27.
26 Byron (n.d.), 526.
27 For the relations between Napoleon III and Mommsen, see Erbe (1995).
29 For the highly important Viollet-le-Duc, see Auzas (1979) and Ministre de l’Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts (1880).
31 See Joffroy (1979).
32 See Napoleon III (1865–6), VII.
33 For the Rome policy during his reign, see Bourgeois and Clermont (1907).
34 See Girard (1986), 144.
35 See Punch (March 11, 1865): “Nullus aut Caesar.”
36 See Punch (October 9, 1869): “A Stage-Wait.”
37 See Augé and Petit (n.d.), 3; for earlier textbooks, see for example Le Ragois (1806).
Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle

38 See Punch (December 17, 1870): “Gaul to the New Caesar.”

39 See Branthôme (1931), 101 and 173.

40 See ibid., color illustration II.

41 During the Nazi occupation of France, according to Gamm, there was an anti-Pétain saying: “Veni, Vidi, Vichy.” See Gamm (1979), 41.

42 Gaulle (1965), 9.

43 For comparisons between Napoleon and Mussolini, see Arzone (1997); Seldes (1936); Vettori (2000). For a film based on a play about Napoleon by Mussolini see Mattei (1998), 328. For comparisons between Napoleon I and Hitler see Rosner (1943); Seward (1988); Vallotton (1945). For a rare modern comparison with Caesar in the US context (Douglas MacArthur) see Manchester (1979).

44 For the general role of historical discourses in France, see Gildea (1994).

45 See Carlyle (1971); Fromm (1991); Greenlee (1975); Kursbuch (1992); Plechanow (1945).

46 Tulard (1984), 350–2. For the parody motive see Marx (1852).

47 See Neumann (1937).
Afterword
A Twenty-First-Century Caesar

Maria Wyke

On March 27, 2003, only days after the invasion of Iraq (and on the eve of our conference in Rome on the reception of Julius Caesar), the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* asked: “Is the President of the United States of America the Caesar of the twenty-first century?” On that same Thursday, the magazine of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* carried a similar question on its front cover: “But is the American empire like that of Rome?” Within the magazine, in the course of an extensive interview, the classical scholar Luca Canali was asked whether he saw any parallel between George W. Bush and Gaius Julius Caesar, given that they were both the supreme heads of two superpowers. The professor scornfully dismissed such historical analogies: Caesar was the greatest man in history (“il più grande uomo della Storia”), how could he be compared with Bush? Privately, Caesar was extremely cultivated, friend to the greatest intellectuals of his time (whereas, the interviewer concedes, Bush doesn’t know his Slovenia from his Slovakia). Publicly, Caesar was a great political leader, who relied upon the justice of his efforts in both peace and war to win the goodwill of all the people. He was an unconquerable general, who had the courage to enter the field of battle, to fight on the front line. He was assassinated only because he preferred not to live guarded day and night. A great man indeed. At this point the interviewer gives up any further attempt at comparing Bush with Caesar, and tries out other Roman analogies for American empire until they are pushed playfully beyond the limits of credibility (Saddam Hussein as Hasdrubal, Osama Bin Laden as Mithridates, Dick Cheney as Agrippa, Donald Rumsfeld as Cato).

Classicists may question the validity of comparing the United States with ancient Rome and the president with Julius Caesar, but Canali’s
scathing rebuttal forms an obstacle to the examination of why, in recent years, such comparisons have been made so often, been taken so seriously, and become so influential in Anglo-American political debate. In the lead up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and continuing on in its aftermath, one common rhetorical strategy which emerged in the popular media to criticize American foreign policy and its perceived aggression was to find multiple parallels between the empire of ancient Rome and modern American imperialism, and between Julius Caesar and this new “imperial presidency.”  

Newspaper articles and editorials, both in the United States and abroad, carried such resonant headlines as “All roads lead to D.C.,” “Rome, AD . . . Rome, DC?,” “The Last Emperor,” “Hail Caesar!” The deployment of such historical analogy has by now become entrenched in popular political discourse and continues to emerge in book-length studies of contemporary American imperialism by those critical of it, such as Senator Robert C. Byrd’s Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency (2004) and Chalmers Johnson’s The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic (2004). In newspapers and books, on television and radio, and across the Internet, the last few years have witnessed a vigorous debate about the seemingly close correspondences between Roman and American empire: correspondences such as overwhelming military strength, the centrality of technology to power, strategic bases around the world, the vigorous pursuit of a policy of invasion and conquest (both militarily and culturally), the deployment of propaganda to demonstrate and sustain power, the rapid aggrandizement of executive authority, and demagogic leadership.  

While classical historians may well flinch at such attempts to make past events speak directly to the present, to make Rome and Caesar the prism through which to perceive contemporary global politics, the Director of the Center for Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Eliot A. Cohen, argues in pointed contrast that practitioners and pundits have the last word over scholars in this regard. Precisely because politicians and policymakers are frequently finding lessons in history, taking them to heart, and even acting upon them, academics have an obligation to examine how history is informing, and how it should inform, current understanding of the United States of America as a hyperpower.  

In my Afterword, therefore, rather than looking backward over the rich reception history of Julius Caesar analyzed in the present volume, I propose to take a glimpse forward over this new mode of reception which makes such an urgent claim on our attention. I am not here concerned with the
workings of the general comparison between Roman and American empire (now almost a cliché of contemporary political discourse) but, in view of our collection’s theme, with occasions where the parallel has touched on the exercise of presidential authority, and been pressed to shape the Bush administration as a form of Caesarian government. In both cases (American empire and the Caesarian presidency), I shall be concerned only tangentially with details of the historical accuracy or appropriateness of Roman analogies. My focus, rather, will be on their development and their rhetorical purpose: when, at the start of the new millennium, both politicians and commentators turn to Julius Caesar to talk of domestic and international crisis, cui bono?

The Coming Caesars

Claims that the United States of America is becoming an empire and its president a Caesar have long been intertwined. During his period of office in the 1830s, Andrew Jackson in particular was accused of both pursuing territorial expansion and augmenting the power of the president. As Margaret Malamud has elaborated earlier in this volume, to Jackson’s opponents he was a Caesar, that is to say an arrogant general turned demagogue who was now leading the republic into domestic tyranny and a damaging imperialism. But it was in the twentieth century and, specifically, after World War II – when it was recognized that the United States was becoming the heir to Europe’s old colonial empires – that this dual Roman analogy (of empire and, therefore, of emperor) was first deployed at length and in depth in order to envisage an apocalyptic future for the western world.

In 1957, the French critic Amaury de Riencourt published a book which received considerable attention in the United States because in it he maintained that Europe now stood in the same relation to America as Greece had once stood to Rome. Just as Roman civilization had been fated to overcome Greek culture and master the world, so American civilization was now destined to take over European culture and dominate the world of tomorrow. For de Riencourt, this was clearly an organic, biocyclical process which could only degenerate into a universal state under the sway of a Caesarian ruler. Hence he entitled his grim political prophecy The Coming Caesars. Among the vast array of elaborate classical parallels and similarities amassed in the book (lent some credibility in part because
many had already been put to use by American politicians and their critics right from the time when the Founding Fathers were debating the relative merits of federalism), two in particular were decisive for the author: the adoption by both Rome and America of the course of democratic growth and imperial expansion. For both the consequence was (or now would be) loss of liberty, centralization, and the arrival of Caesarism: “Our Western world, America and Europe, is threatened with Caesarism on a scale unknown since the dawn of the Roman empire.”

After depicting Franklin D. Roosevelt as the first real “pre-Caesarist” president, that is, as the one who, during the era of the New Deal and in the later crisis of world war, most nearly established dictatorial rule, de Riencourt concluded:

[T]he President of the United States is the most powerful single human being in the world today. Future crises will inevitably transform him into a full-fledged Caesar, if we do not beware. Today he wears ten hats – as Head of State, Chief Executive, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chief Legislator, Head of Party, Tribune of the People, Ultimate Arbitrator of Social Justice, Guardian of Economic Prosperity, and World Leader of Western Civilization. Slowly and unobtrusively these hats are becoming crowns and this pyramid of hats is slowly metamorphosing itself into a tiara, the tiara of one man’s world imperium. (330–1)

In this context, ancient Rome and Caesar are not trusty guides to follow but warning beacons that shed light on the bleak destiny of the world. Or, a little more optimistically, the step back into Roman history which de Riencourt takes is presented by him as an opportunity to wake up and see properly the road we have all been traveling along like somnambulists (6), and to adjust our path as best we can and before it is too late (356).

At the time, de Riencourt’s thesis became the subject of considerable debate. Political conservatives rejected his Roman analogies as robustly as they denied his bold predictions for America’s future place in the world. In the National Review, the libertarian conservative Frank Meyer objected firstly that the author’s argument constituted a sinister European imposition on the United States, designed to depict the latter speciously as the dull and soulless Roman master of a Europe painted as a once sparkling Greece. Secondly, Meyer noted, it depended on an outmoded philosophy of history as cyclical, borrowed from Oswald
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Spengler’s sensational, but long since discredited, two-volume study *The Decline of the West* (1926–8). Finally, it ignored an essential characteristic of American political life, namely, its Christian vision of the innate value of the person and of his freedom under God. Confident of Christian America’s difference from pagan Rome, Meyer boldly concluded that Americans would indeed determine the fate of the West, but on their own terms: any future American era of western culture will be “not Caesarist, but free.” More recent (and more mundane) objections to *The Coming Caesars* have included de Riencourt’s inability to count hats, as well as the extraordinary historical contortions, contradictions, and contentions practiced by the author in order to turn America into the new Rome and Caesarism into its destiny.

In order to sustain a close and complex match over some 350 pages of text between the histories of Europe and ancient Greece, and between those of the United States and ancient Rome, de Riencourt is clearly constrained to twist and distort all four. And the achieved match is reinforced by the constant traffic of historical terminology across the centuries and the sea: the New Deal starts with the Gracchi in Rome, Roosevelt is the first real tribune of the people, Julius Caesar establishes a permanent bureaucracy after the downfall of Roman Big Business and relies on Clodius against Milo’s Tammany Hall. The whole argument is embedded in a contradictory philosophy of history which is simultaneously cyclical (civilizations overwhelm cultures and then ossify and degenerate into lethal tyrannies until the cycle begins again) and apocalyptic (expanding democracy leads to imperialism which in turn destroys republican institutions and concentrates absolute power in a single man, leading to nuclear holocaust and the end of history). Few critics since have been prepared to argue for such thoroughgoing historical coincidence, or to return to a biocyclical understanding of history (as rise and fall, ebb and flow, growth and decay). But at moments of political extremity or crisis, there has again been a turn to de Riencourt’s highly original and flamboyantly dramatic use of ancient Rome and Julius Caesar – namely, to paint a monitory vision of the future of the presidency, of America, and of the world.

Less than ten years later, for example, the front page of the issue of *National Review* for May 3, 1966 carried the legend: “Imperial America: A look into the future.” Inside the journal, the philosopher Thomas Molnar, while acknowledging national resistance to the idea, accepted with little hesitation or need for sustained analysis that by now the United States
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had become an imperial power like Rome. Clearly, American diplomacy and its armed forces have become at least in part reluctant heirs to European conquests, garrisoning GIs from Saigon to Léopoldville in order not to colonize but to “protect” and provision with a *Pax Americana*, currently guarding oceans and sea-routes, air-routes, and space orbits from “a great Asian power.” Molnar exploits the dual Roman analogy not to ponder America’s growth to empire but to pick apart what he perceives to be the tremendous and troubling domestic consequences of such growth. Empire needs a single power center, imperial responsibility brings with it increased centralization. If the United States has grown like Rome from small agrarian republic to empire, then will the parallel hold and its Chief Executive also become an Imperial Caesar?14

Here Molnar catalogues what he perceives to be the extraordinary degree of community already perceptible between modern American presidents and Caesar (or, variously, the Caesars). They empty traditional institutions of their power (the Roman Senate, the American Congress). They are charismatic figures who promise but only partly deliver to the demands of the newly important masses. For their double role as chief administrator and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, they are compensated by considerable privileges (a crown for Julius, four mandates for Roosevelt). They curb the legislative arm of government, contain popular discontent (free grain distributions, anti-poverty funds), and accrue a large staff who duplicate all forms of government and whose political existence is tied to their leader alone. Molnar’s conclusion demonstrates the predictive and apocalyptic functions the Roman equivalence is once again made to serve: “The end of the story? Caesar reaches for absolute power, and absolute power corrupts Caesar first, the public and its morality next. Priests or television screens divinize his Image. Eager, famished enemies appear at the gates.”15

The author completes his analysis by reassuring his presumably somewhat alarmed readers that these thoughts on a Caesarian presidency are merely an intellectual exercise and that none of his predictions might come true. However, although he makes no direct reference to the current president of the United States (Lyndon B. Johnson), the date his article was published is not without significance. Only a year earlier Johnson had authorized open-ended military intervention in Vietnam at the same time as he undertook sweeping policy innovations at home.16 Criticism of the secrecy with which the president came to his decisions

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was portrayed in a political cartoon linked to an editorial that appeared in the *Washington Post* on June 10, 1966, only a month after the publication of Molnar’s Roman speculations. On the left, a bespectacled, short senator dressed in Roman tunic and boots holds a cigar in one hand and raises up a scroll in the other on which is written: “Dirksen accuses administration of lack of candor on Vietnam.” On the right, a tall President Johnson dressed in toga and Roman sandals, and wearing a laurel wreath, finds himself backed against a pillar. The caption over the president’s head reads: “EV [sic] TU?,” identifying the confrontation as one between an American Brutus and his bemused Caesar.17

Throughout the 1960s and on into the mid-1970s and beyond, the Vietnamese conflict brought to prominence on the political left a critique of American imperialism and its association with an imperial presidency.18 But as discussion moved from speculation and prediction to confirmation and description, the original need for the critique to be dressed in dramatic Roman tropes appears to fade, the necessity of examining the distinctiveness and the specifics of the United States’ commitments overseas and the massive growth in presidential powers at home becomes more apparent. Even de Riencourt in his next book, *The American Empire* (1968), fails to sustain his previous use of ancient Rome and Caesar as historical analogy beyond some small mention in his introductory pages, at the same time as he asserts that his earlier predictions have all come true. While *The Imperial Presidency* (1973), Arthur Schlesinger’s study of the gradual appropriation by the presidency of powers originally reserved by the Constitution to Congress, in particular the vital decision to go to war, manages without mention of ancient empire and the Roman dictator.19 Widespread acknowledgment of military interventionism abroad and executive predominance at home now required much less in the way of historical analogy or even historical metaphor for their exploration. While, until the end of the 1980s, apocalyptic anxieties about American expansion were assuaged for some by the assumption that US military growth and the creation of a colossal bureaucratic machinery at home were necessary, but merely temporary, departures from the nation’s republican origins, part of a Cold War strategy of containment rather than conquest, and held in check by the opposition of the eastern empire of the USSR.20 At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Roman historical analogies have reemerged and in the most unexpected quarters.
The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 constituted a turning point for the United States with regard to its stature in the world. From that date, if not before, an influential neoconservative foreign policy group started to develop a coherent grand strategy for the United States now that it was understood to have emerged as the world’s only superpower. Planning for a full-scale transformation of the international order included the publication of a manifesto and the establishment of a website in 1997, Project for the New American Century (www.newamericancentury.org), through which it began to advocate aggressive intervention abroad, expressed as a doctrine of military might conjoined with moral leadership. Signatories included individuals who were to become key members of George W. Bush’s administration, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. At first New Right circles were careful to dismiss the idea that such a doctrine constituted a call to empire (and thus an invitation to critical comparisons with a Roman past associated with domestic tyranny, imperial overstretch, and ultimate collapse that use of the term “empire” might justify). Empire was construed as an outmoded ideological accusation routinely wielded during the twentieth century by the left. Even a few years later, Donald Kagan, Professor of Classics and History at Yale University and co-chairman of a report produced for the PNAC in 2000 on “Rebuilding America’s Defenses,” published an article in the Atlantic Journal and Constitution (which was then posted up on the PNAC website), in which he declared that:

All comparisons between America’s current place in the world and anything legitimately called an empire in the past reveal ignorance and confusion about any reasonable meaning of the concept empire, especially the comparison with the Roman empire. . . . The Romans acquired the greatest part of their empire by direct military conquest, subjected their people to Roman law, and imposed taxes and compulsory military service under Roman command. They deprived their subjects of freedom and autonomy . . . . To compare the United States with any such empire is ludicrous.

Despite Kagan’s comments, such reluctance to make comparison largely evaporated after September 11, 2001 and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. That day and its outcomes spurred more
hawkish neoconservative intellectuals, political figures, and commentators to appropriate, even to revel in, both the concept of empire and historical comparison with ancient Rome. Now enthusiastic assertions about the second coming of the Roman Empire began to litter the prestigious print media, as well as being repeated and widely diffused in foreign policy journals, bulletins of think tanks, conferences, monographs, and across the Internet. For example, a comment to the New York Times in 2002 by the conservative columnist for the Washington Post Charles Krauthammer continues to this day to be endlessly recycled and analyzed both in print and on the web: “People are now coming out of the closet on the word ‘empire.’ . . . The fact is no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the Roman Empire.”

In order, however, to secure for the United States the grandeur and the glory of Roman Empire, rather than its loss of liberties, its cruelties, and its fall, there are evident rules attached to this feverish embrace of ancient Rome in establishment discourse: such views are not to be expressed in the most official contexts (that is, those closest to the president), and careful attempts must always be made to disassociate the acceptance of empire from distasteful suggestions of economic dominance, racism, or tyranny, and to picture this imperium instead as a uniquely beneficial, civilizing mission. As Michael Ignatieff, Professor of Human Rights Policy at Harvard University, noted: “the 21st century imperium is an invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known.”

But it was a rare commentator who would be so bold as to take up the dual historical parallel with Rome and claim a positive similarity between George W. Bush and Julius Caesar. Such a rhetorical strategy was especially dangerous and required careful expression, however tentatively undertaken or momentarily mentioned, for in the political history of the United States of America Caesar had commenced his career as the quintessential enemy, symbolic of British tyranny against which a whole nation of American Brutuses had so bravely fought in the War of Independence. Nonetheless, five months after the September 11 attacks, on February 2, 2002 (just after the president had delivered the State of the Union speech to Congress in which he notoriously attacked North Korea, Iraq, and Iran as an “axis of evil”), another columnist for the Washington Post observed that:
George W. Bush delivered such a stunning State of the Union speech, during which he dazzled Congress with a mix of Julius Caesar and Billy Graham, that it left the opposition virtually speechless. Who is going to argue with the scourge of evil, the conqueror of Afghanistan? . . . Richard Gephardt, House Democratic leader, was reduced, in his reply to the president, to complaining that Bush did not mention campaign reform. Can you imagine that Caesar, addressing the Senate, would be faced with the effrontery of a query about the state of Rome’s sewers? 27

In her brief reference to Caesar, the journalist Mary McGrory appears to bestow on Bush by association the character of an eloquent orator, a high-minded statesman above trivial questions of domestic reform, a popular and resolute decision-maker, and, most importantly of all in the heated context of the War on Terrorism and the invasion of Afghanistan, a triumphant war-time commander-in-chief and conqueror. Any possible hint of dictatorship or cruelty is seemingly offset by the additional association of Bush with Christian fundamentalism. Only later in the article does it emerge more clearly that historical analogy may here have an ironic purpose, that McGrory is twisting the Roman metaphor back against those now deploying it so pretentiously, perhaps even perniciously, as a cloak to cover domestic (and foreign) wrong-doings. For she goes on to argue that the gravity and highmindedness of the president’s oratory conveniently worked to render any questions about the Enron scandal vulgar. A commander-in-chief has no need to make mention of such matters: “when you are briefing the country on survival and revival, you have no time for such trifles.” 28

Twenty-First-Century Caesar

The New Right’s appropriation soon after September 11, 2001 of the tropes of historical destiny, of glorious and beneficent empire resurgent, could be countered either by exposing it as a hollow sham (a matter of no substance, merely of rhetoric), 29 or by a return to the earlier twentieth-century critiques of American empire as leading to Caesarism and to apocalypse. Such critiques begin to gather momentum after the president’s address to the United Nations on September 12, 2002 (the day after the first anniversary of 9/11), when George W. Bush declared that if the UN was not going to act against Iraq, the United States would do so
A spate of articles, in both the British and the American press, subsequently compared the US president negatively with Julius Caesar, or with the Roman emperors more generally.

The day after the address, Robert Fisk, the Middle East correspondent for the British newspaper the *Independent*, observed that seated in the UN General Assembly, surrounded by green marble fittings and a backcloth of burnished gold, the president was able to enjoy the furnishings of an emperor, “albeit a diminutive one.” Indicating how Bush was selling his war against Iraq on the basis that such a regime supported terrorist attacks, the correspondent ended his piece dramatically: “What was the name of that river which Julius Caesar crossed? Was it not called the Rubicon? Yesterday, Mr Bush may have crossed the very same river.”

The same day, another British newspaper, the *Guardian*, carried a lead comment by its columnist Polly Toynbee, in which she described Bush as “this unlikely emperor of the world,” telling the UN in effect to pass a resolution on war or be bypassed. “What the US wants, the UN had better solemnise with a suitable resolution – very like the Roman senate and one of its lesser god-emperors.” The accompanying political cartoon by Jas showed a wreathed and togate emperor incongruously waving a small Stars and Stripes in his hand as he stands in an advancing armored personnel carrier. Similarly, a photomontage of Bush as a wreathed and breastplated Roman emperor, gesturing thumbs down for death (figure 17.1), appeared a few days later on the cover of the tabloid insert of the same newspaper above the legend: “Hail, Bush. Is America the new Rome?” Although the enclosed article by Jonathan Freedland (which it was designed to illustrate) was concerned with the historical analogy of empire rather than emperor, the image strongly suggests a critique of the presidency as an imperial, ruthless, and arbitrary mode of leadership.

Toward the end of 2002, across the Atlantic, a similarly Caesarian condemnation of George W. Bush appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* under the title: “Hail Caesar!” Referring back to the decision on October 11 by Congress to invest the president with the power to order an invasion of Iraq whenever it occurred to him to do so, the writer Lewis H. Lapham described it as “[a]kin to the ancient Roman practice of enthroning a dictator at moments of severe crisis.” He continued, sardonically, both Senate and House of Representatives were much relieved to have escaped the chore of republican self-government and pass it over to Caesar’s sword. Despite the absence of slaughtered goats, the subtext of
their vote could still be understood as a submissive prayer to their great general:

Our President is a Great General; he will blast Saddam Hussein and rescue us from doom. To achieve this extraordinary mission he needs extraordinary
powers, so extraordinary that they don’t exist in law . . . Great is Caesar; God must be with him. 33

Here, as in the British examples above, Caesar appears as a natural consequence of and counter to the neoconservative embrace of empire. 34

Comparison of Bush and Caesar works to create a striking and sensational narrative of the abrogation of power by traditional republican institutions, the usurpation of their authority by an untrustworthy leader, a turn in time of crisis to dictatorship, the illegitimate declaration of war, the march blindly across forbidden borders into an invasion which will bring with it historic, potentially disastrous, consequences. 35

And as the moment of invasion drew nearer, early in 2003, even libertarian advocates of empire such as Michael Ignatieff touched nervously again upon the apocalyptic visions of a Thomas Cole or an Amaury de Riencourt:

The impending operation in Iraq is thus a defining moment in America’s long debate with itself about whether its overseas role as an empire threatens or strengthens its existence as a republic. The American electorate, while still supporting the president, wonders whether his proclamation of a war without end against terrorists and tyrants may only increase its vulnerability while endangering its liberties and its economic health at home. . . . To call America the new Rome is at once to recall Rome’s glory and its eventual fate at the hands of the barbarians. 36

Across the Rubicon

Throughout this Afterword, I have explored some of the causes and the purposes of what has been called the “analogico-historical method” 37 for interpreting American foreign policy and its recent transformations, a method which appeared in political debate in print and then online through the course of the twentieth century and which has taken on an extraordinary vigor in the early years of the twenty-first. Whereas the analogy with Roman Empire has come to belong both to the right as well as the left of the political spectrum (a boast as well as a condemnation), the twinned analogy with Julius Caesar has been deployed almost exclusively in critical key. This is not only as a result of what Caesar was (insofar as it can be discovered from his own writings and other ancient sources), 38 but also of what he has become in the political discourses of Europe and the United States. 39
As foil for western traditions of republicanism, Julius Caesar has come to symbolize the moment of greatest danger to the Roman Republic. He was its ruin. His self-interested ambition led him to usurp senatorial authority by arms. His designs on monarchy led to the establishment of the rule of emperors. The expansion of empire and the centralization of power led ultimately to Rome’s fall. Caesar has been index and embodiment of a devastating turning point in history. Caesarian analogy thus generates, legitimates, and renders more plausible an especially vivid representation of American politics. It paints a portrait of its foreign policy in the bright reds of a bloody imperialism, its president in the deep purples of a ruthless tyranny. It constructs this moment at the beginning of the twenty-first century as equal in historical significance to that when the Roman Republic collapsed. It ennobles those politicians and pundits who utilize it with the gravitas of a brave American Cicero or Cato, and links them back to their own nation’s Founding Fathers (who had used the analogy before them) as new guardians of that republican legacy.

Curiously, however, although the analogy with Roman Empire has been strongly predictive and bleakly apocalyptic on many occasions in its use, the Caesarian analogy has rarely been pressed for the particulars of Caesar’s bloody end. Rarely, that is, until the months and years after the invasion of Iraq, until, that is, debate shifted toward the uncertain issue of a post-invasion settlement. First hints can be discerned in an article by Brad Warthen which was released on March 31, 2003 (only twelve days after the invasion) by Knight Ridder/Tribune News Information Services, a leading information provider to American print, television, and electronic media. He begins:

George W. Bush has crossed his Rubicon, and he has taken us with him. Julius Caesar set world history on a new course when he took his legion into Italy in defiance of the Senate. President Bush has taken an equally irrevocable step by entering the Tigris and Euphrates basin to wage war in spite of UN objections.

While the author goes on to claim that he welcomes this development – with great power comes the responsibility to act and only Bush is single-minded enough to pull it off – he acknowledges that this, perhaps even more than previous turning points in history, creates problems, not just opportunities: “This Rubicon is wider than the one Caesar crossed.”
Current problems are likely to last, but Bush cannot. For, if not as a result of the coming elections in 2004, then certainly in four years time, there will be a new president. More explicitly, and aggressively, Denise Giardina argued in an editorial which featured in the *Charleston Gazette* on May 12, 2003 that Bush had “assumed the mantle of Julius Caesar. He is in the process of ruining the American republic and establishing an American/corporate empire.” The president should be impeached and stand in the dock to be tried for war crimes.43

Perhaps only within the relative safety – the pastness, the theatricality, the tradition, the cultural authority – of performances of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* has it been possible to touch upon Caesar’s assassination as a lesson about contemporary events, for fear of appearing literally to advocate the president’s assassination.44 Two notable modern-dress productions of the play were recently staged, coinciding roughly with the Ides of March and with the second anniversary of the invasion, in which an American flavor was injected into Roman (and, of course, Renaissance) politics rather than the other way around. One was directed by Deborah Warner at the Barbican Theatre in London. Audiences could observe that the *mise-en-scène* of the play’s battle scenes closely mimicked on stage one of the photographs of the Iraq war that had been inserted in their programs in between details of the production. In the program, coordinated by the presence of the color purple on facing pages, a photograph of a smiling Bush in the combat uniform of the US airforce was also placed side by side with a quotation from Act 2.1 of the play: “Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.” A few pages along, coordinated now in yellow, the photograph of a soldier at the ready in Iraq was placed facing a quotation from 4.3: “You have done that you should be sorry for.” While in press interviews the director suggested in passing a possible connection between the excessive authority of Caesar and that of Bush, these other analogical strategies would seem instead to be indicating a lesson for Bush in Brutus, namely, the danger of failing to consider carefully and be well prepared for the aftermath of assassination, the dreadful consequences of tyrannicide.45 The other production, directed by Daniel Sullivan at the Belasco Theatre, New York, achieved considerable press coverage for its casting of the Hollywood film star Denzel Washington as Brutus. Again the *mise-en-scène* was suggestive of modern-day battle, with explosive sound effects of gunfire and overhead helicopters, costumes of business suits and camouflage fatigues, props of

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assault rifles and photo ID security badges. The assassination, however, was located in a boardroom, and off stage. On at least one occasion, the star of the production attempted explicitly to fix a much more provocative analogy for the play’s potential audiences. According to the *New York Times* for April 3, 2005, in interview Washington pulled out a photograph of the president surrounded by his inner circle and asked who would lead the rebellion “if he decided he wanted to make himself King, like Julius Caesar.” Asked by the interviewer who would be Brutus, he replied: “the obvious one is Colin Powell.”

While the analogical strategies employed for these recent stagings of Shakespeare could well be regarded as merely superficial, devices for the generation of publicity and good box office, they are nonetheless indicative of the continuing attraction of Caesar as a mechanism for reflecting upon American politics and its global repercussions in the twenty-first century. Toward the end of the twentieth century, in his study of the traditions of republicanism and Caesarism, Peter Baehr argued that Julius Caesar and the Roman world were now disappearing from political discourse, and fading from the social memory of the West. Although his concern was largely with sustained discussion of Caesar in political theory, and mine has been with passing reference in popular political debate, I hope that this Afterword has begun to demonstrate that at the start of the twenty-first century Caesar has by no means vanished from the imagination of western culture.

**Notes**

2. Edoardo Vigna, “Ma l’impero Americano è come quello Romano?” *Sette* (*Corriere della Sera*), n. 13 (2003), 33–43. I am most grateful to a participant at the conference, Jan Nelis, for drawing the magazine to my attention.
3. The term was originally coined by Arthur Schlesinger (1973), and applied to a presidency which, in his view, had gradually usurped some of the most crucial powers originally allocated by the Constitution to Congress.
4. These articles and others like them are discussed further below. Most were found through a ProQuest Newspaper database search for the combination of names “Caesar” and “Bush” undertaken at the Library of Congress in March 2004 that revealed a clustering of such critical comment during the course of 2002–3. Articles on America as a modern Roman Empire are now
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legion and some of the most important have been conveniently collated under the heading “Militarized Globalism and Empire – Advocates, Skeptics, and Critics” at www.comw.org/qdr/empire.html, a webpage sponsored by the Project on Defense Alternatives.

5 For the purposes of this Afterword, I am restricting my analysis to newspaper and related electronic material.


7 See also Miles (1968) and Miller (1990).


9 De Riencourt (1957), 5. Hereafter citations are given parenthetically in the text.

10 Meyer (1957), on which see Stromberg (2001). Cf. the critical review by Weaver (1957).

11 Miller (1981), 123–41 notes the problem about the number of hats but is otherwise fairly well disposed toward de Riencourt’s thesis, believing the Caesars to have finally arrived in Washington. Baehr (1998), 257–65 provides further comment on and criticism of de Riencourt’s use of Spengler.

12 With respect to the analogical strategies adopted by critics of Andrew Jackson, Miles (1968), 362 noted that Americans are inclined to attribute the loss of Roman liberty to causes they consider menacing to their own. Similar observations could be made about de Riencourt’s contemporary take on Roman history.

13 As Baehr (1998), 264.

14 See, on Molnar, Stromberg (2001).

15 Molnar (1966), 411.

16 See, for example, Grantham (1988), 253–305; Greenstein (2001), 75–89; Chafe (2003), 266–93.

17 The political cartoon can be accessed from the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Its identifying reproduction number is LC-USZ62-127072.

18 Foster (2002).

19 Compare also Liska (1978), for whom the Roman is just one past empire which might illuminate that of modern America and one whose differences, as well as similarities, must be acknowledged.

20 See, for example, Stromberg (2001); Bacevich (2002), esp. vii–ix; Foster (2002).


The comment is quoted in Eakin (2002), for example, and reappears in other articles and books and on numerous websites.


On the reception of Julius Caesar in the United States, see Wyke (1999b), 175–9 and (2004); Malamud (in this volume). Miles (1968), 373–4 notes that some supporters of Andrew Jackson attempted to describe him favorably as Caesarian, but more often rejected the comparison as too dangerous.

My thanks to Tim Whitmarsh and his colleagues at the University of Exeter for first drawing my attention to the potential ironies in McGrory’s Caesarian comparison.

See, for example, the Doonesbury cartoon strip by Garry Trudeau. Around the time of the invasion of Iraq, the cowboy hat which had been used to represent the president and to depict him as totally without substance was replaced by a Roman helmet. Those aspiring to a role as managers of the post-invasion peace were represented as ostentatiously attempting to take on some of the accouterments of Roman imperialism (the title proconsul, the toga, the fasces, the Latin language) while failing totally to understand any consequent responsibilities. For this technique compare, for example, Martinez (2004).

On the significance of this moment, see Johnson (2004), 73 and 90; Byrd (2004), 159–61.

Fisk (2002). The article clearly impressed Johnson, who begins a chapter of his book on The Sorrows of Empire (2004) quoting from it and then closes the chapter by employing for himself the same metaphor of crossing a Rubicon (15 and 37, respectively).

Toynbee (2002).


Holland (2003) notes how difficult it is for Bush’s opponents to resist the image of him as a Roman emperor dressed in toga and laurel wreath.

For such criticisms of Bush, see for example the account by Senator Byrd (2004) of the president’s persistent assault on the separation of powers after 9/11, and the acquiescence of Congress in handing over to him even their constitutional power to declare war. See also Johnson (2004), esp. 256, 284, and 291–8.

Ignatieff (2003), 24 and 25.

As Liska (1978), ix.

See, for example, the first four chapters in this volume.
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39 In this volume, for example, see chapters 5 through 16.
40 On Caesar and the traditions of republicanism, see, for example, Miller (1990), 71–2; Baehr (1998), esp. 4–5; Johnson (2004), 15.
41 Compare Miles (1968) and Miller (1990) on the moral sheen cast on Andrew Jackson’s opponents by their use of Roman analogy. In a review of Robert C. Byrd’s recent condemnation of the president, quoted on the back cover of the book, Arthur Schlesinger says that the senator “speaks with the voice of a Founding Father defending the traditional ideals of the old republic against the ideological radicals who have seized Washington, today an occupied city.”
42 Warthen (2003).
44 Compare Miles (1968), 370–1, who argues that opponents of Andrew Jackson found scant consolation in reflecting on Caesar’s bloody death for what that might imply, especially after an attempt was made on the president’s life in 1835.
45 See, for example, the review in the Observer for April 10, 2005. Since the invasion of Iraq, there has been much discussion of a failure on the part of the Bush administration properly to plan a postwar settlement; see e.g., Ferguson (2004).
46 For details of the New York production, see the website www.caesaronbroadway.com and reviews such as those in the New York Times (April 4, 2005), the Hollywood Reporter (April 2, 2005), Newsweek (April 18, 2005), United Press International (May 8, 2005).


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