

Caesar's Orations

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Caesar's Orations

Caesar was a brilliant orator according to contemporaries and later generations of writers. Quintilian, the first century AD rhetorician, even considered Caesar the only serious rival to Cicero's famous oratorical brilliance, because of his force, acumen, vigor and elegance, and the biographer Suetonius thought that Caesar equaled, if not surpassed, the greatest orators of all time.¹ Cicero himself appraisingly singled out Caesar's elegant style and skill in formulating catchy phrases.² Why was Caesar's oratory considered so brilliant and is that brilliance displayed in the surviving fragments of his speeches? What do we know of Caesar's public speeches and their role in his political career? In this chapter, I discuss Caesar's education as the background to his oratorical performances, the most important of his known speeches in their political context, his oratorical delivery and style, and the effects his speeches had on his audience and on his political career.

Although Caesar is one of the most famous Romans to date and has had an enormous impact on Roman history, limited information survives about his oratory – one of the main means of public communication in Rome.³ Apart from the short descriptions of Caesar's style in the works of Cicero and some imperial authors, we possess remarks on specific occasions at which Caesar spoke, and a handful of fragments from speeches are extant. We know of eleven *contiones* (speeches addressed to the people), seven delivered as a magistrate and four as a private citizen, and a handful of court speeches. The datable court speeches belong to the beginning of Caesar's career and they are all prosecution speeches, clearly following a common tactic of making yourself known to the public as a young prosecutor before embarking on a political career.⁴ Another handful of speeches are known from appearances in the senate, and at least three of these were circulated after the event. Caesar's two funeral speeches for his aunt Julia and his wife Cornelia were famous in antiquity and beyond and a largish fragment of the first speech survives. Finally, ancient historians record, paraphrase or invent a handful of speeches apparently addressed to Caesar's soldiers during the Gallic and the civil war.⁵

Our sources often provide problematic or no information on the date, purpose and nature of Caesar's orations. Although Cicero (106-43 BC) was a connoisseur of oratorical talent as well as Caesar's fellow senator, his different political orientation on the one hand and his need to censor his judgment of Caesar's qualities during his dictatorship (when Cicero wrote his substantial evaluation of Caesar's oratory in the *Brutus*, 46 BC) on the other hand means that Cicero's testimony cannot be taken at face value. The historian Sallust (86-35 BC) also experienced Caesar first hand and has sometimes been seen as a partisan of Caesar, although the evidence is flimsy. Sallust did benefit from Caesar's dictatorship and wrote his historical works after his death in 44 BC, but his 'inclusion' of Caesar's speech in the Catilinarian debate should be read as a product of Sallust rather than of Caesar. A great number of

¹ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.114; Suet. *Iul.* 55.1; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.3.

² Letter to Cornelius Nepos quoted in Suet. *Iul.* 55.2; Cic. *Brut.* 252-62. For Caesar's *elegantia*, see Deichgräber 1950, Pezzini and Krebs, "Rewriting Latin" in this volume.

³ Most fragments and testimonies are collected in Malcovati 1976: nr. 121.

⁴ Griffin & Atkins (1991) 81, n. 1; Powell & Paterson (2004) 40.

⁵ For the speeches in Caesar's *commentarii*, see the section 'Further Reading' below and Grillo "Speeches in the *commentarii*" in this volume.

imperial writers provide further information about Caesar's speeches, especially Tacitus, Quintilian, Suetonius, Plutarch, and Gellius, but their different purposes for writing makes it difficult to compare their testimonies of Caesar's public performances. Moreover, their reception of Caesar was colored by his unique position in Roman history as the murdered dictator and adoptive father of the first *princeps*, Augustus. The potentially negative element of tyranny was combined with Augustus' masterly attempts at rewriting Caesar's memory; Augustus took a keen interest in evaluating the authenticity of Caesar's circulated speeches, and he may have influenced their reception.⁶ Nonetheless, the substantial number of fragments and, especially, testimonies to Caesar's public speeches makes him one of the better-known orators from the republican period and it is possible to form a reasonable impression of his oratory.

EDUCATION AND EARLY CAREER

Being a young man of the Roman upper class, Caesar enjoyed a traditional education which included studies in law, history, and rhetoric; there is no evidence that he engaged seriously with philosophy. He studied rhetoric with the freedman M. Antonius Gnipho, who excelled in both Greek and Roman rhetoric.⁷ Cicero tells us that Caesar studied rhetoric with diligence and enthusiasm.⁸ He was taught by the famous philosopher and rhetorician Molo of Rhodes (just as was Cicero) when he went to Rhodes on his study tour in the Greek East in 75-73 BC, and perhaps also when Molo was in Rome as ambassador during the 80s BC.⁹ Caesar's famous attention to correct language (*latinitas*), exemplified by his treaty on linguistic analogy, *de Analogia*, is said to have been influenced by his upbringing under his mother's careful attention to language. Cicero mentions the domestic custom (*domestica consuetudo*) of speaking as origin of Caesar's pure Latin, while Tacitus broadens out his mother Aurelia's impact to direct the young Caesar to where his talents were the greatest: army, law or eloquence.¹⁰ Caesar seems to have had a special gift for two of the three, military and oratory, possibly also for law.

Caesar's first known public speech is significant for his oratorical inspiration, for his political purpose of taking on the case, and, especially, for what he made of the occasion. His prosecution of Cn. Cornelius Dolabella (cos. 81 BC) in 77 or early 76 BC for proconsular mismanagement (*de repetundis*) was preceded by an oratorical contest for the right to prosecute, a *divinatio*. Caesar's *divinatio* imitated the style – in places verbatim – of a speech by his relative Caesar Strabo, a famously witty orator.¹¹ This *divinatio* is lost, but one extant fragment (Gell. NA 4.16.8) and one paraphrase (Val. Max. 8.9.3) of Caesar's subsequent prosecution show his talent in thinking up arguments, expressing them with elegance, and playing the underdog. Caesar lost the trial, probably in the face of heavy bribery and behind-the-scenes negotiations in favor of the influential Dolabella, but he managed to turn the occasion into an advantage nevertheless.¹² After the trial, he circulated his speech, possibly the *divinatio* too (Gellius mentions several volumes), and while Caesar's performance itself made a splash, the circulation of his speech(es) reinforced the impression of a young man

⁶ Suet. *Iul.* 55 on Augustus' interest in Caesar's speeches. See White (1998) for Augustus' use of Caesar's memory.

⁷ Suet. *Gram.* 7.

⁸ Cic. *Brut.* 252.

⁹ Suet. *Iul.* 4.1; Plut. *Caes.* 3.1.

¹⁰ Cic. *Brut.* 252; Tac. *Dial.* 28.5-6.

¹¹ Suet. *Iul.* 55.2; Caesar Strabo's wit: Cic. *De or.* 2.216-90; *Brut.* 177. For Caesar's wit see Corbeill in this volume.

¹² On the political background to this base, see Gruen 1966: 385-8.

arriving on the public scene. Caesar's prosecution of Dolabella is one of his best known speeches and it is mentioned by a string of imperial authors: Velleius Paterculus, Asconius, Tacitus, Suetonius, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Gellius.¹³ The circulation was a conscious attempt on Caesar's part to enhance the impact of the delivered version and to promote himself. Plutarch remarks in the connection with the Dolabella trial that Caesar had a special gift for making himself liked and being popular with the people, although his description may have been colored by Caesar's later popularity and Augustus' even later promotion of the positive aspects of his public image. Caesar left Rome for Greece and Rhodes with a reputation as a great orator.

The later career and reception of Caesar may lead us to think that already at this stage it was universally clear that he was destined for greatness.¹⁴ However, as a member of a patrician but long undistinguished family, a successful career was not a given. His aunt's marriage to the seven times consul Gaius Marius had offered important credentials and more recent public attention to the Julii. But as with his first speech against Dolabella, it was less the situation itself and more Caesar's talent in exploiting such a situation which made the crucial difference. Caesar had already shown himself in opposition to Sulla and his supporters in his prosecution of Dolabella who owed his political position to Sulla, and he began to build up his public image in the late 70s as a supporter of the people against the domination of the Sullan regime and its beneficiaries – with the help of oratory. Caesar supported the efforts to restore the rights of the tribunes and delivered a speech in favor of the bill of the tribune Plautius to allow the return from exile and restoration of citizenship to the adherents of Marcus Lepidus, who had joined Rome's enemy Sertorius after Lepidus' death.¹⁵ In Suetonius' description, Caesar's support appears an act of familial duty because his brother-in-law, Lucius Cinna, was among the exiled. Caesar may have aimed to promote his *pietas* towards his kinsman, but his speech also signaled publicly his efforts on behalf of the people at large, as the senatorial clampdown on Lepidus' rebellion was seen by some as elite suppression of the people and their political rights. This is Caesar's first known *contio* and it is significant for its people-friendly stance. The bill was passed and Caesar may subsequently have circulated a version of his speech, as the survival of the fragment in Gellius suggests, with the aim of promoting his stance and success further.¹⁶

THE PEOPLE-FRIENDLY POLITICIAN

With his first civic magistracy, the quaestorship of 69 BC, Caesar's political career had begun in earnest. This office did not normally offer occasions to address the public, as quaestors were usually sent out to serve under a commander or governor in the provinces. But the deaths of his aunt Julia (Marius' widow) and then his wife Cornelia (who had borne him his only child Julia) he quickly turned into chances to speak in public. Suetonius (*Iul.* 6.1) and Plutarch (*Caes.* 5) describe the situation and Suetonius provides a striking fragment from his speech for Julia (cited below under delivery and style) in which Caesar argues that his aunt (and therefore also himself) descended from gods and kings. Suetonius' inclusion of a fragment of this speech (there is no particular reason to question its authenticity) suggests that it was circulated, possibly by Caesar himself.

¹³ Vell. Pat. 2.43.3; Asc 26C; Tac. *Dial.* 34.7; Suet. *Iul.* 4.1, 55.1; Val. Max. 8.9.3; Plut. *Caes.* 4; Gell. *NA* 4.16.8.

¹⁴ Already Strasburger (1953) protested against this notion. For the construction of the myth of Caesar, see Batstone in this volume.

¹⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 5; fragment in Gell. *NA* 13.3.5. Dating to 70 BC: Gelzer 1968: 29; Hinard 2008: 117-18.

¹⁶ See also Krebs "Caesar de se ipso: Propaganda inside and outside the *Commentarii*" in this volume.

Despite Suetonius' remark that Caesar made the 'customary funeral speeches from the rostra', public funeral speeches in honor of elite women were not an ancient custom as were funeral speeches for elite men. The first known example was Q. Catulus' (cos. 102 BC) speech for his mother Popillia and there can only have been few further such speeches until Caesar's in 69 BC.¹⁷ Popillia was an old woman at her death, as was Julia, not young as Cornelia. While also Plutarch misleads in saying that it was common practice to deliver funeral orations for older women, he does point out how unusual was Caesar's speech for the young Cornelia, adding that it was the first of this kind. Although building on the existing tradition of funeral speeches for men,¹⁸ Caesar's innovation may have gone further than simply introducing the speech for a young woman. Given the very recent history of such speeches for women, both his speeches and the accompanying processions with *imagines* of ancestors may have included original elements such as female virtues (e.g. chastity – *pudicitia* and domestic virtues) in place of male virtues (e.g. military bravery – *virtus*, oratorical talent, strength – *fortitudo*, honour – *honor*, wisdom – *sapientia*) and references to the birth and good upbringing of children as climax of their lives rather than political successes or military triumphs. That Caesar was making the most of the situation is clear, too, from the processional context at Julia's funeral. Plutarch relates that Caesar had the *imagines* of Marius and his son paraded, the first time these had been seen since Sulla's ban on this and other physical reminders of his enemy.¹⁹ Caesar skillfully exploited the political turn against Sulla's regime and in favor of people-friendly initiatives, and the display of Marius' *imago* was greeted with cheers from the crowds. Four years later, Caesar would further exploit this familial link in restoring Marius' victory trophies from the wars against Jugurtha, the Cimbri and Teutones to the Capitol.²⁰ At Julia's funeral, Caesar was evidently trying to ensure maximum attention to his speech in order to strengthen his claim to ancestral and familial credentials and to his people-friendly stance. The combination of speech, visuals and spectacle was a powerful cocktail with maximum impact in the public imagination.

When in Rome – and Caesar was away for prolonged periods in the 70s BC, 60s BC and almost all of the 50s BC – he skillfully sought out and used oratorical occasions to promote himself to the public and his senatorial peers. He continued to nurture his people-friendly profile by speaking in favor of allocating the popular commander Pompey two major commands against pirates in the Mediterranean (67 BC) and against Rome's arch-enemy Mithridates of Pontus (66-62 BC), by having three Sullan henchmen prosecuted, and by effecting the prosecution of C. Rabirius for the murder of the tribune Saturninus in 100 BC.²¹

Caesar's most famous speech was delivered in the debate on the fate of the Catilinarian conspirators on 5 December 63 BC.²² The senators debated whether the conspirators should be executed when Caesar brought forward an unusual counterproposal. Caesar's speech, and that of Cato the Younger, was later immortalized by Sallust, but it is unclear how much of it

¹⁷ Catulus possibly delivered it as late as in the year of his consulship: Cic. *De or.* 2.44; RE Q. Lutatius Catulus, col. 2072.

¹⁸ Illustrated vividly in Polyb. 6.53-4, and some examples of speeches for Fabius Maximus Cunctator: Cic. *Cato* 12, Plut. *Fab. Max.* 1.7; M. Claudius Marcellus: Liv. 27.27.12; Q. Caecilius Metellus: Plin. *HN* 7.139.

¹⁹ See Pelling 2011: 150-1 on the context.

²⁰ Vell. Pat. 2.43.4; Suet. *Iul.* 11; Plut. *Caes.* 5.1-4; cf. Flower (2006) 93, 104-6.

²¹ Caesar's speech(es) for Pompey's commands: Plut. *Pomp.* 25.3; Dio Cass. 36.43.2 with Watkins 1987. Against Sullan henchmen: Cic. *Att.* 1.16.9; *Sul.* 81; *Pis.* 95; Asc. 90-91C; Suet. *Iul.* 11; App. *B Civ.* 1.101; Dio Cass. 37.10.2. Trial of Rabirius: Cic. *Rab. perd.*; Suet. *Iul.* 12; Dio Cass. 37.26-7.

²² Cic. *Cat.* 4; Sal. *Cat.* 50-4; Plut. *Caes.* 7.7-9; Dio 37.36.1; App. *BC* 2.1.6.

is Sallust's own invention.²³ We know that all the speeches were noted down by clerks, but no fragment of Caesar's speech exist.²⁴ It is also unclear whether Caesar himself circulated a version of his speech afterwards. Bits of the its content, but not its style, can be gleaned from Cicero's Fourth Catilinarian, which is a version of Cicero's speech(es) in the same debate circulated some time after the meeting and therefore unlikely to seriously misrepresent Caesar's main points.²⁵ According to Cicero, Caesar argued that instead of execution, the five captured conspirators should be imprisoned in different Italian towns, that the towns should be penalized strongly if a prisoner escaped, and that the property of the conspirators should be confiscated.²⁶ Long-term imprisonment was not commonly used in the Roman republic for financial reasons; instead exile was the usual penalty for serious crime, especially for members of the equestrian and senatorial classes, because it deprived the exiled of citizen rights and, sometimes, their property. Caesar may have supported his proposal with humanitarian and philosophical reflections, but knowing his flair for making a splash, he may also have chosen a controversial, yet defensible, position to ensure maximum attention to his own person. Indeed, Cicero presents Caesar's proposal as a people-friendly initiative (Caesar followed the *via popularis*²⁷) and this fits into Caesar's self-presentation in the 60s BC. In light of the crucial question in the debate, whether to have the conspirators executed without trial against the Sempronian law but under the powers of the so-called *senatus consultum ultimum*, Caesar's imprisonment-proposal could be presented as favoring the rights of the people against senatorial domination. The fact that Caesar almost convinced the senators – Cato's speech for execution ultimately carried the day – indicates his persuasive powers as an orator. Already a talented speaker in the courts and in the *contio*, this performance showed that he also mastered senatorial oratory.²⁸

The pattern of vigorous political activity and frequent public speeches when in Rome continued into Caesar's praetorship in 62 BC and, after his propraetorship in Spain (61-60 BC), during his consulship of 59 BC. Testimonies, but no fragments, show how Caesar in 62 BC carried on promoting himself against conservative senators such as Catulus, and in support of popular figures such as Pompey, presumably attempting to ingratiate himself with the people.²⁹ The famous story, that at the trial of Clodius for sacrilege at the Bona Dea rituals he explained his divorce stating that his wife should be above suspicion, is doubtful in its entirety, but it is just possible that he uttered these words at some point before the trial; if so, it was the perfect sound bite for the historians to include in their narratives.³⁰ The testimonies of his consular speeches relate to proposals of agrarian laws, and his use of the *contio* to promote his political aims. Caesar also tried to stir up the people against his consular colleague Bibulus, and used a *contio* to allow Vettius to address the people on the controversial issue of an alleged plot on Pompey's life – as ever conscious of the possibilities

²³ Sal. *Cat.* 51.

²⁴ Clerks: Cic. *Sull.* 41-4; Plut. *Cat. Min.* 23.3.

²⁵ For the question of revision see Dyck (2008) 10-12. For political reasons, Cicero might have circulated a first version of his speeches shortly after delivery, and certainly also a revised version in 60 BC (Cic. *Att.* 2.3.1, SB 23); cf. Steel (2005) 50-4 and van der Blom (2010) 184, n. 39 for discussion and references to further scholarship.

²⁶ Cic. *Cat.* 4.7-10 with Pelling 2011: 164-9.

²⁷ Cic. *Cat.* 4.9; 4.11.

²⁸ Cf. Ramsey 2007.

²⁹ Against Catulus: Suet. *Iul.* 15; Dio 37.44. 1; Cic. *Att.* 2.24.3 (SB 44). Support of Pompey: Plut. *Cat. Min.* 26-29; Plut. *Cic.* 23.4; Dio 37.43.1-3; Cic. *Sest.* 62; Schol. Bob. 134S; Suet. *Iul.* 16, 55.3.

³⁰ Plut. *Caes.* 10.8-9 with Pelling 2011 *ad loc.*; Cic. 29.9; Suet. *Iul.* 74.2; Dio 37.45.2.

the *contio* offered for testing and manipulating the temperature of public opinion.³¹ While we have abundant evidence about Caesar's consulship in general, the evidence of his consular speeches is meager. Considering his circulations of earlier speeches, it is noteworthy that we have no trace of circulation of speeches from this eventful year. His speeches in the senate will have been recorded by clerks, following his own consular rule for publicizing senatorial proceedings.³² Caesar may have judged it superfluous to duplicate these no longer extant proceedings with his own circulation. However, the circulation of his three speeches against the praetors of 58 BC, C. Memmius and L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, who had raised questions in the senate about the legitimacy of Caesar's consular legislation, suggests that Caesar thought the situation important enough to necessitate circulating his version in public.³³ These are the last speeches we know Caesar held in Rome before his return from Gaul to the city in 49 BC. We have little information about the speeches he delivered as dictator and consul during the 40s BC.³⁴

DELIVERY AND STYLE

The few fragments and the testimonia to specific orations by Caesar allow us glimpses into his delivery and style. His elegant language is clear from his funeral speech in honor of Julia (Suet. *Iul.* 6.1; in brackets are given the *clausulae*, the last rhythm heard at each pause):

Amitae meae Iuliae (– ∪ – – ∪ – double cretic), maternum genus ab regibus ortum (– ∪ ∪ – ∪ heroic clausula), paternum cum diis immortalibus coniunctum est (– – – – double spondee). Nam ab Anco Marcio sunt Marcii reges (– ∪ – – – cretic and spondee), quo nomine fuit mater (∪ ∪ ∪ – – ∪ fourth paeon and trochee); a Venere Iulii (– ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ – first paeon and cretic), cuius gentis familia est nostra (∪ ∪ ∪ – – ∪ fourth paeon and trochee). Est ergo in genere et sanctitas regum (– ∪ – – ∪ cretic and trochee), qui plurimum inter homines pollent (∪ ∪ ∪ – – – fourth paeon and spondee), et caerimonia deorum (– ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ first paeon and trochee), quorum ipsi in potestate sunt reges (– ∪ – – – cretic and spondee).

My aunt Julia's maternal family is descended from kings, her paternal family is related to immortal gods. For the Marcii Reges are descended from Ancus Marcius, and her mother was of that name. The Iulii, to which our branch belongs, are descendants of Venus. Thus, our family can claim both the sanctity of kings, who are the most powerful among men, and the reverence due to gods, who have even kings in their power.

The fragment is in Caesar's own voice, underlining his close relationship with Julia and thus his own kingly and godly descent. The style is straightforward and factual, yet solemn through its rhythm and vocabulary. The heroic clausula (*ab regibus ortum*) echoes the epic rhythm and underlines the regal lineage of Caesar, while the other clausulae are rhythms favored in oratory as pleasing to the ear. The vocabulary is carefully chosen; for example, *sanctitas* and *caerimonia* evoke the ceremonial and divine element. Here we see Caesar as the fully-fledged orator. The rhythm, tone, word order and vocabulary are tailored to the

³¹ Agrarian laws: Plut. *Cat. min.* 33; *Pomp.* 47.4; Dio 38.4-6; App. *B Civ.* 2.10-12; Cic. *Att.* 2.16.1 (SB 36). Against Bibulus: Cic. *Att.* 2.21.5 (SB 41). Vettius in the *contio*: Cic. *Att.* 2.24.3 (SB 44).

³² Suet. *Iul.* 20.1. Willems 1885: 2.206; White 1997.

³³ Schol. Bob. in Cic. *Sest.* 40 (Stangl 130, 9); Schol. Bob. in Cic. *Vat.* 15 (Stangl 146, 19).

³⁴ Most importantly the 'quirites' speech: App. 2.93-4; Dio Cass. 42.53-5; Suet. *Iul.* 70; Tac. *Ann.* 1.42.3; Plut. *Caes.* 55.1 with Chrissanthos 2001: 63, n. 7; Jehne 2000: 161; Pelling 2011: 396; Hölkeskamp 2013: 13. Victory speech: Plut. *Caes.* 55.1 with Pelling 2011: 409-10. He will also have delivered speeches in the senate and to his soldiers, cf. *Caes. BC* 1.7, 3.6, 3.53.5, 3.73-4, 3.90, but some of these speeches may be literary inventions.

genre and situation; the style is generally different from that of the speeches in his *commentarii*.³⁵

The fragment and the paraphrase from his prosecution of Dolabella suggest some skill in discovering arguments (*inventio*) and use of appeal to the good old days: “Gaius Caesar too, a great authority on the Latin language, says (...) in the *First Action against Dolabella*, Book I: ‘the men of old in whose temples and shrines works of art were a source of both honor and beauty.’ (‘Isti, quorum in aedibus fanisque posita et honori erant et ornatu.’) Also, in his books on analogy he decides that *i* should be omitted in all such forms.”³⁶ While Gellius focuses on word forms preferred by Caesar who was by then known as a great Latin linguist, note how Caesar refers to a custom of the past with the implied notion of the past being preferable to the present situation, presumably the one instigated by Dolabella’s behavior in his province. This was by no means an original type of argument, as Cato the Elder’s and Cicero’s speeches were full of reminiscences of the past, and indeed Caesar may also later have used such an argument in the Catilinarian debate, but it does give us an impression of the kinds of arguments Caesar used in his early orations.³⁷

Valerius Maximus’ paraphrase of another bit of the same speech is telling as well: “The divine Julius too, the most perfect jewel of celestial divinity and of human talent, expressed the power of eloquence appropriately when he said in his speech against Cn. Dolabella, whom he prosecuted, that his best case was being twisted away from him by L. [Cn.] Cotta’s advocacy (extorqueri sibi causam optimam L. [Cn.] Cottae patrocinio). In this way the greatest eloquence regretted the power of eloquence.”³⁸ Caesar tried to use his junior status as an advantage, suggesting that although he had the best case in objective terms, the opposing advocate, Cotta, tried to use his superior position and experienced eloquence to destroy it. By saying it outright, Caesar tried to bank on sympathy with the talented junior person against his senior. Valerius Maximus’ evaluation is colored by Caesar’s later reputation as a great orator, but not far off the mark in recognizing Caesar’s clever and well-formulated complaint as a rhetorical tactic.

Another court speech by Caesar is known from two brief fragments, suggesting circulation at some point. Caesar’s speech in defense of the Bithynians was probably delivered in ca. 71 BC, when Caesar was military tribune, and therefore relatively early in his career.³⁹ The longer fragment runs like this:

Strong and clear testimony on this subject is provided by the authority of Gaius Caesar, the *pontifex maximus*; for in the speech which he delivered in defense of the Bithynians he began like this: “In consideration either of my guest-friendship with king Nicomedes or my relationship to those whose case is on trial, O Marcus Iuncus, I could not refuse this duty. For the memory of men ought not to be so eliminated by

³⁵ Von Albrecht 1989: 54-8 on the prose rhythm and differences from the *commentarii*, although he acknowledges that the direct speeches at Caes. BG 7.77 ([discussed by Grillo in this volume](#)) and Caes. BC 2.32 (cf. Grillo 2012: 68-9) also include clausulae.

³⁶ Gell. NA 4.16.8; cf. Deichgräber 1950: 114.

³⁷ See above on the Catilinarian debate; only Sall. BC 51.5-6 includes this argument; it may be Sallust’ invention.

³⁸ Val. Max. 8.9.3.

³⁹ Klotz 1917: 260-1; Gelzer 1968: 29; Dahlmann 1938: 343-6; Ward 1977; Fantham 2009: 146; Pelling 2011: says late 74/early 73 BC. Gellius’ remark that about Caesar as *pontifex maximus* has confused scholars as Caesar became *pontifex maximus* in 63 BC (he was a regular *pontifex* since 73 BC). Dahlmann 1938: 346 argues that the title is not meant to date the event but merely to support the claimed *auctoritas* of Caesar.

their death as not to be retained by those nearest to them, and we cannot without maximum disgrace forsake clients to whom we are obliged to help even against our own relatives.” (“Vel pro hospitio regis Nicomedis vel pro horum necessitate quorum res agitur, refugere hoc munus, M. Iunce, non potui. Nam neque hominum morte memoria deleri debet quin a proximis retineatur, neque clientes sine summa infamia deseri possunt, quibus etiam a propinquis nostris opem ferre instituimus.”)⁴⁰

Caesar uses emotional appeal to duty, justice and respect to start off his speech. This was a common way to open a speech, and here it is effective in both setting a moral tone and explaining Caesar’s decision to defend the Bithynians from a moral obligation. His use of abstract concepts such as *hospitium*, *necessitas*, *memoria*, and *infamia* together with words of obligation (*munus*, *non ... potui*, *debet*, *neque ... possunt*, *instituimus*) helps to underscore the moral point and his rightful position in the question to be settled. The rhythmical endings and careful construction of parallel and antithetical parts indicates a high style which emphasizes the moral content.⁴¹

Gellius, who was very interested in the use of *necessitas*, preserves a fragment from another of Caesar’s orations. Here again, Caesar takes up the moral obligation to act: “However, in an oration of Gaius Caesar, in support of the Plautian law, I found *necessitas* used for *necessitudo*, that is, for the bond of kinship. These are his words: ‘Indeed, it seems to me that, as our kinship (*necessitas*) demanded, I have failed neither in labor, in pains, nor in industry.’ (‘Equidem mihi videor pro nostra necessitate non labore, non opera, non industria defuisse.’)⁴² In this short passage, Caesar uses tricolon, anaphor and auxesis as well as clausula (the final clause ending in a cretic and double trochee: – ∪ – – ∪ – ∪) to create a rhythmical and stylistically powerful foundation for his content. This belongs to the speech which Caesar delivered in support of the Plautian law to restore citizen rights to the surviving participants of Lepidus’ revolt. Caesar evidently reused a theme from his court speech for the Bithynians (if the dating is to be trusted) in this his first *contio* speech, where emotional appeal would be the strongest argument in favor of the bill. The overlap in language and moral tone (and possibly delivery too) from his forensic speech defending the Bithynians to his contional speech is striking and underlines the fact that although Caesar’s style could be plain and straightforward (as in his *commentarii*) it could equally well be fuller and more expressive (as also in his funeral speech for Julia).

The only negative review of Caesar’s oratory is Tacitus’ remark that his speech for Decius the Samnite was characterized by slowness (*lentitudo*) and lukewarm flatness (*tepor*).⁴³ This goes against the other testimonia, indeed against Augustus’ remark that Caesar’s rapid delivery made it difficult for shorthand writers to note down his speech for Quintus Metellus.⁴⁴ Caesar could evidently alter his style and delivery as he wished, and Tacitus also acknowledges that Caesar ranked among the best orators of his day.⁴⁵ This is confirmed by Cicero’s eleven chapters on Caesar’s style in the *Brutus*.⁴⁶ Cicero and his interlocutors focus on Caesar’s pure Latin vocabulary and style and discuss Caesar’s diligent study of the Latin language, his opinion that the foundation of oratory is a pure Latin diction, and his literary

⁴⁰ Gell. NA 5.13.6; the other fragment is in *Iul. rufin. RhL* p. 40, 23, and it is very brief.

⁴¹ Deichgräber 1950: 114-15.

⁴² Gell. NA 13.3.5; cf. Deichgräber 1950: 115-16.

⁴³ Tac. *Dial.* 21.6.

⁴⁴ Suet. *Iul.* 55.3.

⁴⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 25.3.

⁴⁶ Cic. *Brut.* 252-62.

works, including the *commentarii*. Caesar's delivery is also praised, but by contrast to Cicero's descriptions of other orators in the *Brutus*, nothing is said about Caesar's choice of content or the effect of his oratory on his audience.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Caesar delivered orations in all the common contexts of his time: court, senate, funeral, popular and military assemblies (the latter 'reported' in his *commentarii* and by later authors such as Dio, Appian, Lucan, Plutarch, and Tacitus). The sample is, however, too small to allow any conclusions about distinctions in style, content, delivery and success between these occasions or the styles associated with them: forensic (court speech), deliberative (political speech), laudatory (epideictic), and invective. However, the survival itself of a significant number of fragments and, especially, testimonia about Caesar's orations suggests both his own efforts to circulate some of his speeches and the more general interest in the speeches of a famous politician and adoptive father of the first *princeps*, reputed for his oratorical talents and skill. Not just Caesar himself, but others too – not least Augustus – had an interest in preserving an image of him as a great orator. Caesar's orations are striking for their moral content, careful style, and for what he made of them. Even when unpersuasive to his immediate audience, for example in his early unsuccessful prosecution speeches or his speech in the Catilinarian debate, he managed to accrue attention to himself as a brilliant orator and a politician working in the interest of the people.⁴⁷ At all times, Caesar made the most of the oratorical occasions presented to him, as he did with political opportunities too, and used them to promote his public profile and thereby his political career.

⁴⁷ For Caesar as a friend of the Roman people in his *commentarii*, see Krebs, "Propaganda inside and outside the *commentarii*" in this volume.

Further Reading

Most of the fragments and testimonies to Caesar's orations are collected in Malcovati (1976). General discussions of Caesar's oratory, especially his style are found in Norden (1898) 209-12, Klotz (1917) 186-275, Deichgräber (1950), Eden (1962), Leeman (1963) 156-9 and (2001), Kennedy (1972) 283-92, von Albrecht (1989) 54-8, Fantham (2009) 145-8. For Caesar's *vis*, see also Kraus (2005) 108. For the relationship between Caesar's orations and the "speeches" in his narrative works, see Eden (1962), Rasmussen (1963), Miller (1975) 49-50, Hall (1998), Riggsby (2006) 142, Grillo (2012). For Cicero's evaluation of Caesar's oratory, see Leeman (1963) 157-8, (2001), Gotoff (1993) xxvi-xxvii, Dugan (2005) 177-89, Lowrie (2008) 131-154. For speeches to his soldiers, see van Stekelenburg (1976) and Chrissanthos (2001).

Further Research

The fact that all speech genres are represented in the extant fragments and testimonia to Caesar's speeches may reflect a collection of speeches, circulated by Caesar or somebody else (Augustus?); this excellent suggestion of Tony Corbeill deserves more thought than space in this chapter allowed. My monograph *Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) goes into more detail about Caesar's speeches and the ways in which Caesar used speeches to promote his public career.

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