

How Verbs Make the Man:
A Reading of Caesar, *Gallic War*
and *Civil War* and .

Timothy Joseph
College of the Holy Cross

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Caesar is back. To say that the most renowned, influential, and indeed infamous figure from ancient Rome ever faded from public view would be incorrect. But Caesar the writer is, to be sure, undergoing a twenty-first-century comeback, with a revival of interest in recent years in his works the *Gallic War*, which covers his imperialist exploits in Gaul in the years 58–51 bce, and the *Civil War*, which covers the internecine conflicts of the years 49–45 bce. New texts and translations have recently appeared or are on the way, and several scholarly works from this century put their

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See the new Oxford Classical Text of the *Gallic War* by Damon (2016), as well as the Loeb translation of the *Gallic War* by Damon (2016); the translation of the *Gallic War* and the *Alexandrian War*, the *African War*, and the *Panish War* (each of which was written by other authors) by Carter (2016); and the translation of the complete Caesarian oeuvre by Raab (2016).

focus more on Caesar the *auctor* than Caesar the *actor*. Moreover, in one of his latest posthumous triumphs, in 44 BC – Caesar marched his way onto the Advanced Placement Latin reading list — selections from the *allii* *ar* now stand on the AP syllabus alongside selections from Virgil's

of selectiveness in his lost work *De analogia*. "In the first book [Caesar] said that the choice of words is the starting-place of eloquence" (*in primo libro dixit verborum dilectum originem esse eloquentiae*). In a more recent discussion of Caesar's choice of verbs in particular, William Batstone and Cynthia Damon write, "As one might expect, verbs in Caesar are typically practical rather than colorful. They represent war's *res gestae*." But they go on to note, when looking at a passage

(1) *Caesari cum id nuntiatum esset, eos per provinciam nostram iter facere conari, maturat ab urbe pro cisci et quam maximis potest itineribus in Galliam ulteriorem contendit et ad Genavam peruenit.* (2) *Provinciae toti quam maximum potest militum numerum imperat (erat omnino in Gallia ulteriore legio una), pontem qui erat ad Genavam iubet rescindi.* BG1.7.1-2

(1) "When it had been announced to Caesar that they [the Helvetii] were trying to conduct a march through our province [Transalpine Gaul], he hastens to set out from the city and, in the longest marches that were possible, he strides into further Gaul and arrives in Geneva. (2) From the entire province he orders as many troops as possible (in all of further Gaul

cum clause to the present verbs *maturat*, *contendit* and *peruenit* makes us feel the present-ness and vibrancy of Caesar's actions all the more strongly. Perhaps Caesar's most important verb choice in this sentence is his first one, which is, let us recall, the first verb he uses of himself in the *allic ar. maturat. aturo* means, primarily, "to ripen, bring to maturity" () and thus "to perform or finish in good time, speed" (). Caesar's movement is not simply swift; it is well timed, appropriately timed action.

If the first sentence in . presents Caesar as a man of efficient movement and timely action, the second sentence establishes him as a man of authority, with the pair of common, straightforward verbs *imperat* and *iubet* that he uses of his levying of a draft. Moreover, Caesar makes it clear that these commands are as effective as they are straightforward: there is no further mention of the process of this draft or the destruction of the bridge to Geneva. ere need not be. What Caesar orders happens.

Caesar then continues his account – and his self-introduction – by writing:

without any wrongdoing, because they had no other route; and that they were asking to be allowed to make the march with his approval. Caesar, because he kept in his memory that the consul Lucius Cassius had been killed and his army had been beaten by the Helvetii and sent under the yoke, was thinking (parsing in his mind) that this should not be allowed. (4) And he thought (estimated) that men of hostile spirits, when given the opportunity to march through the province, would not refrain from harm and wrongdoing. (5) Nevertheless, so that time could pass while the troops he had levied could gather, he responded to the legates that he would take some time to think about it (to weigh options): if they wanted anything, they could return on the Ides of April.

decision-making process. Whereas in . . . - the use of the historic present tense conveys with immediacy the efficiency of Caesar's movement, the imperfect tense in . . . - in a sense slows things down, accentuating the carefulness of Caesar's multifaceted decision-making process.

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the first passage from the *ivii ar* that we will consider, .

Caesar gives the clear impression that the dictatorship was held only to achieve necessary business; and the gerundive *per ciendis*, which agrees with all that pre-

the Lentulus whom Caesar crafts in this passage is no man of action, but one of words, promises (*pollicetur*). And his promise to defend the republic is contingent upon *others'* willingness to speak boldly and strongly against Caesar. If they do not, his promise is that he will seize a plan for himself (*sibi consilium capturum*) and show no temperance or moderation (*obtemperatum*) with the senate. I have printed the text from the most recent critical edition of the *Civil Wars*, edited by Cynthia Da

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