TWO CAESARIAN BATTLE-DESCRIPTIONS: A STUDY IN CONTRAST

In 57 BCE, on the banks of the river Sabis, commonly but on insufficient evidence identified as the Sambre,[1] Caesar came under surprise attack by the massed forces of the Belgic Nervii and their allies while in the midst of building camp. There ensued a desperate struggle in which superior Roman discipline eventually prevailed over the numerical superiority and ferocious courage of the enemy. Nine years later, at Pharsalus, the armies of Caesar and Pompey clashed on the plain of Thessaly, where Caesar's foresight in preparing a fourth line of infantry to counter the enemy's superior cavalry opened the way to the rout of the Pompeian forces. Two wars, two battles—and two narrative styles. The subject of this study is a comparison between Caesar's battle-descriptions of the Sabis and Pharsalus. Looking beyond their purely military differences, it seeks to identify the features that set them apart as narratives of foreign versus civil war.

From the time of Sulla, who fought at one time or another against foreigners, allies, and fellow-citizens, the contrast between external and internal war seared itself ever more deeply into the Roman consciousness. Foreign wars were traditionally regarded as at least justified and even beneficial, but civil war rent asunder state, class, and family. While the lure of political supremacy proved irresistible, it could be attained only at the expense of ineradicable opprobrium—for what glory was to be won from killing fellow-citizens? The intrinsic differences between foreign and civil

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[1] See W. Görler, "Caesar als Erzähler (am Beispiel von *BG* II.15-27)," *Der Altsprachliche Unterricht* 23 (1980) 26 n. 10; C. B. R. Pelling, "Caesar's Battle-Descriptions and the Defeat of Ariovistus," *Latomus* 40 (1981) 747-49 with works cited in n. 17; Pelling follows those who think the Sabis most probably to be the Selle.

war are reflected in literary depictions of and attitudes to warfare. Horace, for example, memorably condemns the wickedness and self-destructiveness of civil war as opposed to the glorious ideal of righteous imperialism (*Epodes* 7). But potentially the richest source for examining attitudes to each kind of war is Caesar's *Commentaries*, which offer the unique opportunity to study firsthand accounts of foreign and civil war by a single author and participant.

Caesar's style is lucid, economical, and correct, and this, together with his precise descriptions of peoples, places, and tactics, lends to his works an air of scientific exactitude. His use of the third person, "detaching the protagonist from the emotionality of the *ego* and setting him in the drama of history as an independent character,"[2] enhances this impression. But objective style is not synonymous with objective judgment but is itself a form of rhetoric—in Caesar's case, the rhetoric of the *tenue* (or *subtile*) *genus*, a manner suited to the task of validation (Cic. *Orat.* 69). Like any writer, Caesar selects, omits, organizes, shades, and enhances material to suit his own purposes.[3] The *Commentaries* are not the scholarly reconstruction of a disinterested third party but literary creations that impose the author's interpretation upon the events in which he participated in order to elevate his contemporary standing and the verdict of posterity. That Caesar tailors the narrative to promote his desired image can be demonstrated at every turn, especially with reference to diplomatic and political events.[4] My own interest lies chiefly in the battle-descriptions and the possibility of significant differences therein between the *Gallic War* and *Civil War*, a subject largely unexplored. In comparing Caesar's descriptions of the battles of the Sabis and Pharsalus I ask not only, "Are they tendentious and, if so, how?" but, "In what ways does the

[2] G. B. Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* [tr. J. B. Solodow] (Baltimore 1994) 227.

[3] Cf. Görler (above, n. 1) 19-22, who rightly insists, however, that subjectivity is not equivalent to falsification. Though slanted, the *Commentaries* may be factually accurate.

[4] On the *Tendenz* and credibility of the *Commentaries* the most ambitious—and extreme—study is that of M. Rambaud, *L'Art de la Déformation Historique dans les Commentaires de César*[2] (Paris 1966). Cf. J. H. Collins, "Caesar as Political Propagandist," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 1.1 (Berlin 1972) 922-66; F.-H. Mutschler, *Erzählstil und Propaganda in Caesars Kommentarien* (Heidelberg 1975) esp. 147-242; H. Gesche, *Caesar* (Darmstadt 1976) 70-78, 122-26, 257-58; W. Richter, *Caesar als Darsteller seiner Taten* (Heidelberg 1977) 96-101; W. Will, *Julius Caesar: Eine Bilanz* (Stuttgart 1992) 80-87.

tendentiousness peculiar to each narrative reflect the contrasting subjects of foreign and civil war?"

Why these two battles? They have no special claim to be considered together except that they show a greater than usual degree of artistic elaboration and illustrate well the kinds of narrative difference I think to be typical of the two works.[5] Of course, basic differences in the military and political circumstances of each battle go a long way towards accounting for the different character of their descriptions. The battle of the Sabis marked a stage in the prosecution of a legitimate campaign against a belligerent foreign foe—or, at least, could be plausibly represented as such. Its chaotic action was a consequence of the surprise achieved by the Nervii in their swift attack from the cover of the woods. Pharsalus presents an antithesis: a set-piece battle fought on open and level ground against a foe similarly trained and equipped, and embodying the legal government. On the one hand, an improvised struggle against "barbarians" in unfamiliar terrain far from Roman civilization. On the other, a sought-out tactical contest between fellow citizens within the bounds of a Roman province. These are significant differences which any narrative would be bound to reflect. But above and beyond the historical circumstances there exists, I suggest, a narrative contrast that is due to the differing conventions, opportunities, and constraints that influenced Caesar as a narrator of foreign as opposed to civil war.

Both descriptions are, in a sense, exercises in self-justification. Not that Caesar felt a strong need to justify his campaign against the Belgae or the Nervii in particular. He had only to learn that the Belgae were "conspiring" against the Romans (*BG* 2.1.1-2) to feel justified in launching a pre-emptive strike. As for the Nervii, their refusal to submit peaceably automatically exposed them to invasion. On the other hand, Caesar needed to explain how it was that he had been caught off-guard at a vulnerable moment and almost suffered a catastrophic defeat. Pharsalus was not so close-run and Caesar was proud of the tactical mastery he had shown. He felt, however, a need yet more pressing—the need to justify the war itself and *a fortiori* the outcome of its climactic battle. Military considerations are eclipsed by political ones and the battle becomes a microcosm of the struggle between the two causes. The justice of the Roman cause at the Sabis is taken to be self-evident—or rather

[5] A brief comparison is made by F. E. Adcock, *Caesar As Man of Letters* (Cambridge 1956) 70.

the whole notion of "cause" is inapplicable. To the extent that the individual battle is symbolic, like Pharsalus, of a general opposition, it is one between two nations rather than causes. Roman courage and skill prevail over Gallic, to the greater glory of Caesar and Rome. Glory in the context of Pharsalus is a problematic concept, for the idea of glory is indissolubly linked to triumph over a foreign foe. Thapsus could be represented, at a stretch, as a victory over King Juba and included in Caesar's quadruple triumph—a precedent for Octavian's triumph over Cleopatra—but no such comfortable adjustment of the facts was possible in the case of Pharsalus. Hence the prominence in Caesar's account of the theme of moral worthiness, replacing the theme of physical courage that is central to the description of the Sabis.

Let us follow this up with a closer look at each description. First, then, the Sabis (*BG* 2.15-28).[6] Caesar's *Tendenz* reveals itself in his self-exculpation from the potential charges of recklessness and incompetence. He knew that the Nervii were waiting for him somewhere across the Sabis but failed to discover their presence in the woods or the imminence of their attack. As a result, there was no time to deploy the legions properly and the fighting was uncoordinated and improvised. For a while, when the Nervii drove into a gap that had opened in the middle and threatened to encircle the legions on the right wing, the outcome hung in the balance. Caesar emphasizes a number of mitigating factors in regard to his reconnaissance, precautions, and leadership during the battle.[7] His tone, however, is neither defensive nor apologetic but confident and aggressive. What might otherwise be regarded as a lucky escape he presents as a heroic contest culminating in the triumph of Roman over barbarian. So skillfully does he slant his version of the battle that he succeeds not merely in rescuing but enhancing his reputa-

[6] On Caesar's narrative see Adcock (above, n. 5) 69-70; Rambaud (above, n. 4) 165-67, 209-11; G. Pascucci, "I mezzi espressivi e stilistici di Cesare nel processo di deformazione storica dei *Commentari*. La battaglia contro i Nervi (Cesare, *B.G.*, II.15-28)," *Studi Classici e Orientali* 6 (1957) 134-74; D. Rasmussen, *Caesars Commentarii: Stil und Stilwandel am Beispiel der direkten Rede* (Göttingen 1963) 57-62, with works cited at 179 n. 1; H. P. Kohns, "Der Verlauf der Nervierschlacht. Zu Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* II.15-27," *Gymnasium* 76 (1969) 1-17; H. A. Gärtner, *Beobachtungen zu Bauelementen in der antiken Historiographie besonders bei Livius und Caesar* (Wiesbaden 1975) 106-112; Görler (above, n. 1) 22-31; F. Maier, "Die Nervierschlacht als Gestaltungsobject. Ein Beitrag zu Caesars Erzählstrategie im *Bellum Gallicum*," in *Antike Texte in Forschung und Schule: Festschrift für Willibald Heilmann*, ed. C. Neumeister (Frankfurt am Main 1993) 173-80.

[7] Cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 166-67.

tion, by turning to his advantage the very chaos of the battle for which he arguably bore the ultimate responsibility. The more stunning the surprise and the more critical the danger, so much greater the credit for surmounting them; perhaps Caesar even exaggerated both.[8]

Essential to the heroic character of the narrative are, first, the depiction of the Nervii and the Romans as distinct and contrasting entities, and, second, the transcendent importance assigned to the theme of courage. Foreign wars involved more often than not an intrusion into the geographically and culturally unknown, with all the risk, unpredictability, and fear that this entailed. The confrontation with the unknown imprints itself onto the narration of foreign war in the form of ethnological excursuses and asides that take the measure of the differences and similarities between the Romans and their foes. (The main examples in the *Gallic War* are the digressions on the Suebi [4.1-3], Britain [5.12-14], and the Gauls and Germans [6.11-28], but there are many smaller observations scattered throughout the work.) Ethnological details serve not only to satisfy the reader's curiosity but to establish the enemy as a dangerous threat by virtue of the cultural differences that render them incompatible with and hostile to Rome—differences too wide to be bridged by diplomacy. A trial of strength is the only definitive conclusion. The clash between two armies of contrasting culture, composition, and tactics, impelled by the competing passions for freedom and domination, lends itself to a heroic literary interpretation, than which there is no better example in the *Gallic War* than the struggle with the Nervii.

The interrelationship of the themes of cultural difference and *virtus* is clear from the beginning, where Caesar reports what he was able to learn about the nature and customs of the Nervii (2.15.3-5):

Eorum finis Nervii attingebant: quorum de natura moribusque Caesar cum quaereret, sic reperiebat: nullum aditum esse ad eos mercatoribus; nihil pati vini reliquarumque rerum ad luxuriam pertinentium inferri, quod eis rebus relanguescere animos eorum et remitti *virtutem* existimarent: esse homines feros magnaeque *virtutis*; increpitare atque incusare reliquos Belgas, qui se

[8] For the view that the battle was not nearly so dangerous as Caesar represents it, see Kohns (above, n. 6). He and those at the opposite extreme who castigate Caesar's performance are criticized by Görler (above, n. 1) 24-26, who argues persuasively that Caesar's account is informed by two contradictory tendencies: a desire, on the one hand, to obviate criticism of his generalship and, on the other, to make the narrative dramatic and suspenseful.

populo Romano dedidissent patriamque *virtutem* proiecissent; confirmare sese neque legatos missuros neque ullam condicionem pacis accepturos.

No casual assortment of data this, but a coherent explanation of what makes the Nervii such a formidable foe, anticipating their brave performance in the coming battle.[9] Foremost amongst the things Caesar reckons worthy of record is their exclusion of traders and wine and other luxuries considered injurious to their martial spirit. The Nervii, then, excel in *virtus* because of their resistance to external influences. The thrust of this is identical to the opening paragraph of the *Gallic War* where Caesar asserts that the Belgae are the bravest of the Gauls because they live farthest from the civilization of the Roman Province (and closest to the Germans) and are least infiltrated by traders and imports (1.1.3; cf. 4.2.1, 6, on the Suebi). Belgic courage depends upon the preservation of native spirit from the corrupting effects of Roman civilization. As such it differs in basis from Roman courage—wine and other benefits of civilization had not sapped the spirit of Caesar's Italian legions—and in its primitive quality, which Caesar signals with the adjective "fierce" (2.15.5, *esse homines feros magnaeque virtutis*; cf. 4.8, *totidem Nervios, qui maxime feri inter ipsos habeantur longissimeque absint*).[10] The theme of *virtus* is underscored finally by the statement that the Nervii accused the other Belgae—who according to Caesar, it will be remembered, are the bravest of the Gauls—of betraying their ancestral valor in making peace with the Romans (15.5). Just as the Belgae stand out from the other Gauls, so do the Nervii from the Belgae.[11] Their refusal to send ambassadors to Caesar and to countenance any condition of peace is a further illustration of their impermeability to the influences of Roman civi-

[9] Cf. A. Klotz, "Geographie und Ethnographie in Caesars *Bellum Gallicum*," *Rheinisches Museum* 83 (1934) 74; Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 85-87; Görler (above, n. 1) 23; Maier (above, n. 6) 174. On Caesar's tribute to the courage of the Belgae, and the Nervii in particular, see D. E. Koutroubas, *Die Darstellung der Gegner in Caesars 'Bellum Gallicum'* (Diss. Heidelberg 1972) 139-43.

[10] Caesar elsewhere reserves *ferus* for the Germans (1.31.5; 1.33.4; 1.47.3; 4.10.4), thrice in connection with *barbarus*. It is relevant that he had been told that most of the Belgae were of German extraction (2.4.1).

[11] Cf. Koutroubas (above, n. 9) 148, noting that the Nervii are an exception to the general rule of barbarian *inconstantia*. In 2.4.5, Caesar states the Bellovaci to be "the strongest among them [the Belgae] in courage, influence, and population" (*plurimum inter eos Bellovacos et virtute et auctoritate et hominum numero valere*), but qualifies this with the observation that the Nervii were "considered especially fierce among [the Belgae] themselves" (4.8, quoted above).

lization and a symptom of the courage that their very isolation sustains.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the Nervii to emerge is their lack of cavalry (17.4), all the more remarkable in view of the Gauls' general excellence in this arm—in fact, they constituted the bulk of Caesar's horsemen. To offset their vulnerability, the Nervii maintained hedges of bent trees intermingled with brambles which might obstruct the cavalry incursions of their neighbors. (It is significant that it is their *neighbors* whom the hedges were meant to keep out—another detail which sets the Nervii apart from the other Belgae as well as the Romans.) Like their exclusion of traders and imports, the hedge contributes to Caesar's alien portrayal of the Nervii, but, together with their uncorrupted *virtus*, the Nervian reliance on infantry may well have struck a sympathetic note with the Roman reader. Caesar's Gallic cavalry plays a less than glorious role in the battle of the Sabis. Having been despatched across the river to repulse the outposts of the Nervii (19.4-5), they fail to follow them into the woods, collapse "easily" before their massed attack (19.7), and flee again when they run up against their advance upon the Roman camp (24.1). Caesar's cavalry included a detachment of Treveri, who, despite their "unique reputation for courage among the Gauls" (24.4, *inter Gallos virtutis opinio...singularis*), noted with due sarcasm, scatter on witnessing the enemy's penetration of the camp and turn tail for home where they report that the Romans have been defeated (24.5). The cavalry who remain attempt later to wipe out the disgrace of their flight by vying with the legionaries (27.2), but Caesar is much more impressed by the courage of the unmounted enemy (27.3-5). I suggest that he uses the topic of the cavalry to highlight the courage of the infantrymen on both sides. For Caesar, as for the Nervii, battle means hand-to-hand combat. This is what constitutes the proper field of *virtus*.

The interest in *virtus* that we have noted in Caesar's proem informs the battle-description itself, which opens and closes with vignettes of Nervian heroism. The opening describes the attack of the Nervii, which involved running downhill from the woods for about two hundred paces, wading through a wide, three-foot deep river, clambering over its banks, and charging uphill—an extremely difficult and risky move—against the better trained and equipped, but unprepared, Roman legions. The timing of the attack was impeccable. On the march the Romans had the ability to deploy from column to line of battle, and their camps, once built, were

almost invulnerable to attack, but in the transitional stage between the end of the march and the completion of the camp they were at their most exposed. Caesar plays down the tactical understanding and skill it took to pull off such a coup, concentrating instead on its lightning speed (19.6-8):

...subito omnibus copiis provolaverunt impetumque in nostros equites fecerunt. His facile pulsis ac proturbatis, incredibili celeritate ad flumen decucurrerunt, ut paene uno tempore et ad silvas et in flumine et iam in manibus nostris hostes viderentur. Eadem autem celeritate adverso colle ad nostra castra atque eos qui in opere occupati erant contenderunt.

The passage is all the more effective for its economy, vigor, and disavowal of the "curling-tongs" (Cic. *Brut.* 262). Language, imagery, and sentence structure convey the impression of irresistible speed and force: *subito, provolaverunt, facile pulsis ac proturbatis, incredibili celeritate, paene uno tempore, eadem celeritate.* Particularly striking is the central sentence, with its alliteration (*pulsis ac proturbatis*), hyperbole (*incredibili, paene uno tempore*), and two rising tricola—those of the whole sentence (*his...proturbatis, incredibili...decucurrerunt, ut...viderentur*) and its third element (*et ad silvas et in flumine et iam in manibus nostris*)—which bring the sentence to a surging climax. The description of the Roman response is calculated with equal care, its first word effecting a sudden shift of focus from the Nervii to Caesar himself (20.1-2):

Caesari omnia uno tempore erant agenda: vexillum proponendum, quod erat insigne cum ad arma concurri oporteret; signum tuba dandum; ab opere revocandi milites; qui paulo longius aggeris petendi causa processerant arcessendi; acies instruenda; milites cohortandi; signum dandum. Quarum rerum magnam partem temporis brevitas et successus hostium impediebat.

The lopsided opposition of Nervii-Caesar—nothing has been said of the Nervian leader—draws attention to the key role of Caesar's generalship. The crisis demands a swiftness of reaction matching the *celeritas* of the Nervii (*omnia uno tempore*, cf. *paene uno tempore*). Caesar, however, is faced with a more complex, mental as well as physical challenge, conveyed by the breathless series of gerundives listing the multitude of things he had to do "at once."[12] The enumeration of these practical tasks sets the tone for

[12] Note the juxtaposition of *omnia uno*, whose echo in 22.1, *neque ab uno omnia imperia administrari poterant*, underlines the impossibility of Caesar's task. On the accommodation of style to sense in 20.1, see Maier (above, n. 6) 175-76. The sense of urgency and pressure achieved by the accumulation,

the Roman response in general, which displays a *virtus* equal in degree and merit to that of the enemy but differing in quality. Caesar says that the crisis was alleviated by two circumstances: the knowledge and experience of his men, and, secondly, his orders to the legionary commanders not to leave the earthworks or their legions during the building of the camp (20.3-4). He makes little direct mention of his soldiers' courage beyond his exhortation to the Tenth legion to remember its former *virtus* and bravely withstand the enemy's attack (21.2-3). This is not, of course, because he rates them inferior but because the courage of the Romans manifests itself less as boldness and impetuosity than firm resolve born of training, experience, and skilled leadership. The steadfast resistance of the legions in the midst of confusion and against overwhelming odds contrasts, as we have seen, with the cowardly flight of the cavalry and orderlies. Somewhat similarly, the courage of the Nervii is thrown into sharper relief by the flight of their allies, the Atrebates and Viromandui (23.1-3).

The description reaches a peak with the imminent collapse of the Twelfth and Seventh legions on the right wing, to which Caesar had hastened after exhorting the Tenth on the left. The critical moment is weighted by a monumental sentence (25.1-2)—the longest in Caesar's works (seventeen lines in the Oxford text)—whose analysis of crumbling resistance builds up a powerful tension that is released by the *peripeteia* brought about by the intervention of Caesar. A casualty report indicates the seriousness of the crisis. All the centurions of the fourth cohort of the Twelfth legion—i.e., six of them—had been killed, he says, along with its standard-bearer, and almost all the centurions of the other cohorts had been killed or wounded. (Centurions led from the front.) Among them he singles out the first-centurion P. Sextius Baculus, "a very brave man, weakened by many serious wounds so that he could no longer hold himself up" (25.1, *in his primipilo P. Sextio Baculo, fortissimo viro, multis gravibusque vulneribus confecto, ut iam se sustinere non posset*). The spare yet muscular language paints an icon of Roman *virtus*, an Horatius-like figure who will not budge

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asyndeton, and gerundives is not unlike that in 4.24.2-3 (the landing in Britain), *erat ob has causas summa difficultas, quod naves propter magnitudinem nisi in alto constitui non poterant, militibus autem, ignotis locis, impeditis manibus, magno et gravi onere armorum oppressis, simul et de navibus desiliendum et in fluctibus consistendum et cum hostibus erat pugnandum, cum illi aut ex arido aut paulum in aquam progressi, omnibus membris expeditis, notissimis locis, audacter tela coicerent et equos insuefactos incitarent*; cf. Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 59-60.

when those around him weaken and begin to retreat. This same Sextius Baculus turns up at the climax of two other desperate contests, both involving the last-ditch defense of a beleaguered camp. In the first, Baculus and a military tribune persuade their commander that the only hope lies in a sudden breakout (3.5.1-3); the passage contains a cross-reference to the wounding of Baculus in the battle with the Nervii. In the second, Baculus, though he is ill and hasn't eaten for five days, seizes weapons from those nearest and takes his stand at the gate to prevent a breakthrough into the Roman camp. He is seriously wounded, loses consciousness, and barely escapes death, but not before putting new heart into the defenders and averting the crisis (6.38.1-4). Again there is a cross-reference to his mention in previous battles.

For Caesar Baculus epitomizes the quintessentially Roman brand of *virtus* capable of eking out victory against the odds through initiative and dogged perseverance. The description of his role in the battle of the Sabis differs, however, from the other two passages in assigning the decisive action not to Baculus—or an equivalent figure, like the *aquilifer* in 4.25.3-6—but to Caesar himself,[13] who, having observed the faltering of his men, grabs a shield from a soldier in the rear and pushes into the front line where he addresses the centurions by name, encourages the legionaries, and orders them to open up their crowded ranks.[14] His arrival, he claims, restored the hope and spirit of the soldiers, each of whom strove to excel in the sight of his commander (25.2-3):

...scuto ab novissimis uni militi detracto, quod ipse eo sine scuto venerat, in primam aciem processit centurionibusque nominatim appellatis, reliquos cohortatus milites, signa inferre et manipulos laxare iussit, quo facilius gladiis uti possent. Cuius adventu spe inlata militibus ac redintegrato animo, cum pro se quisque in conspectu imperatoris etiam in extremis suis rebus operam navare cuperet, paulum hostium impetus tardatus est.

[13] Caesar's action is mistakenly attributed to Baculus in *Caesar: The Gallic War*, tr. C. Hammond (Oxford 1996) 49.

[14] A. K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War, 100 BC-AD 200* (Oxford 1996) 156, 158, assumes that Caesar was on horseback, whereas N. Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi* (Berkeley 1990) 118, cites this as an example of Caesar's "striding up into the front lines." The verb *decucurrit* (21.1), the same word used of the charging Gauls (19.7), suggests that he was on foot at the start of the battle (cf. 3.2.4; 3.4.1; *BC* 1.28.3). He may have mounted to cross over to the right wing, but not necessarily; cf. 1.25.1, where he dismisses his own and his officers' horses to stiffen his men's resolve; for his similar exploit at Munda, cf. Vell. 2.55.3-4; Plut. *Caes.* 56.2; Front. *Str.* 2.8.13; Polyaen. 8.23.16.

It is no accident that the huge sentence completed by the above quotation begins with the word "Caesar," which has not been used in the nominative since he ran to exhort the Tenth legion at the outset (21.1, *Caesar...ad cohortandos milites quam in partem fors obtulit decucurrit*).[15] From its first word to its last the sentence revolves around Caesar and his actions: his arrival, his assessment of the situation, and his remedial measures (*Caesar...profectus, ubi ...vidit...et...vidit, ...processit...iussit*). Both as general and writer, he imposes control upon a complex and incipiently chaotic collection of events. As the following sentence makes clear (*cuius adventu spe inlata...hostium impetus tardatus est*), the sequence of ideas is intended to mark Caesar's intervention as the turning-point of the battle.[16] The climactic moment is Caesar's entrance into the thick of the fray, which the reader is encouraged to view not simply as prudent but heroic, an extension of the courage demonstrated by Baculus and the other killed or wounded officers, into whose shoes Caesar must step in order to avert a general collapse. In reality, Caesar must have been surrounded by bodyguards and adjutants who remain unmentioned. But it is futile to question the truthfulness of his account. The main point is that he has tailored the timing and details of the episode, true or false, to maximize its importance and present himself in a special light. What he gives us is Caesar the warrior, the Homeric hero whose personal intervention turns, or at least stems, the tide of battle.[17]

[15] The dramatic word-placement also recalls 20.1, *Caesari omnia uno tempore erant agenda*; cf. 15.1, 19.1, 26.1, all at salient points of the narrative; cf. Pascucci (above, n. 6) 156-57, 168. The battle-description begins from the viewpoint of Caesar the participant (20.1-21.4), switches to that of Caesar the omniscient narrator for the sake of a broad overview (21.5-24.5), and back again, at 25.1, to Caesar the participant, as described by Görler (above, n. 1) 30-31.

[16] For further stylistic and structural analysis cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 230; Pascucci (above, n. 6) 163-68; Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 57-59; Koutroubas (above, n. 9) 139-40; Maier (above, n. 6) 176-80. Maier draws an interesting contrast between the string of short, elliptical gerundive sentences in 20.1 and the densely compact structure of 25.1-2, the form of each being adapted to its content (hectic improvisation versus magisterial assessment and control) and the latter acting as a foil to the former.

[17] Cf. Kohns (above, n. 6) 14-15, with n. 43. The heroic coloration was improved upon in the retelling; cf. Val. Max. 3.2.19, *sed ut armorum togaeque prius, nunc etiam siderum clarum decus, divum Iulium, certissimam verae virtutis effigiem, repraesentemus, cum innumerabili multitudine et feroci impetu Nerviorum inclinari aciem suam videret, timidius pugnanti militi scutum detraxit eoque tectus acerrime proeliari coepit. Quo facto fortitudinem per totum exercitum diffudit labentemque belli fortunam divino animi ardore restituit*, where Caesar snatches the shield from a timid soldier and saves the

The telling detail about the shield informs us that he had not bothered to protect himself until now, and, by the emphasis on shield rather than weapon, stresses the power of his words and presence as opposed to his physical participation in the fighting. Other factors ultimately contribute more to the victory, as Caesar recognizes, but what lingers in the memory of the Roman resistance are these vignettes of the wounded Baculus and of Caesar's bold foray, such is their descriptive power. Their message is that the victory was due to more than luck: Roman valor, confirmed by discipline and inspired by exemplary leadership, was the essential ingredient.

Caesar's steadying of the right wing sets the stage for the arrival of the last two legions and the return of the Tenth (26.3-5), which effects so complete a transformation that the wounded reenter the battle leaning on their shields (another heroic touch), the unarmed orderlies pitch in, and the cavalry compete in bravery with the legionary soldiers (27.1-2). But it is not with an image of Roman but of *Nervian* courage that Caesar leaves us (27.3-5):

> At hostes, etiam in extrema spe salutis, tantam *virtutem* praestiterunt ut, cum primi eorum cecidissent, proximi iacentibus insisterent atque ex eorum corporibus pugnarent; his deiectis et coacervatis cadaveribus, qui superessent, ut ex tumulo, tela in nostros coicerent et pila intercepta remitterent: ut non nequiquam tantae *virtutis* homines iudicari deberet ausos esse transire latissimum flumen, ascendere altissimas ripas, subire iniquissimum locum; quae facilia ex difficillimis animi magnitudo redegerat.

The passage rises to heights of almost poetic beauty, not through emotive or flowery language but the clear and simple unfolding of ideas powerful in themselves and culminating in a tricolon intensified by an unusual run of three superlatives.[18] Fighting atop a pile of their comrades' corpses, *ut ex tumulo*, the Nervii present a ghastly caricature of the stereotypical "last stand." We are re-

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day by joining in the fighting, not just encouraging the troops; Flor. 1.45.4, *hic cum multa Romanorum militum insignia, tum illud egregium ipsius ducis, quod, nutante in fugam exercitu, rapto fugientis e manu scuto in primam volitans aciem manu proelium restituit*; Plut. *Caes.* 20.5; Oros. 6.7.16; also Suet. *Jul.* 62, *inclinatam aciem solus saepe restituit*. For other places where Caesar dramatizes his personal intervention, cf. *BG* 4.34; 7.86-88; *BC* 3.69; similarly, Cotta at *BG* 5.33, 35; cf. Rosenstein (above, n. 14) 118-20; Goldsworthy (above, n. 14) 154-56, 163-65, 169-70.

[18] Cf. Pascucci (above, n. 6) 170-74; Koutroubas (above, n. 9) 141-42, who detects a veritable arsenal of rhetorical figures including asyndeton, accumulation, climax, homoioteleuton, alliteration, antithesis, and personification.

called from this grisly scene, however, to the memory of their magnificent charge across the Sabis, which begins and rounds off the battle-description through the technique of ring-composition.[19] The word play of the final clause (*facilia ex difficillimis*), reinforced with a fourth superlative, captures their *virtus* in epigrammatic fashion, while *animi magnitudo* evokes the heroic epithet *magnanimus* (μεγάθυμος). The phrase connotes for Caesar an overbold, even reckless, type of bravery—but splendid nonetheless.[20]

Following this moving tribute, the next sentence comes as a shock. "When the battle was over," says Caesar, "the tribe and name of the Nervii had been almost wiped out" (28.1, *hoc proelio facto et prope ad internecionem gente ac nomine Nerviorum redacto*). Envoys of the Nervii claim that they have been reduced from 600 to three "senators," and from 60,000 soldiers to scarcely 500. Undoubtedly the figures are exaggerated[21] but equally without doubt a terrible slaughter had occurred, of which the human cost may seem to be slighted by Caesar's callous, even self-congratulatory, report. This is probably an unbalanced reaction. For, while it would be equally mistaken to interpret Caesar's attitude as in the least bit sentimental, the point of the casualty report is not only to reveal the extent of his victory—and,

[19] From a broader perspective, the narrative also displays ring-composition in the relation of 27.3-5 to 15.3-5; cf. Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 86. The proem gives an abstract analysis of Nervian *virtus* that finds its ultimate, concrete expression in the picture of their last stand.

[20] He applies it elsewhere to his own troops, to soften his criticism of their unauthorized attack on Gergovia (*BG* 7.52.3, 4), and to Curio (*BC* 2.38.2); the continuators of Caesar are somewhat less discriminating (2 uses in *B. Afr.*, 4 in *B. Alex.*). The restraint of Caesar's usage allows the expression its proper weight, and in this he is followed by the other major historians. Sallust uses the phrase just once, of Caesar and Cato (*Cat.* 54.1); Livy 6 times (4 of them in reference to Scipio Africanus and one to Q. Fabius Maximus); Tacitus once (*Ann.* 13.50). Cicero, however, uses the expression liberally—27 instances in the speeches alone—and in a broader sense than Caesar, to denote that particular combination of *fortitudo, constantia,* and *clementia* which was "one of the chief qualities claimed by the Roman aristocrat:" see P. McGushin, *C. Sallustius Crispus: Bellum Catilinae* (Leiden 1977) 272; J. G. F. Powell, *Cicero: Cato Maior De Senectute* (Cambridge 1988) 173-74. "Neglect of personal considerations in a larger cause is the essence of this quality" (D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, Vol. 1 [Cambridge 1965] 380).

[21] There is a *prima facie* contradiction with the reappearance of the Nervii (and Aduatuci) as a force to be reckoned with in 54 BCE and later (5.38-52, 56, 58; 6.2-3; 7.75); see Rambaud (above, n. 4) 10, 76, 184-85; M. Gelzer, "Caesar als Historiker," in *Caesar*, ed. D. Rasmussen (Darmstadt 1980) 446; but incompatibility is denied by H. Oppermann, "Probleme und heutiger Stand der Caesarforschung," in Rasmussen *ibid.* 514-16.

incidentally, his generosity in securing the safety of the elders, women, and children who were now left defenseless—but to underscore the courage of the Nervii, who preferred to die almost to the last man than save themselves by flight.

The actual consequences of the battle, of course, are diametrically opposite for the winners and losers: for the Nervii, the loss of their independence and the flower of their manhood; for Caesar, following continued success against the Aduatuci, the unprecedented honor of a fifteen-day public thanksgiving decreed by the Senate—this is the note on which he ends Book Two (35.4). But in literary terms the result is more even, if we may use "result" to mean not just who wins and who loses but their overall showing. Both fight valiantly, both earn Caesar's accolades for their courage: two brands of courage conditioned by their different cultures. The opposition of barbarian *hostes* and civilized Romans is straightforward and clear, and sharpened by the emphasis on the distinct nature and customs of the enemy. It is also morally uncomplicated—virtually self-justifying, inasmuch as the Roman army existed precisely to subdue external foes such as these. Lacking the need for political or moral justification, the significance of the battle as a literary construct lies in the way it is fought—not simply its tactics but the behavior and attitudes of its participants. For Caesar this boils down to their comparative display of *virtus*, which, arising from their common lot as warriors, transcends cultural differences.[22] Such purity of meaning could not be attached to the battles of the civil war. Not that they were any the less notable for the courage shown by the soldiers of both sides. But to push the theme of courage into the literary foreground would seem diversionary, hollow, or condescending. Civil war battles could justify themselves neither by the foreignness of the enemy nor by glorious feats; they were about power not glory. For this reason the winner had to demonstrate more than that he had fought bravely against a worthy foe. He had to show that he had served the cause of justice. It was impossible to represent the enemy as culturally different and inappropriate to dwell upon the courage of either side. It

[22] The word *virtus* appears 72 times in *BG* (Books 1-7) as opposed to 30 in *BC*. Caesar often praises the bravery of his own soldiers, but not infrequently acknowledges that of the foe; in addition to the Nervii at the Sabis, cf. *BG* 1.26; 2.10, 11, 33; 7.25, 62. The importance which he attaches to the comparative *virtus* of the Romans and the enemy is further illustrated by passages such as 1.39-40; 2.8; 3.14; 5.34; 7.80. Rivalry in *virtus* manifests itself even between Roman and Roman, like the two centurions in 5.44.

was expedient, rather, to reveal them as misguided or unworthy in a moral sense distinct from military *virtus*. This is what Caesar does in his description of Pharsalus.[23]

The narrative may be divided conveniently into three parts: preliminaries (*BC* 3.82-87), battle (88-94), and aftermath (95-99). All parts, even the description of battle, are notably partisan. Mingling military with political considerations Caesar portrays the Pompeians as not only inferior in their grasp of military strategy and tactics but morally flawed and unworthy of rule. The first part comprises three sections that alternate between the Pompeian and Caesarian camps, their purpose being to define the differences between the leaders of each side.

As reconstructed by Caesar, presumably on the basis of first-hand reports but slanted, no doubt, and supplemented by his own imagination and craft, the Pompeian leadership suffers from a fatal case of the pride that goes before a fall.[24] He harps on this note from the beginning, where Pompey is said to have encouraged the recently arrived legions of Scipio "now that victory was theirs, to share in the booty and the rewards" (82.1, *...ut parta iam victoria praedae ac praemiorum velint esse participes*),[25] as if it remained only to put the finishing touches to the victory at Dyrrachium. When Pompey unites the two senatorial armies in a single camp, "the opinion previously held by them all was confirmed and their hopes of victory were increased" (82.2, *pristina omnium confirmatur opinio et spes victoriae augetur*). To deflect and minimize the animus of civil war, Caesar avoids criticizing the ordinary soldiers on the Pompeian side and narrows his target to their leaders. These worthies are accused of maliciously interpreting any slowness or caution on the part of Pompey as a sign of the pleasure he took in supreme command and in treating ex-consuls and ex-praetors as slaves—a witty Caesarian *reductio ad absurdum* on the theme of

[23] On Caesar's narrative see K. Barwick, *Caesars Bellum Civile: Tendenz, Abfassungszeit und Stil* (Berlin 1951) 82-85; Adcock (above, n. 5) 70; Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 119-29; G. Maurach, "Caesar-Interpretationen (*B.C.* 3.41-93)," *Gymnasium* 81 (1974) 59-63; Gärtner (above, n. 6) 131-33; Mutschler (above, n. 4) 214-25, with works cited at 215 n. 1; also the valuable commentary of J. M. Carter, *Julius Caesar: The Civil War, Book III* (Warminster 1993) 204-219. On the moralizing tendency of the *Civil War*, see Collins (above, n. 4) 942-63.

[24] Cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 227, 357

[25] Translations are from *Julius Caesar: The Civil War*, tr. J. M. Carter (Oxford 1997). For other references to the overconfidence of the Pompeians cf. 72.1, 96.1. This was Curio's flaw (2.37.1; 2.38.2) and the rebellious Gauls' (*BG* 7.76.5).

political *libertas*. Overconfidence exacerbates their ambition and greed. Caesar relates with irony how some were already competing for future priesthoods and magistracies, others for the houses and property of the Caesarians (cf. Cic. *Att.* 11.6.2, 6). Their petty motives are illustrated by specific instances that have nothing to do with the conduct of the battle of Pharsalus but everything with Caesar's larger agenda of discrediting his opponents. He mentions, first, an invidious and hotly contested debate over whether Lucilius Hirrus should be allowed to stand for the praetorship *in absentia* (an ironic echo of the controversy over Caesar's own second consulship?). Second, a quarrel between Domitius, Scipio, and Lentulus Spinther over who would inherit Caesar's position as *pontifex maximus*—a quarrel that degenerates disgracefully *ad gravissimas verborum contumelias* (83.1). Third, a pair of vindictive proposals, one aimed at punishing L. Afranius for his prosecution of the Spanish campaign, the other, all those senators who had not supported the Pompeian side; the latter, laid out in all its nasty detail as to who should be exonerated, fined, or subjected to a capital sentence, is particularly offensive. "In short," says Caesar, "all of them were concerned with either office, or monetary reward, or pursuit of their private enemies, and thought not about how they could achieve victory, but how they ought to use it" (83.4, *postremo omnes aut de honoribus suis aut de praemiis pecuniae aut de persequendis inimicitiis agebant, neque quibus rationibus superare possent sed quemadmodum uti victoria deberent cogitabant*). The reference to *inimicitiae* is a pregnant one, for Caesar had made much of the claim that it was solely the private enmity of his senatorial opponents that had brought about the civil war (cf., e.g., 1.2.8; 1.3.4; 1.4.1, 4; 1.7.1). While reinforcing this argument with evidence that, had they won, the Pompeians would have used their victory to settle private scores, Caesar also points ironically to the existence of *inimicitiae* among the Pompeians themselves, eating away at the unity and morale of their own side. The vivid and sarcastic particularities of the sketch are worthy of the finest satire.[26]

This is followed by a passage about the situation in Caesar's camp (84-85). The first items to be mentioned are the organization of the grain supply and the recovery of the troops from their ordeal at Dyrrachium. Plain language and practical action bespeak a *modus operandi* far different from that of the Pompeians—no overconfidence here, no bickering over the prizes of war, but necessary at-

[26] Cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 351; Conte (above, n. 2) 228.

tention to the needs of the soldiers on whom victory depends (84.1, *re frumentaria praeparata confirmatisque militibus et satis longo spatio temporis a Dyrrachinis proeliis intermisso...*). By deploying his army every day at a gradually decreasing distance from the Pompeians, Caesar, the psychologist, tests his men's mettle and instills fresh confidence. Farsightedly, and in order to compensate for his vast inferiority in the number of cavalry, he also trains some light-armed legionaries to fight with the cavalry, in order to give his 1,000 horsemen the confidence to stand up to the charge of Pompey's 7,000 (84.3-4; cf. 75.5). This tactic's potential is illustrated by a successful cavalry engagement, in which Caesar cannot resist pointing out that one of two Allobrogian brothers who had deserted to Pompey was killed (84.5; cf. 59-61)—a fit punishment for his treachery; deserters, like the Gallic brothers and Labienus, are treated with especial harshness in the annals of civil war.

Caesar finally succeeded in tempting Pompey to accept battle after he had given up hope of doing so and already issued orders to strike camp. Though the marching column was on the point of exiting the gates, Caesar immediately cancelled the march and prepared to fight. The words with which he ordered the sudden change of plan are reported in direct speech in order to dramatize this pivotal moment (85.4):

> Differendum est, inquit, iter in praesentia nobis et de proelio cogitandum, sicut semper depoposcimus. Animo sumus ad dimicandum parati; non facile occasionem postea reperiemus.

Remarkably, and not by chance, this is the only place in the *Commentaries* where Caesar quotes his actual words.[27] As we shall see, the technique of *oratio recta*, which is absent from the description of the Sabis and rarely used at all in the *Gallic War*, plays an important role in Caesar's account of Pharsalus, partly because his style had evolved into a more dramatic instrument, partly because direct speech lends itself so well to the revelation of character, which is central to Caesar's ulterior purpose. His words are focussed, resolute, and founded in a confidence that is justified by the soundness of his tactical and psychological preparations. They point to Caesar's decisiveness, control, and closeness to his soldiers (note the use of the first person plural)—characteristics notably absent from the Pompeian leadership.

[27] Cf. Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 120-21; Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 207.

Suspensefully postponing the battle-description itself, Caesar now returns to the Pompeian scene, in order to explain what had prompted Pompey unexpectedly to accept his offer of battle. The chronological dislocation of the Pompeian council of war helps Caesar to draw a contrast between his own careful approach to battle and that of Pompey, who turns out to be infected with his colleagues' misplaced confidence and over-influenced by their advice." On the urging of all his advisers" (86.1, *suorum omnium hortatu*), Pompey makes the bad decision to settle matters in the very way that Caesar wanted—by a pitched battle. His folly is brought out by a speech in *oratio recta* that demands comparison with the terse words of Caesar.[28] Pompey details in this his plan to win the battle by an outflanking movement of his superior cavalry. There is no reason to doubt that this accurately represents his intention or the trust he placed in it, but the words put into his mouth by Caesar are a caricature. Pompey promises the incredible (86.2, *scio me, inquit, paene incredibilem rem polliceri*), that the cavalry will rout the foe before a weapon is hurled, and "without any danger to our legions and virtually without bloodshed" (86.4, *sine periculo legionum et paene sine vulnere*), words laden with dramatic irony for the reader who knows his promise to be indeed "incredible." Even more absurdly, Pompey backs up the promise with the assurance that he has "persuaded" the cavalry to follow this course and that they have "confirmed" their willingness to do so (86.3, *persuasi equitibus nostris, idque mihi facturos confirmaverunt*), as if the outcome depended upon a verbal contract rather than action. That he has to "persuade" his own troops also raises a serious doubt about his authority: "did Pompey really not *order* (as Caesar always does), but have to *persuade* his subordinates? And moreover in the context of a battle plan?"[29]

Pompey's speech is followed by that of Labienus, a masterpiece of Caesarian misrepresentation. Caesar's Labienus is a man whose judgment is warped by hatred of his former commander—and a cold-blooded murderer to boot (71.4). He begins with a boastful exaggeration of his role in the Gallic wars—*omnibus interfui proeliis* (87.2)—whose "effect is to destroy the credibility of everything he goes on to say and emphasise the self-delusion of the Pompeian

[28] Cf. Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 121-22; Mutschler (above, n. 4) 216-19; Carter *ibid.*

[29] Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 208.

council, who believe it."[30] Labienus disparages Caesar's army as a pale remnant of the army that had conquered Gaul, filled out with sick men and Transpadane settlers, a charge that is not only distorted—and supercilious—but manifestly disproved by the outcome. Labienus ends by swearing he will not return to camp unless victory is won and urges the rest to follow, most presumptuously. They all comply, including Pompey, whose weakness as a leader receives further demonstration. This is the second time in Book Three that Labienus initiates such an oath (cf. 13.3-4). In the case of the first: "The irony is patent of having such a man, celebrated for his desertion of Caesar at the outbreak of the war, take the lead in swearing an oath of loyalty."[31] The same irony is present here, where the oath is stressed both as a symptom of overconfidence—like Pompey's "promise"—and because it is not kept by Labienus, Pompey, or any of the others, who turn out to be perjurers as well as fools. Caesar's description of the Pompeian council ends with its breaking up in a spirit of hope and joy at the prospect of certain victory, "because they thought it impossible in a matter of such importance and from a general of such experience to receive assurances that were groundless" (87.7, *quod de re tanta et a tam perito imperatore nihil frustra confirmari videbatur*). The mere fact that such-and-such is "confirmed" by a man like Labienus is tantamount in the minds of the Pompeians to its actual fulfillment. As with Pompey's "persuasion" of the cavalry and their "confirmation" of compliance, the formulation of the sentence points to a gap between words and reality that is a measure of the Pompeians' self-delusion.

With this pair of speeches—"the fanfare of pride before the cold narrative of the battle itself"[32]—Caesar concludes his account of the preliminaries, whose function in addition to setting the military scene is to develop contrasting portraits of Caesar and the Pompeian leaders: the former, cautious, foresighted, decisive, and at one with his soldiers; the latter, ambitious, vengeful, oversanguine, and disunited. Whatever military justification exists for Caesar's revelation of the Pompeians' overconfidence as being a factor in their rash decision to accept battle is outweighed by his purpose of discrediting them politically and morally and laying claim implicitly to the qualities which they lack so egregiously. It

[30] Carter *ibid.*; on Caesar's depiction of Labienus cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 345; Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 122-24.
[31] Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 155; cf. Mutschler (above, n. 4) 218.
[32] Adcock (above, n. 5) 67.

is noticeable, however, that Caesar reserves his sharpest barbs for Pompey's colleagues—directly, in the case of the senators who quarrel over the prizes of war, indirectly, and no less maliciously, in the case of Labienus, who is made to betray his character with his own mouth. Pompey seems a cut above his colleagues, one of whose unattractive characteristics is their resentment and disrespect towards their leader.[33] Although his assurance of victory shows him to be out of touch with reality, it is at least based upon a high estimation of his own troops—albeit primarily his foreign cavalry—rather than disparagement of Caesar's. He comes across as weak and naive rather than knavish, though a less honorable side emerges in the later description of his flight from battle. Caesar's restraint may, however, have more to do with literary strategy than genuine feeling. Pompey had been defeated and murdered. To attack him personally could seem tasteless and inflammatory. It was safer, and—in a self-serving way—magnanimous, to depict him as the tool of unprincipled and incompetent advisers.

We come now to the heart of the narrative (88-94). As usual, Caesar slants the description of the battle to demonstrate his superior leadership. As the key to his success, he stresses two tactical decisions: his last-minute withdrawal of several cohorts to make a fourth line of heavy infantry that could counterbalance Pompey's cavalry (89.4) and, second, his retention of the third line as a reserve (89.5). Here is a different Caesar from the warrior who plunged into the front line at the battle of the Sabis: Caesar the dispassionate mastermind, for whom Pharsalus plays out like "a game of military chess"[34]—one too whose moves have all been worked out in advance. But leaving aside his general self-presentation, let us turn to those aspects of it that are adjusted to suit the civil war context. In this respect the most interesting section is that which comprises the speeches of Caesar and the centurion Crastinus (90-91).

What is striking about Caesar's report of his own speech is its restriction to a single theme among the many that formed the staple of the battlefield oration: the theme of political and moral self-justification (90.1-2):

[33] Cf. Collins (above, n. 4) 954-55.

[34] Adcock (above, n. 5) 70, who sees in the character of the Pharsalus description an "unconscious hint of the fact that by then Caesar had become a virtuoso in the art of war, almost an impersonal directing intelligence."

in primis commemoravit testibus se militibus uti posse quanto studio pacem petisset, quae per Vatinium in colloquiis, quae per Aulum Clodium cum Scipione egisset, quibus modis ad Oricum cum Libone de mittendis legatis contendisset. Neque se umquam abuti militum sanguine neque rem publicam alterutro exercitu privare voluisse.

It is unnecessary to believe that Caesar invented this speech, or even that he did not emphasize the points mentioned, for one to suspect that he has distorted its content through the exclusion of all else. On the verge of describing a bitter and bloody battle, its intention is to raise him above the fray and confirm the account of his peace-seeking diplomacy that he himself has provided. The *Civil War* reflects and validates itself thereby.[35] The *oratio obliqua* is artfully constructed: first, a general statement on Caesar's commitment to peace whose truthfulness is guaranteed by an "objective" appeal to the witness of his soldiers, followed by a detailed summary of the failed negotiations, and lastly an emotive and patriotic restatement of his peaceful intentions, expressed as an unwillingness "to waste soldiers' blood, or deprive the state of one or other army." Caesar's *studium pacis* (90.1) incongruously translates into his soldiers' *studium pugnae*, as they clamor to commence the battle (90.3, *hac habita oratione, exposcentibus militibus et studio pugnae ardentibus tuba signum dedit*). Not plunder, then, nor power, pride, fear, or any of the usual things that fire up an army was what galvanized the soldiers of Caesar, he would have us believe, but the knowledge that their commander had done everything in his power to avoid a civil war. Thus Caesar claims the moral high ground.

We might have expected an immediate transition to the fighting itself, but a most unusual and interesting episode intervenes.[36] There was, says Caesar, a re-enlisted veteran called Crastinus, a man of great courage who had served as *primipilus* of the Tenth legion the previous year. When the signal for battle was given,

[35] On Caesar's presentation of himself as a man of peace in the *Civil War*, see Collins (above, n. 4) 957-58.

[36] On the Crastinus episode and its conclusion (99.2-3, to be discussed later) see Rambaud (above, n. 4) 207, 348; Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 124-27; Gärtner (above, n. 6) 133; Mutschler (above, n. 4) 223-25; H.-J. Glücklich, "Soldaten für Caesar? Vier Szenen aus den *Commentarii*," *Der Altsprachliche Unterricht* 33 (1990) 77-78; Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 213. Glücklich contrasts the Rome-oriented speech of the standard-bearer in *BG* 4.25.3 with the Caesar-oriented speech of Crastinus, though each speech functions similarly as a catalyst of action. Also comparable is the speech of the wounded standard-bearer at *BC* 3.64.3; cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 233-34. Like the speech of Crastinus, it emphasizes personal loyalty to Caesar.

this man briefly exhorted his fellows and, promising that he would give Caesar cause to thank him, alive or dead, ran forward from the right wing at the head of about 120 picked volunteers from among his former subordinates. I do not doubt that something of the sort really happened, but assuredly it was not so spontaneous as Caesar implies—this is obvious from the pre-selection of Crastinus' men—and it is highly probable that Caesar had been warned of his action in advance and given it his blessing. It was, in fact, a staged demonstration. But leaving that aside, I want to focus on the way in which Caesar exploits the event for its literary value.

The events leading up to the closing of battle alternate dramatically between word and action: Caesar's speech; his men's eager response and the signal for battle; Crastinus' speech; the charge of Crastinus and his company; Pompey's instructions to his men to remain in place; the charge of Caesar's men. The sequence is tied together chronologically by repeated references to the battle signal (90.3; 91.2; 93.1), and conceptually by the theme of martial enthusiasm, culminating in Caesar's observations about the "naturally inborn excitement and ardour of soul, which is fired by the desire to fight" (92.4, *quaedam animi incitatio atque alacritas naturaliter innata omnibus, quae studio pugnae incenditur*). Within this framework, the function of the Crastinus episode is to bridge the gap between Caesar's exhortation to his troops and their actual attack. It puts a human face on the eagerness to fight that is said to have greeted Caesar's oration (90.3) by placing the spotlight on a single officer and a particular group of men, who are meant to typify the loyalty and courage of the whole army. But this is not all. As an oration, and one of the few ascribed to a professional soldier in the *Commentaries*, it takes up the task of vindication where Caesar left off. Let us examine Crastinus' words (91.2), whose *oratio recta* supervenes vividly upon the *oratio obliqua* of Caesar:

Sequimini me, inquit, manipulares mei qui fuistis, et vestro imperatori quam constituistis operam date. Unum hoc proelium superest; quo confecto et ille suam dignitatem et nos nostram libertatem recuperabimus.

And then, turning to Caesar (91.3):

Faciam, inquit, hodie, imperator, ut aut vivo mihi aut mortuo gratias agas.

One is struck by the polished rhetoric: the combined chiasmus and parallelism of the first sentence (imperative, noun-adjective phrase, relative clause; adjective-noun phrase, relative clause, im-

perative); the balance of *et ille suam dignitatem et nos nostram libertatem,* and the epigrammatic flourish of the "life or death" conclusion. Whatever Crastinus, the tough centurion, really said was undoubtedly less elegant.

The content of his speech is equally suspect, summing up as it does Caesar's own two-pronged justification for crossing the Rubicon: the restoration of his personal *dignitas* and the *libertas* of the people that had been infringed upon by the senate's suppression of the tribunician veto and its passing of the *senatus consultum ultimum* in unprecedented circumstances. Upon learning of the latter in 49 BCE, Caesar relates in Book One how he had called upon his soldiers to defend his "reputation and standing" (1.7.7, *existimationem dignitatemque*), in response to which they had "shouted that they were ready to defend their general and the tribunes from harm" (1.7.8, *conclamant...sese paratos esse imperatoris sui tribunorumque plebis iniurias defendere*). The theme of *dignitas* recurs, notoriously, in Caesar's statement that "for himself his standing had always been his first consideration, more important than his life" (1.9.2, *sibi semper primam fuisse dignitatem vitaque potiorem*). That of *libertas* is developed later in Caesar's response to Lentulus Spinther (1.22.5):

> cuius orationem Caesar interpellat: se non maleficii causa ex provincia egressum, sed uti se a contumeliis inimicorum defenderet, ut tribunos plebis in ea re ex civitate expulsos in suam dignitatem restitueret, ut se et populum Romanum factione paucorum oppressum in libertatem vindicaret.

There is a resonance with Book One even in Crastinus' double use of the title *imperator,* a reminder of Caesar's great victories over the Gauls and a token of his army's loyalty (3.91.2, 3; cf. 1.7.7, *hortatur, cuius imperatoris ductu...,* 8 [above]).

By repeating *in nuce* the case Caesar himself had made to his troops at the outset of the war, the speech of Crastinus testifies to its popular acceptance and support. "That Crastinus really uttered such extraordinarily apposite words may be doubted, but the author's ring-composition can hardly be faulted: on the very brink of the climactic battle, the notions which set the whole struggle in motion, three books back, reappear."[37] Carter's reference to ring-composition makes the essential point that whether or not Crastinus spoke in such terms, Caesar's report of his speech is worked

[37] Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 213.

into the literary fabric of the *Civil War* in a way that is calculated to recall and reinforce Caesar's own political stance. It does this all the more effectively for its appearance of objectivity, with Crastinus vouching, as it were, for the truth of the terms in which Caesar had defined the issue. Once again, it is a case of the *Civil War* validating itself.

From a narrative perspective, Crastinus' speech is set up by the speech of Caesar that precedes it. We have seen that Caesar emphasizes his attempts to negotiate peace after war had broken out. This, of course, ignores the awkward fact that it was he who had begun the war and substitutes the counter-claim that the war was due entirely to the intransigence of his political opponents. Why, then, fight at all, if Caesar is such a lover of peace, so solicitous for the blood of his soldiers? Crastinus' speech provides the moral underpinning: Caesar is fighting from irreproachable motives of personal prestige and public freedom. This contrasts pointedly with the Pompeians, to whom Caesar attributes no such worthy principles. Thus Crastinus confirms and complements Caesar's noble self-portrait by overlaying his avowed disinclination to fight with positive reasons why he is nonetheless justified in fighting.

The two speeches and their enthusiastic reception are followed by the description of the Caesarians' running attack, which Pompey had ordered his men to await in a stationary position. On this score, he is criticized by Caesar for stifling his soldiers' fighting spirit. By contrast, the attack of Caesar's men evinces both natural ardor (92.4) and military experience (93.1), which allows them spontaneously to rest half-way when they notice that the Pompeians are not running to meet them—a happy blend of *ingenium* and *ars*, as it were. The sequence of speeches and actions thus conveys the superior morale and discipline of Caesar's army, which is founded upon loyalty and a belief in the rightness of his cause. Caesar avoids criticizing the Pompeian forces, whom he refers to in factional terms as *Pompeiani* rather than *hostis* or *hostes*,[38] but he implies *ex silentio* that they lack enthusiasm for the senatorial cause and that the morale of their heavy infantry is damaged at the outset by Pompey's mistake (92.2-4). The inferior spirit of the Pompeians is suggested further by the suddenness and completeness with which their resistance dissolves into panic and flight (94.2,

[38] Significantly, the odious word *hostis* is put into the mouth of Pompey (86.3). On Caesar's depiction of the Pompeian armies, cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 339-43.

universi terga verterunt; 94.5, *eam partem cui maxime confidebat perterritam animadvertit*; 95.1, *nullum spatium perterritis dari oportere existimans*; 95.4, *et animo perterriti et lassitudine confecti*), while Caesar's men, despite their physical exhaustion, are "mentally ready for any effort" (95.2, *ad omnem laborem animo parati*) and readily respond to his exhortations—Caesar stresses their cooperativeness by twice using the verb *cohortor* (95.1; 97.4) instead of *impero*—to storm the Pompeian camp, pursue those who had fled to the hills, and entrap them with earthworks. This they accomplish, "although they were exhausted from the unbroken exertions of a whole day, and night was starting to fall" (97.4, *etsi totius diei continenti labore erant confecti noxque iam suberat*).

The last citations have brought us to the third and final part of the narrative, which describes the rout of the Pompeians and its aftermath (95-99). Once more the scene shifts from the Caesarian side to the Pompeians and their thorough demoralization. It was not, however, the rank and file who were responsible for the defeat; Caesar has made it plain that this was due to the arrogant folly of their leaders and his own superior generalship. Having demonstrated the latter in the main battle-description, he seizes two final opportunities to besmirch the Pompeian elite.

The primary victim is Pompey himself, who has escaped thus far the full force of Caesar's sarcasm. His overconfidence, his tactical errors have been exposed and criticized, but not his moral character. The description of his behavior in defeat carries, however, a more critical assessment.[39] When he witnesses the failure of his battle plan, Pompey is quick to lose faith in his army and return to camp (94.5), whither, we recall, he had sworn he would not return unless victorious. This is bad enough, but Caesar now catches Pompey in an outright lie. On arriving at the camp Pompey is said to have instructed the centurions at the main gate to defend the camp while he goes round the other gates and encourages the guards. Emphasis is placed upon the scene through the use of *oratio recta*:

> Tuemini, inquit, castra et defendite diligenter, siquid durius acciderit. Ego reliquas portas circumeo et castrorum praesidia confirmo.

His succinct, soldierly words formally recall the speech of Crastinus, but his deeds, by belying them, sunder the unity of speech and action that informs the Crastinus episode.[40] Instead of patrolling

[39] Cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 357-58; Mutschler (above, n. 4) 219-21.
[40] Cf. Rasmussen 1963 (above, n. 6) 127-29.

the camp, Pompey straightaway makes for his tent in despair (94.6, *summae rei diffidens*)—an ironic reversal of his previous *fiducia*. Thus he plunges in a matter of minutes from certainty of victory to the opposite extreme, cloaking his despair with false encouragement of those who had to bear the brunt of the assault on his camp. When the Caesarians enter the camp he flees with unseemly haste for Larisa, having torn off his insignia and "flung himself" out of camp at full gallop (96.3, *equum nactus detractis insignibus imperatoriis decumana porta se ex castris eiecit protinusque equo citato Larisam contendit*). Nor does he stop there, but rides on through the night "at the same speed" to the sea, where he embarks on a grain ship. Our last view is of Pompey complaining, falsely and unfairly, of having been "all but betrayed" (96.4, *paene proditus*) by the men on whom he had counted to win victory but who had been the first to flee—as if he were not himself guilty of flight and a greater betrayal in abandoning his army.

The drama of Pompey's ignominious flight epitomizes the bankruptcy and failure of his cause. Meanwhile, the description of the conditions discovered by the Caesarians within the Pompeian camp sets that failure in a broader moral context, building upon the ground prepared earlier in the narrative (96.1):

> In castris Pompei videre licuit trichilas structas, magnum argenti pondus expositum, recentibus caespitibus tabernacula constrata, Luci etiam Lentuli et nonnullorum tabernacula protecta hedera, multaque praeterea quae nimiam luxuriem et victoriae fiduciam designarent, ut facile existimari posset nihil eos de eventu eius diei timuisse, qui non necessarias conquirerent voluptates.

The artificial bowers, silver dinnerware, and other decorations were intended for the celebrations that were to follow the expected victory—tangible proof of the overconfidence and arrogance highlighted by Caesar in his account of the preliminaries. The Pompeians' pleasure-seeking on the eve of a critical battle is symptomatic of their ill-founded certainty about its outcome but also of their poor character. To the old charge of *nimiam...victoriae fiduciam* Caesar adds that of extravagance: *nimiam luxuriem*. Such hedonism is inappropriate in a military camp and meant, no doubt, to typify the corrupt lifestyle of the *nobiles* who opposed him. It gives him all the more satisfaction to record—and exaggerate?—their self-indulgence that they had apparently levelled the same accusation against his own "wretched and long-suffering army" (96.2, *at hi miserrimo ac patientissimo exercitui Caesaris luxuriem obiciebant, cui semper omnia ad necessarium usum defu-*

issent). Not only are they are hoisted with their own petard but their decadence is set off by the austerity of Caesar's men. Caesar's indignant countercharge is sharpened by the repetition of *necessarius*, which recalls the Epicurean classification of the desires as necessary or unnecessary. Whereas the Pompeians seek out "inessential pleasures" (*non necessarias...voluptates*), the Caesarians have always lacked enough for their "essential needs" (*ad necessarium usum*). In this way he insists on the moral as well as military factors that defined the conflict and contributed to his own victory.

Caesar's emphasis on moral factors and his personalization of the battle through the naming of individuals and the use of direct speech has an obvious political purpose. His description of Pharsalus is not just, or even centrally, a military memoir but a judgment on the principles and character of Pompey and his colleagues. To impugn the worthiness of the foe at every opportunity would seem bizarre in the description of a battle against foreigners such as the Nervii. In the Sabis narrative there is a single, inconsequential reference to the Nervian leader, Boduognatus (*BG* 2.23.4), and it is devoid of judgment—military, political, or moral. The ordinary Nervian warriors, on the other hand, are celebrated for their bravery, so admiringly that Caesar almost upstages himself and his own army. Contrast with this the Pharsalus narrative, which has little to say—and virtually none of it good—about the performance of the Pompeian soldiers and concentrates instead upon the mistakes and weaknesses of their leaders as compared with the unerring leadership of Caesar. The battle of the Sabis was a glorious and uncomplicated struggle between Roman and non-Roman, civilized and uncivilized, allowing free rein to the theme of heroism. What stand out from the narrative are acts of courage: the dashing charge of the enemy, the steadfast resistance of the legions, the exploits of Baculus and Caesar, and the last stand of the Nervii. Most memorable in the Pharsalus narrative, however, and more essential to Caesar's larger purpose than the details of the fighting itself, are "character" scenes such as those depicting the pettiness of the nobles, the self-delusion of Pompey and Labienus, the loyalty of Crastinus, and the flight of Pompey.

The differing roles of *virtus* in each account offer a good way of gauging the contrast. *Virtus*, as we have seen—the courage of friend and foe alike—is the primary leitmotif in the account of the battle with the Nervii. In the Pharsalus narrative, however,

there is no reference to the *virtus* of the foe[41] and, with one special exception, only a single reference to the *virtus* of the Caesarian army: this is where Caesar impresses upon the soldiers of his improvised fourth line that "victory that day depended on the courage of these cohorts" (89.4, *monuitque eius diei victoriam in earum cohortium virtute constare*)—a conventional exhortation in a non-conventional setting. The proverbial exception that proves the rule is that of Crastinus, *vir singulari virtute* (91.1). Crastinus reappears in the casualty list at the end where Caesar reports that he lost only two-hundred soldiers but about thirty centurions—*fortes viros*—, and also Crastinus, "who was killed, fighting heroically, by a sword-thrust full in the mouth" (99.2, *interfectus est etiam fortissime pugnans Crastinus...gladio in os adversum coniecto*). The nature of the wound—the opposite of a spear in the back—demonstrates his grit. Through his death he proved the truth of what he had said as he went out to combat, and "it was Caesar's opinion that Crastinus' courage in the battle had been outstanding, and he considered himself most deeply in Crastinus' debt" (99.3, *sic enim Caesar existimabat eo proelio excellentissimam virtutem Crastini fuisse optimeque eum de se meritum iudicabat*)—a contrived fulfillment of Crastinus' prophecy that Caesar would have cause to thank him, dead or alive (91.3).

The concentration on the heroism of a single officer is reminiscent of the *Gallic War*: "[t]he centurions have a special place in Caesar's depiction of the men under his command: their acts of conspicuous bravery at moments of crisis can be pivotal in averting impending disaster (Baculus, 3.5, 6.38 [the same officer who is wounded at the Sabis, 2.25]; Petronius, 7.50) or in offering narrative reassurance to balance and compensate Roman setbacks (Balventius, Lucanius, 5.35; Pullo and Vorenus, 5.44; Fabius, 7.47; see also 6.40)."[42] Similar figures appear in the *Civil War*, notably Q. Fulginius (1.46.4) and Scaeva (3.53.4-5). Crastinus is cut from the same cloth but his story is more organic, more fraught with significance. Structurally, it is contrived to frame the description of the battle itself and demonstrate in miniature the quality and devotion of Caesar's army vis-à-vis Pompey's. It is significant that there is no

[41] On the contrary, the Thracians and other auxiliaries are asserted, pointedly, to have fought more vigorously in defence of the Pompeian camp than the Roman cohorts (95.3). Cf. also the abjectness of the Pompeians' surrender in 98.1-2.

[42] Hammond (above, n. 13) xxiii; cf. Rambaud (above, n. 4) 244-45; Carter 1997 (above, n. 25) xxvi, xxxix; Goldsworthy (above, n. 14) 257-58.

one of Crastinus' rank and character mentioned on the other side, only the aristocrats and Labienus. (There is a political aspect to this; Caesar's idealized portrait would appeal to the social class to which Crastinus belonged and on which his own supremacy partially depended.) Thematically, Crastinus' keeping of his promise to Caesar shows up the failure of Pompey and others to keep the oath they had made at the urging of Labienus.[43] Caesar leaves this unsaid but it is easily inferred from the implicit comparison between Crastinus and L. Domitius, the only Pompeian named in the casualty report. Whereas Crastinus dies facing forward in the front rank, in fulfillment of his promise, Domitius is killed while fleeing from the camp to the hills, contrary to his (99.5). Typologically, Crastinus also recalls the two Decii who won victory for the Romans by sacrificing themselves to the gods of the underworld and charging suicidally into the thick of battle (Liv. 8.9-10; 10.28).[44] The combined evocation of the "brave centurion" stereotype and these legendary aristocrats sheds on Crastinus the luster of "legitimate" glory, which partially redeems—in a literary sense—the fratricidal carnage. A popular hero of sorts, Crastinus is the only individual in Caesar's account of Pharsalus to achieve glory. But it is a clouded, ambiguous glory compared to that of the Nervii and their Roman opponents at the river Sabis. They died fighting a foreign foe; Crastinus, his fellow citizens. He is an *exemplum* not of *virtus per se* but of *virtus* inspired by personal loyalty and harnessed to a political goal. From being an end in itself, the fullest expression of Roman manhood, *virtus* has become a means to an end, a demonstration of the justice of the cause that had the power to call it forth.

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[43] Cf. Mutschler (above, n. 4) 225. As a self-fulfilling prophet Crastinus resembles Caesar, whose accuracy in foreseeing the course of the battle contrasts with the non-fulfillment of whatever is promised, sworn, or predicted by the Pompeians.

[44] Cf. Carter 1993 (above, n. 23) 213.