



## ‘Innovation and cliché: the letters of Caesar.’

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## INNOVATION AND CLICHÉ: THE LETTERS OF CAESAR

Ruth Morello

Caesar the letter writer appears in numerous remarkable vignettes of multi-tasking productivity: sources describe him causing offence by openly dealing with correspondence during shows,<sup>1</sup> dictating multiple letters on horseback to at least two secretaries simultaneously,<sup>2</sup> or receiving a love letter from his mistress during a Senate debate.<sup>3</sup> Even on the last night of his life, we find him half-listening to conversation after dinner while ‘reclining on the couch adding his personal notes to letters *as usual*’ (‘not an endearing habit’, as Pelling remarks).<sup>4</sup>

Caesar’s letters themselves were noted, too, for rich content,<sup>5</sup> unusual layout, or even clever delivery methods.<sup>6</sup> His formal dispatches to the senate, for example, apparently looked unlike those of other commanders, being set out in something unusually close to a book format, a habit that may suggest confidence in the lasting value of these letters, and perhaps even their literary aspirations.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, his famous cipher excluded inquisitive readers from letters *de domesticis rebus*,<sup>8</sup> prompting a learned commentary *de occulta litterarum significatione in epistularum C. Caesaris scriptura*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 45.1. For Caesar’s public multi-tasking, cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGH* 90 fr. 130.78-9; Pliny, *HN* 7.91. Such tales put Caesar in a tradition of indefatigable individuals such as Cato, who read in the *curia* (Cic. *de finibus* 3.7; Val. Max. 8.7.2; Plut. *Cato minor* 19.1), although only before senate sessions began; see Zadorojnyi (2005) 117.

<sup>2</sup> Plut. 17.7.4, 7; cf. Pliny the Elder *HN* 7.91. For Caesar sending and receiving letters, cf. Plut. 17.4-5; 23.4; 24.2; 30.2; 31.1; 48.2; 49.4.

<sup>3</sup> Plut. *Cato Minor* 24.1.6, 24.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch *Caes.* 63.7. Pelling (2011) 471. Ironically, distraction allegedly prevented him from reading the missive that might have saved him on the Ides (Plut. *Caes.* 65.)

<sup>5</sup> *Uberrimis litteris*, Cicero says in *Att.* 4.16.6 about Caesar’s richly informative letters from Britain; cf. Cic. *Prov. Cons.* 22.

<sup>6</sup> On the dispatch written in Greek characters and wrapped round a javelin (*BG* 5.48), see Osgood (2009) 336-8.

<sup>7</sup> Suet. *Diu. Iul.* 56.6 *quas primum uidetur ad paginas et formam memorialis libelli conuertisse*. On this problematic passage, see most recently McCutcheon (2013) 162-65. See also Osgood (2009) 339; Ebbeler (2003) 4, 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Gellius, *NA* 9.2; Suetonius *Diu. Iul.* 56.6; cf. Dio 40.9.3.

<sup>9</sup> Gellius, *NA* 9. 5.

Caesar's letters clearly drew a curious readership and several ancient collections of Caesar's letters are recorded.<sup>10</sup> However, as Ebbeler has observed, the history of the letters' *modern* reception is 'largely a tale of gaps and silences' – understandably, perhaps, given that only six letters survive. Nevertheless, the past decade or so has yielded fresh approaches, as the renaissance of scholarly interest in epistolography has grown alongside renewed consideration by historians of the special political utility of Caesar's remarkable epistolary machine.

Recent scholarship has considered Caesar's letters for their value in manipulating individual personal associates and public opinion alike. During his campaign in Gaul, Caesar's very inaccessibility gave him the advantage over associates in Rome, whom he kept always on uncertain ground, 'reassuring' them with epistolary clichés while leaving his agents to foster ambiguity and confusion in person.<sup>11</sup> In that light it seems significant that Caesar is said to have first invented conversation with friends by letter when he was in the city but too busy to meet in person.<sup>12</sup> Sending notes across town might seem unremarkable, but if Plutarch has understood correctly, the innovation was, perhaps, a *predominant* reliance on letters in a face-to-face culture; we might see this as the ingrained practice of the general whose special mastery of written communication, as Osgood has argued, 'helped to facilitate the Roman conquest of the Gallic peoples.'<sup>13</sup> At all events, there was often clearly a great deal of discomfort generated by Caesar's epistolary practices and by the letters themselves; the unusual reliance upon epistolary communication has been read as the symptom of a developing tyranny,<sup>14</sup> and it is only partly playfully, perhaps, that White

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<sup>10</sup> Suetonius mentions *epistulae ad Ciceronem* (Suet. *Iul.* 56.6), and personal letters to senior senators about the training of gladiators (Suet. *Iul.* 26.3); cf. Gellius *NA* 17.9.1 on collections of letters to Oppius and Balbus. For the surviving fragments of letters exchanged with Cicero, see Watt (1958) 153-6; Weysenhoff (1970) 19-22, 50-7. The letters from Caesar that survive as enclosures in the *ad Atticum* collection might also have appeared in lost books of Caesarian letters, just as a letter of Pompey of which a copy was sent to Atticus with *Att.* 8.11 seems also to have been published in a separate collection of Pompeian letters (Nonius 2:455.39-40 Lindsay): see White (2010) 192. On the early publication of Caesar's letters, see Cugusi (1983) 140-1, 177.

<sup>11</sup> White (2003) 73-80.

<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Caes.* 17.8; Pelling (2011) 216 suggests that Plutarch has misunderstood information more accurately preserved in Suetonius 56.6; for a more confident view of Plutarch's report, see Ebbeler (2003) 14.

<sup>13</sup> Osgood (2009) 329.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Zadorojnyi (2005) 129, 131.

suggests that the assassins of March 44 included frustrated correspondents who found themselves still unable to get a straight answer even once Caesar had returned to Rome.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, we are starting to look more positively at what the evidence for Caesar's letters tells us about his manipulation of the genre's broader political possibilities. Letters became, as Krebs notes, the means of disseminating Caesar's 'revolutionary concept of Gaul' in Rome,<sup>16</sup> but throughout Caesar's life even an ostensibly 'private' letter might reflect a self-publicising programme. Plutarch observes, for example, that the speed and efficiency of the campaign at Zela is appropriately represented in Caesar's letter to his friend Matius, from which he quotes (in Greek) the famous *ueni, uidi, uici*.<sup>17</sup> The closural value of the phrase is highlighted by Suetonius, who ignores the epistolary version and reports instead that the famous phrase appeared on placards at Caesar's triumph in place of the more detailed representations of the events of the campaign;<sup>18</sup> if both appearances of the phrase are historical we can see Caesar's use of letters as testing grounds for sound-bites and alternative mechanisms for self-publicity.

In his *commentarii*, Caesar also used letters as historiographical markers of closure. In Books 2, 4 and 7 of the *BG* letters are Caesar's final dispositions, as it were, in wrapping up a year's campaign: in Book 2, for example, which ends with the famous declaration *omni Gallia pacata*, it is Caesar's letter of report to the senate (*ex litteris Caesaris*) that prompts the unprecedented honours voted to him for his achievement, and Caesar's own portions of the work conclude in the final words of Book 7 with reference to his letters (*his litteris cognitis*).<sup>19</sup> The subsequent inversion from closural letters in the *BG* to an opening letter in the *BC* is telling. The senate's refusal to read this letter casts Caesar as the wronged statesman making extraordinary efforts to achieve peace with dignity and the rejection of Caesarian closure (in appropriately epistolary form) implicitly

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<sup>15</sup> White (2003) 92.

<sup>16</sup> Krebs (2006) 116. On the wider role of letters in Caesar's propagandistic efforts, see also Krebs in this volume; cf. Osgood (2009); for their wider role, Caesar himself alleges epistolary campaigns of *disinformation* by the Pompeians (e.g. *BC* 1.53; *BC* 3.79).

<sup>17</sup> Plut *Caes.* 50.3; cf. App. 2.91.384. See Pelling (2011) 392.

<sup>18</sup> Suet. *Div. Iul.* 37.2.

<sup>19</sup> *BG* 2.35.4; 4.38.5; 7.90.8.

encapsulates the injustice of some senators, who are subtly blamed for the impending war.

More can be done, however, in reading even the tiny sample of complete letters that survives. All date from March-April 49 BC, so we cannot expect to draw broad conclusions from them about the development of Caesar's epistolary habits, writing style or range of addressees. However, the restricted range of composition dates does allow us to treat these letters (with caution) as a partial case study of Caesarian epistolary activity at this crucial stage of the civil war. Above all, the context in which they are preserved provides an invaluable opportunity to assess the effect such letters had upon contemporary readers, since the Ciceronian collections preserve not only the letters of Caesar themselves, but also some of the judgements of Cicero and other addressees and readers as to the character and significance of specific letters. With that in mind, the remainder of this chapter will look not only at distinctive features of Caesar's letters considered in isolation but also at Cicero's responses to them and the effects achieved by the unknown editor's decision to retain the letters within the collection.

### *The six surviving letters*

No ancient collection of Caesar's letters survives, and (as so often) we have Cicero to thank for most of the information we have about individual items: even cursory reading of the extant Ciceronian collections will yield dozens of references to letters received from Caesar in a correspondence that spanned several decades. All six extant letters are preserved as enclosures in just two books of Cicero's *ad Atticum* collection (five of them in Book 9, a book that is, as we shall see, particularly dominated by the attempt to interpret Caesarian letters).<sup>20</sup> Three (*Att.* 9.6A, 9.16.2-3, 10.8B) are addressed to Cicero, two to Oppius and Balbus (*Att.* 9.7C and 13A) and one to Q. Pedius (*Att.* 9.14)

Book 9 is not the only book of the Atticus collection that has as its central theme the flow of letters from a single significant individual. *Ad Atticum* Book 8, for example, is Pompey's book: it begins with news of a frustratingly short letter

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<sup>20</sup> On 'enclosures' preserved in the Ciceronian collections, see White (2010) 43-6.

from Pompey<sup>21</sup> that then appears in full in the revealing exchange between Pompey and Cicero at the heart of the book (8.11.A-D), where Cicero sends Atticus both sides of a correspondence to contrast Pompey's insultingly careless epistolary manner with Cicero's detailed and finely crafted replies (8.11.6). Pompeian letters to other addressees (demonstrating, among other things, a fuller epistolary engagement on the writer's part) follow immediately at 8.12A-D. Meanwhile, even in "[Pompey's Book](#)" (*Att.* 8), Caesar is a far more attentive suitor than Pompey.<sup>22</sup> His epistolary programme of persuasion and cajolery is represented as [sustained](#) and assiduous (notice 8.11.5 'you ask me what Caesar said in his letter. *The usual thing*, that he is greatly obliged for my quiescence'), and he punctiliously reinforces messages from his own hand with reassurances and reminders through his agents (a lengthy letter from Balbus is enclosed with 8.15).<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, in Book 9 a dominant motif is Pompey's *mirum silentium*. There are no letters from Pompey himself (*nihil interim ad me scribere*, 9.10.2), and news of his whereabouts and intentions has almost entirely dried up. Instead, the Caesarian letters take centre stage.<sup>24</sup> We see them, however, almost entirely from the perspective of the contemporary readers (rather than from Caesar's own viewpoint), as Cicero and others seem absorbed in the problems of interpreting them. Indeed, the process of 'decoding' Caesar's letters becomes almost a defining feature of epistolary activity at this period.<sup>25</sup>

The letter that most exercises Cicero is *Att.* 9.6A, a hasty note in which Caesar hopes for fruitful interaction with Cicero. Cicero characterizes 9.6A as

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<sup>21</sup> *cum ad te litteras dedissem, redditae mihi litterae sunt a Pompeio* (*Att.* 8.1.1).

<sup>22</sup> On Caesar's 'polarized parallelism' between himself and Pompey, expressed through contrasts in their letters during the blockade at Brundisium (*BC* 3.25), see Henderson (1998) 46 (a chapter that is vital reading on the centrality of letters in the design of the *BC*, and on the figure of Caesar himself as 'the hero of a thousand despatches'). We might also set this in the context of the *Bellum Civile*, in which – on Grillo's reading (Grillo (2012)149) '[pitches] the alienating *misophilia* of the Pompeians against his assimilating *amicitia*.'

<sup>23</sup> See 8.9 (a letter, verbal message and promise from Caesar via Balbus junior to Lentulus, plus letters from Balbus senior about Caesar's wishes); 8.9.5 (letter from Caesar reported and summarized – plus a message from Balbus junior to the same effect). Letters from Cicero to Caesar are mentioned elsewhere in Book 8: e.g. 8.2 and especially 8.9 (preserved here in defiance of chronological order) which defends the language of Cicero's letter to Caesar after Corfinium.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed Caesarian letters and messengers are among the main sources of information about Pompey's situation, too: see, e.g., *Att.* 9.12.1.

<sup>25</sup> Against that backdrop, Caesar's letters stand out as distinctive – if only for the reason that he expresses no such hermeneutical *aporia* with regard to anyone else's letters.

written from a position of power, but cannot decipher precisely what role Caesar envisages for him and worries particularly about what Caesar means by his wish to call upon Cicero's *consilio, gratia, dignitate, ope*. Anxious consultation of Atticus and of Caesar's friend Matius ensues,<sup>26</sup> before Cicero finally drafts his reply (*Att.* 9.11A), the first sections of which still attempt to interpret the same four words.

A stimulating recent discussion compares this letter with one of the central enclosures of Book 8, Pompey's letter at 8.11C. The two letters were dated a mere fortnight apart (Pompey's on Feb 20, and Caesar's on March 4), and use remarkably similar language. Pompey encourages Cicero to travel to join him (*ut te ad nos conferas*) in order that they may jointly bring assistance to the stricken republic (*ut communi consilio rei publicae adflictae opem atque auxilium feramus*). Caesar, by contrast, seeks to come to a meeting with Cicero in or near Rome *ut tuo consilio, gratia, dignitate, ope omnium rerum uti possim*.<sup>27</sup> Although Cicero makes much of failing to understand exactly what Caesar means by this, Caesar's letter as a whole is considerably more personal, even respectful than Pompey's. It is full of common epistolary motifs that oiled the mechanisms of friendship at Rome: apology for brevity and distractedness, unwillingness to pass up an opportunity for speaking/writing, and – in the language of favours exchanged – the suggestion that Cicero's past goodwill might guarantee future favours.<sup>28</sup> Caesar makes good use of clichés of *amicitia*, in other words, in a way that is typical of his broader deployment of such language elsewhere; he emphasises Cicero's value to him, and attempts to flatter Cicero in a way that Pompey simply does not.<sup>29</sup> Pompey makes no apology for brevity (despite Cicero's pointedly lengthy replies to him) and no attempt to reflect Cicero's best self back to him,<sup>30</sup> whereas Caesar's epistolary manners suggest a potentially more pleasing approach. 9.6A is framed in the most polite, even respectful, of

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<sup>26</sup> *Att.* 9.9.3; 9.11.2.

<sup>27</sup> Grillo (2012) 58.

<sup>28</sup> On the 'facework' conducted in Cicero's letters, see Hall (2009), and for a cynical view of Caesar's clichés, see White (2003). On banalities in letters, see Gunderson (2007) 7.

<sup>29</sup> See Grillo (2012) 143-9.

<sup>30</sup> See Morello (2013) 210.

terms (formulaic though they are), and it is revealing that Cicero's reaction is so suspicious and cynical as the book progresses.<sup>31</sup>

The process of comparing the letters of Caesar himself with those of others on similar subjects is further encouraged in 9.7, which accompanies three enclosures, all masterpieces of self-positioning and diplomacy: a joint letter from Oppius and Balbus (9.7A), another from Balbus alone (9.7B), and finally the letter by Caesar himself (9.7C); the three enclosures together give a snapshot of the Caesarian campaign to keep Cicero on side, and [demonstrate one more advantage of reading](#) Caesar's letters not in isolation but [in light of his ability to exploit readers' interest in triangulating and comparing epistolary communication](#).<sup>32</sup>

Advice and approval within precisely delineated social relationships are dominant issues in all three enclosures. Atticus has advised Cicero to seek dispensation from Caesar to maintain his relationship with Pompey, and Cicero encloses letters from Balbus and Oppius to prove a point: he has already been trying to do that (*id me iam pridem agere intelleges*, 9.7.3). In 9.7A Balbus and Oppius depict themselves as 'humble folk', in a self-deprecating opening move that masks their role as Caesar's spokesmen, [and at the end they even](#) acknowledge that [Cicero](#) might question the sincerity and independence of their advice: (9.7A.2).<sup>33</sup> In a complex [rhetorical](#) exercise in building trust, they contrive simultaneous distance from Caesar (to suggest *trustworthiness* as advisers) and closeness to him (to suggest *expertise* as advisers): [through](#) a series of counterfactuals (*si...cognovissemus...si ex contrario putaremus* 9.7A.1) they imply that they cannot know firsthand, and for certain, what Caesar's intentions really are; they then evaluate Cicero's situation in either one of two eventualities (that Caesar seeks reconciliation with Pompey or that he pursues war). The views that they do express as their own are carefully marked as

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<sup>31</sup> See Grillo (2012) 58 (and cf. *Att.* 7.1.7; 9.9.3).

<sup>32</sup> In a study of the challenge of 'distinguishing good politeness from bad' in the Ciceronian letter collections, Hall (2009) 79ff. notes the effect of changing political circumstances on Cicero's attitude to Caesar's assiduous epistolary courtship, which he perceives as 'charming' in 54 but as part of a more cynical campaign in late 50 when Caesar's flattery is echoed by Balbus (*Att.* 7.3.11).

<sup>33</sup> Another joint letter may be found in this book, at *Att.* 9.15A (from Matus and Trebatius – both Caesarians – reporting rumours of Pompey's departure).



potentially unwise (*quod si non fuerit prudens...*) but based on personal goodwill and on faith in Caesar's good qualities (*pro sua humanitate*).

The letter from Balbus alone that follows exploits the rhetoric of personal connection between writer and addressee: Balbus *personally* feels Cicero's difficulty (*sentio quod tu...*), and can point to his own similarly compromising relationship with Lentulus (which is willingly tolerated by Caesar, 9.7B.2). He is delighted to be able to share a letter from Caesar (9.7C) that just happened to arrive after the sending of the joint letter. Everything, it seems, conspires to confirm the views expressed in 9.7A, and the fiction that Balbus and Oppius are merely participants in the wider epistolary project of 'decoding' Caesar is consciously and almost overtly sustained as Balbus represents himself as sharing with Cicero a 'discovery' of Caesar's honourable sentiments.

In the context of Cicero's letter and the two enclosures we have looked at so far, Caesar's letter to his aides (9.7C) makes a commensurately greater impression and once again highlights Caesar's conscious mastery in his epistolary environment. It has been circulated at least partly as confirmation that his agents' assurances of Caesar's clemency and fairness are not misplaced – and even Cicero's comment on the letter suggests its success (*sana mente scriptas litteras quo modo in tanta insania*, 9.7.3). Caesar welcomes his friends' approval of his actions at Corfinium, reports his capture and release of a second Pompeian prefect, Magius, and advertises his commitment to reconciliation, his amenability to advice (*consilio vestro utar libenter*, 9.7C.1) and his determination not to follow Sulla's example.<sup>34</sup> All this has the feel of an **open letter**, written for public consumption, and yet Balbus makes it look like a private line to Caesar's thoughts and intentions.<sup>35</sup> Caesar's emphasis on his gratitude for Balbus' advice, and his solicitation of further thoughts on how best to implement his *noua ratio uincendi*, works to reinforce the advice given to Cicero by Oppius and Balbus:<sup>36</sup> Caesar values our advice, so the implicit argument goes, and so should Cicero.

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<sup>34</sup> A passage all the more striking because of Cicero's observation in 9.7.3 that Pompey's ambition to *emulate* Sulla is one of the few things he does not cover with misdirection and ambiguity (*nihil ille umquam minus obscure tulit*).

<sup>35</sup> On the prevalence of the open letter in 49 BC in particular, see Jal (2002) 52.

<sup>36</sup> Note in particular Caesar's use of the first person plural: *temptemus hoc modo si possimus omnium voluntates recuperare*, 'Let us try whether by this means we can win back the good will of all, 9.7C.1.

These letters, then, offer a kind of ‘read-through’ performance for Cicero’s benefit of the rhetoric appropriate to these tricky circumstances. In the light of that ‘performance’, the disastrous personal meeting between Cicero and Caesar (9.18) towards which Book 9’s narrative gradually builds begins to look like an instance of Cicero’s failure to understand how to construct a character for himself within the ‘script’ that all these epistolary clichés cumulatively construct, as much as it is a brave stand by a man of conviction. On the one hand his version of the congratulations after Corfinium that Balbus and Oppius are seen to have offered in 9.7C.1 was overly effusive,<sup>37</sup> but on the other his behavior in the long-awaited meeting with Caesar spectacularly fails to maintain the fragile veneer of rhetorical politeness, and Caesar’s angry outburst (‘if he could not avail himself of my counsels he would avail himself of those he could get and stop at nothing’, 9.18.3) should be no surprise in the light of the careful, assiduous epistolary ‘facework’ that has been devoted to this tricky relationship.

Caesar’s response to congratulations and approval, as well as his commitment to almost excessively courteous treatment of a problematic addressee, are once again in evidence in another brief letter to Cicero that is enclosed with *Att.* 9.16. Cicero has written to commend his clemency at Corfinium and now introduces the brief reply from Caesar.<sup>38</sup> Once again, however, the focus is narrowly upon a small part of the letter that contains a new version of the offending sentence of 9.6A (*iam ‘opes’ meas, non ut superioribus litteris ‘opem’ expectat*, ‘he now counts upon my ‘resources’, not, as in his former letter, on my ‘help’, 9.16.1). Once again, however, Cicero ignores the courteous expression of Caesar’s letter, which emphasizes the longstanding acquaintance between the two men (*bene enim tibi cognitus sum*, 9.16.2), expresses joy at Cicero’s approval, hopes to be able to meet him in Rome to continue the process of profitable interaction (*ut tuis consiliis atque opibus, ut consuevi, in omnibus rebus utar*, 9.16.3) and finally lavishes praise upon Cicero’s son-in-law (establishing relationships in common, in a classic epistolary move). Cicero may be right to be suspicious of Caesar, but nevertheless it should be acknowledged that Caesar plays the game; once again, comparison with Pompey’s even briefer

<sup>37</sup> Note the defensiveness of 8.9.1.

<sup>38</sup> Cicero has interested himself specifically in the fate of Lentulus, who is mentioned in *Att.* 9.11A.3 and 9.13.7.

communications with Cicero (8.11A and 8.11C), both of which are marked, in Cicero's own word, by *neglegentia* (8.11.6), demonstrate how carefully Caesar is working to maintain at least a superficially healthy epistolary interaction with Cicero.

Readers (including Atticus, the first reader of these 'packages' of letters) are encouraged by the enclosure format to conduct precisely this kind of comparative work in dealing with Caesar's letters. The cluster of letters and enclosures from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 49 gives another invaluable opportunity for comparing crisis letters on the same topic, to the same addressee, but from three different individuals, including Caesar himself. *Att.* 10.8 accompanies two letters that both respond to a rumour that Cicero is finally about to join Pompey: a thoroughly unpleasant missive from Antony (10.8A) and a more emollient one from Caesar himself. *Att.* 10.9 then encloses a letter from Caelius in which he explicitly presents himself as joining in the chorus of Caesarian pressure upon Cicero from the standpoint of a longstanding intimate. Once again, we see a version of the 'clustering' phenomenon that made the enclosures of 9.6 and 9.7 so powerful: Caesar's own letter is embedded, as it were, between letters from an enemy and a close friend, and Caesar's arguments are echoed and reinforced to Cicero from two different perspectives.

Cicero calls Antony's letter *odiosas*, and it is indeed a threatening and rhetorically contorted piece, in which Antony couches a warning to Cicero within a network of hypotheticals and conditionals ('**If I did not** have a great affection for you, much more indeed than you suppose, **I should not** have been so alarmed at a report which has been put about concerning you, especially as **I did not believe it.**'). Unlike the letter from Balbus, which built its case upon a textbook expression of personal friendship, and dealt in hypotheticals only to highlight positive outcomes of alternative situations, Antony's letter openly acknowledges that it is bridging a gap between two people whose relationship is not based on healthy affection – Antony likes Cicero 'more than he supposes' and refers to *offensio nostra*, barely softening this acknowledgement with an assumption of responsibility (Antony's jealousy, rather than any injury done him by Cicero, is the root of the problem). Whereas Balbus put Cicero in the group of his dearest friends (with Caesar's life as the pledge), Antony makes a convoluted

triangulation of the relationships of all concerned in his letter: Cicero comes second to Caesar for Antony, but Cicero is especially important to Caesar – and for that reason to Antony too. The letter, he says, will be brought by one of his own closest associates, as proof of his true concern for Cicero – a tour de force, then, managing the failure of their relationship within the context of the epistolary language of friendship.

In this context, 10.8B, written by Caesar himself to express alarm at the same rumour and to urge honourable neutrality, appears straightforward and direct, using the language of friendship, honour and pragmatism smoothly and skilfully. His arguments are more expertly targeted than Antony's to Cicero's own patterns of thought, balancing an appeal to Cicero's sense of duty to friendship (*namque et amicitiae grauiorem iniuriam feceris*) with encouragement to self-preservation (*et tibi minus commode consulueris*); he ends with an appeal to the philosopher and the student of the powerful in Cicero's nature (*tu explorato et uitae meae testimonio et amicitiae iudicio neque tutius neque honestius reperies quicquam quam ab omni contentione abesse*). This is the language, surely, of an expert reader of the *de officiis* (or, indeed, of some of Cicero's letters of this period).<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that there is no threat conveyed in Caesar's friendliness; nevertheless, it is a marked feature of the surviving letters that Caesar consistently deploys the language of friendship and intellectual kinship, even when under severe pressure.<sup>40</sup>

Both these letters should be compared with Caelius' longer and more emotional appeal to Cicero (10.9A). Like Balbus, Caelius represents himself as Caesar's advisor, even claiming some responsibility for the terms in which Caesar's own letter was framed (10.9A.4), but unlike Balbus he writes to Cicero as an equal, in a letter that Cicero says deeply moved his whole family. Like Antony, Caelius highlights the danger of Cicero's proposed departure (indeed Caelius magnifies the likely threat from an angry Caesar), the betrayal of friendship (in creating a conflict of interests for friends like Caelius and Dolabella), and the folly of declaring open opposition to a victorious Caesar after long vacillation during more uncertain times. Like Caesar, Caelius appeals in

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<sup>39</sup> See, e.g. *Att.* 8.2.2.

<sup>40</sup> On the threatening quality of Caesar's deployment of the language of *amicitia* here, see Grillo (2012) 147-8.

particular to issues of principle: Cicero's fear of falling short of the qualities of the true optimate, Caelius says, has blinded him to the truly 'best' option, namely friendly neutrality (*uide ne, dum pudet te parum **optimatem** esse, parum diligenter quid **optimum** sit eligas*, 10.9A.3).

### Conclusion

Reading Caesar's few surviving letters within the 'narrative(s)' of the books in which they are preserved allows us to see more clearly the sustained effort expended by Caesar upon his courtship of Cicero, and perhaps also the potential for failure (given the angry exchange between the two when they met face-to-face in *Att.9.18*). In retaining the Caesarian 'enclosures' in Books 9 and 10, the editor of the *Ad Atticum* collection has encouraged the reader to read Cicero's motivations and his hermeneutic struggles with Caesar's letters (and with the man himself) with perhaps a more suspicious eye, while still allowing the flavor of Caesar's manipulateness to develop and become increasingly dominant as the books progress. We cannot help but see Caesar's letters in these books mostly through Cicero's eyes, but nevertheless, we see the persona of the busy, driven epistolographer who needs to make smoothly packaged epistolary clichés work to his best advantage, and who will persist in his attempts to teach even Cicero how to play that game. Ultimately (if we can believe Nepos (?)), it was Atticus who understood better than Cicero how to play, and perhaps the most serious impediment to our understanding of Caesar's preserved letters is the absence of Atticus's analyses of the extraordinary packages of correspondence which arrived from his old friend in the early months of 49 BC.

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