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'GREETINGS, CICERO!': CAESAR AND PLATO ON WRITING AND MEMORY

In his digression on the Gauls in Book 6 of the *Gallic War*, Caesar includes a portrait of the Druids (*BGall.* 6.13.3 *sed de his duobus generibus* [*sc. quae aliquo sunt numero atque honore*] *alterum est* ***druidum***) and their public roles first and foremost in religious and legal affairs (6.13.4–5 *illi* ***rebus diuinis*** *intersunt,* ***sacrificia*** *publica ac priuata procurant,* ***religiones*** *interpretantur … fere de omnibus* ***controuersiis*** *publicis priuatisque constituunt*), not forgetting their philosophical doctrine (6.14.6 *multa … **disputant** et iuuentuti tradunt*). He emphasizes the strictly oral form their teaching takes (6.14.4), how 'they do not deem it appropriate to commit it [their learning] to writing even though in almost everything else, in public and private affairs, they resort to Greek writing (*neque fas esse existimant* ***ea litteris mandare****, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis priuatisque rationibus Graecis litteris utantur*)',[1] about the reasons for which he then proceeds to speculate (6.14.4):

> id **mihi** duabus de causis instituisse **uidentur**, quod neque in uulgum disciplinam efferri uelint neque eos qui discunt litteris confisos minus memoriae studere: quod **fere plerisque accidit**, ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo ac memoriam remittant.
>
> This [*sc*. practice] they seem to me to have instituted for two reasons: they do not wish either that their teaching be revealed to the general public or that those who are learning it, having become reliant on writing, give less attention to memorization; and it does, as a rule, happen to many that, because of the prop offered by writing, they relax their diligence in thoroughly committing things to memory.[2]

Three circumstances render this mini-digression peculiar: First, Caesar leaves no doubt that he adduces his own speculation as to their reasoning (*id* ***mihi*** *… instituisse* ***uidentur***). This is all the more noteworthy as he is notoriously sparing of any such authorial self-reference other than for the purpose of cross-referencing (which he does frequently); and he is even more sparing in referring to himself in the first-person singular. In fact, this is the only instance in the *Bellum Gallicum*.[3] Second, given how

[1] For Celtic inscriptions in Greek letters in France, see M. Lejeune, *Recueil des inscriptions Gauloises I: Textes gallo-grecs* (Paris, 1985).

[2] All translations are mine except where specified otherwise. I have consulted throughout the following: C. Hammond, *Caesar – The Gallic War* (Oxford and New York, 1996) and H.J. Edwards, *Caesar. The Gallic War* (Cambridge, 1917; repr. 2006). The latter may be in need of replacement.

[3] Within the *BGall.*, the following two instances come closest: 5.13.4 *nos nihil de eo percontationibus reperiebamus, nisi certis ex aqua mensuris breuiores esse quam in continenti noctes uidebamus*, and 7.25.1 *accidit inspectantibus nobis quod dignum memoria uisum praetereundum non existimauimus*. But both passages use the plural and merge the narrator with the historical agent. For comprehensive lists of self-reference in Caesar, see E.D. Kollmann, 'Die Macht des Namens. Beobachtungen zum "unpersönlichen" Stil Caesars', *Studii Clasice* 17 (1977), 45–60, esp. 54–8. Instances of cross-

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broad-brushed is his sketch of the Druids, the sheer length of this explanation appears out of proportion: in fact, the summary of the Druidic doctrine (quoted below) is not afforded more space.[4] Lastly, when Caesar applies this knowledge to *many* who *as a rule* rely on writing rather than memory (*quod **fere plerisque** accidit*), one could wonder on what grounds this generalization rests.

All three aspects (the last-mentioned being most significant) combine to 'signpost' the text upon which Caesar's generalization is based: Plato's *Phaedrus*.[5] His discussion of memory and writing is clearly taken thence (275a2–5, with passages from Caesar in square brackets):

τοῦτο γὰρ **τῶν μαθόντων** [cf. *eos qui discunt*] λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει **μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ** [cf. *minus memoriae studere*], ἅτε **διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς** [cf. *litteris confisos*] ἔξωθεν ὑπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ᾽ αὑτῶν ἀναμιμνῃσκομένους [cf. *ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo ac memoriam remittant*]

For this [*sc.* invention of yours] will cause forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn it owing to neglect of their memory, as, by trusting in writing, they will be reminded from the outside by foreign signs, not from within by themselves.

While Caesar cannot claim, as Cicero does (*De diu*. 1.61), to render *uerba ipsa Platonis*, in two instances he comes close to translating (μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ: *minus memoriae studere*; διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς: *litteris confisos*); one might also want to notice how the first two words in the first expression phonetically mimic the Greek (just as Caesar seems to do elsewhere in an adaptation of a Thucydidean expression).[6] More generally, however, the thematic and structural parallels are striking, not least in the explanations of the memory impairment, both of which, introduced by ἅτε there and *ut* here,[7] contrast

referencing are listed in Fr. Albrecht, *Die Rückverweisungen bei Caesar und seinen Fortsetzern* (Berndorf, 1911). On that practice as a debt to the administrative language, see E. Odelman, *Étude sur quelques reflets du style administratif chez César* (Diss., Stockholm, 1972), 169–70.

[4] It is commonly assumed that the portrait in Strabo (4.4.4) is based on Posidonius, who must have been consulted by Caesar too (see A. Klotz, *Cäsarstudien* [Leipzig and Berlin, 1910], 120–8, even though he is much too willing to credit Posidonius with everything). But even if not, Strabo reveals what else Caesar *could* have mentioned: παρὰ πᾶσι δ᾽ ὡς ἐπίπαν τρία φῦλα τῶν τιμωμένων διαφερόντως ἐστί, **βάρδοι** τε καὶ **ὀυάτεις** καὶ **δρυΐδαι**: βάρδοι μὲν ὑμνηταὶ καὶ ποιηταί, ὀυάτεις δὲ ἱεροποιοὶ καὶ φυσιολόγοι, δρυΐδαι δὲ πρὸς τῇ φυσιολογίᾳ καὶ τὴν ἠθικὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἀσκοῦσι: δικαιότατοι δὲ νομίζονται καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πιστεύονται τάς τε ἰδιωτικὰς κρίσεις καὶ τὰς κοινάς, ὥστε καὶ πολέμους διήτων πρότερον καὶ παρατάττεσθαι μέλλοντας ἔπαυον, τὰς δὲ φονικὰς δίκας μάλιστα τούτοις ἐπετέτραπτο δικάζειν. … ἀφθάρτους δὲ λέγουσι καὶ οὗτοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐπικρατήσειν δέ ποτε καὶ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ.

[5] On 'signposting' allusions by Roman poets, see S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. 1–5. I here use the concept somewhat more broadly than, say, G.B. Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* (Turin, 1985), 35–45, in his influential reading of Ariadne's *memini* (*Fast.* 3.473) as a flag of Ovid's engagement with Catullus 64, or than I myself do in suggesting that Caesar's use of the verbs *imitari* and *tradere* (*BGall.* 7.22.1) signals his adaptation of Thucydides' account of the siege of Plataea (C.B. Krebs, 'Thucydides in Gaul and signposting in the *Gallic War*. The sieges of Plataea and Avaricum', *Histos* 10 [2016], 1–14, esp. 11–12). But the three features discussed above clearly signal *something*; a more systematic study of signposting, i.e. how a reader is alerted / invited / urged to (consult) an intertext, would perhaps be welcomed.

[6] As I tentatively suggest in Krebs (n. 5), esp. 5, *aggerem apparare* is modelled on Thucydides' χῶμα ἔχουν. Caesar enjoyed such play (as my forthcoming commentary on *BGall.* Book 7, index, s.v. sound play, will show).

[7] The *ut* is often (and quite naturally) taken to be the object clause to *accidit* (*OLD* s.v. 7a); but it may just as well be epexegetical to *quod*.

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external help to one's own (internal) effort (note *in* ***per****discendo*).[8] Closer inspection reveals further echoes: first, his expression *litterarum praesidium* is all but unparalleled; the *TLL* knows of one more fourth-century instance.[9] An obvious military metaphor (as Julian's use seems to confirm), it may be owed to Plato's repeated observation that a word, once written, would be 'unable to either defend or help itself' (αὐτὸς γὰρ οὔτ' **ἀμύνασθαι** οὔτε βοηθῆσαι δυνατὸς αὑτῷ).[10] Plato's *second* cause for concern about the danger of writing—that, 'once written down, every word could be bandied about everywhere, amongst those interested just as much as amongst those whom it behoves not' (ὅταν δὲ ἅπαξ γραφῇ, κυλινδεῖται μὲν πανταχοῦ πᾶς λόγος ὁμοίως παρὰ τοῖς ἐπαΐουσιν, ὡς δ' αὕτως παρ' οἷς οὐδὲν προσήκει, 275e1–2)—is the *first* reason Caesar gives as to why the Druids do not write down their teachings. But Plato's chiefly hermeneutic concern—that the written word will be less meaningful when it circulates indiscriminately—has been sharpened by Caesar to indicate a classist anxiety among the Druids that their privileged teachings will be transmitted to the masses (*quod neque* ***in uulgum*** *disciplinam efferri uelint*). Third, the Druids' preference for discussion of philosophical issues in teaching the next generation—*multa praeterea de sideribus ...* ***disputant*** *et iuuentuti* ***tradunt***—echoes Socrates' reaffirmation of the superiority of the dialectical method in teaching (276e–277a):

πολὺ δ' οἶμαι καλλίων σπουδὴ περὶ αὐτὰ γίγνεται, ὅταν τις τῇ διαλεκτικῇ τέχνῃ χρώμενος, λαβὼν ψυχὴν προσήκουσαν, φυτεύῃ τε καὶ σπείρῃ μετ' ἐπιστήμης λόγους, … ὅθεν ἄλλοι ἐν ἄλλοις ἤθεσι φυόμενοι … ,

earnest attention to these matters is, I believe, all the more beautiful when someone employs the dialectical method, takes a fitting soul, and implants and sows in it words along with intelligence … whence other words spring up in other characters.[11]

But the perhaps most cogent additional reason for a well-read reader to think of the *Phaedrus* is the theory of metempsychosis that Caesar presents as the first and foremost tenet of the Druids' philosophical doctrine with the help of a memorable instance of wordplay (6.14.5–6):

in primis hoc uolunt persuadere, non **interire** animas, sed ab aliis post mortem **transire** ad alios, atque hoc maxime ad uirtutem excitari putant metu mortis neglecto. multa praeterea de sideribus atque eorum motu, de mundi ac terrarum magnitudine, de rerum natura, de deorum immortalium ui ac potestate disputant et iuuentuti tradunt.

[8] The intensive compound verb occurs only here in Caesar (R. Menge, S. Preuss, *Lexicon Caesarianum* [Hildesheim, 1972, orig. Gerstenberg, 1890], s.v.), just like *ediscere* a few lines before (6.14.2). Of *discere* there are four instances (ibid. s.v.).

[9] Julian, in a law included in the Codex Theodosianus, declares (6.26.1): *in rebus prima militia est, secundus in litterarum praesidiis pacis ornatus*. I fail to see why neither the author of the lemma *littera* nor the author of the lemma *praesidium* marks the relation between the two instances (*TLL* 7.2.1522.10–11, 10.2.888.26). Nor do I understand how this instance in Caesar could possibly appear in the following company (*TLL* 10.2.886.4–8): 'Caes. Gall. 6, 5, 7 loci [praesidi]o freti Menapii ([4 paludibus silvisque muniti]. Liv. 4, 41, 6. 26, 46, 2 l. ac stagni. al.). 6, 14, 4 ut [praesidi]o litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo … remittant. Hor. carm. 3, 29, 62 biremis [praesidi]o scaphae (…). Liv. 37, 20, 14 in [praesidi]um urbis redit eruptione facta (40, 49, 3).' Seneca (*Ep*. 88.28) seems pertinent too: … *et nescio an certior memoria sit quae nullum* ***extra se subsidium*** *habet*.

[10] Then again 276a6 δυνατὸς μὲν ἀμῦναι ἑαυτῷ [*sc*. ὁ λόγος] and, similarly, 276c8-9 μετὰ λόγων ἀδυνάτων μὲν αὐτοῖς λόγῳ βοηθεῖν.

[11] I am indebted to the anonymous reader for alerting me to the possible significance of *disputare*; in fact, *disputo* may well translate διαλέγομαι *vel sim.* (cf. *TLL* 5.1.1443.11, 1445.35, 1447.16, 1447.47 [Lackenbacher]).

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First and foremost, they wish to teach this: souls do not pass away but pass on from those who have died to others; and, as the fear of death is thereby eliminated, they consider this belief the greatest incentive to valour. Besides this, they variously discuss the stars and their movement, the size of the universe and of the earth, the order of nature, the strength and the powers of the immortal gods, all of which they hand down to their young men.[12]

Socrates had developed this belief in his final speech on love, the imaginative palinode. Whichever soul, he claims, fails to maintain its wings will grow heavy and fall down to earth and into a body of a human being (Pl. *Phdr*. 243e7–257b6).[13] After a first lifetime and a subsequent existence under the earth or up in the skies, they are given another life-circle (249b4–7):

… ὃν [*sc*. τὸν βίον] ἂν ἐθέλῃ ἑκάστη [*sc*. ἡ ψυχή]· ἔνθα καὶ εἰς θηρίου βίον ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχὴ ἀφικνεῖται, καὶ ἐκ θηρίου, ὅς ποτε ἄνθρωπος ἦν, πάλιν εἰς ἄνθρωπον.

… whichever [*sc*. Life] each [*sc.* soul] wants: there a human soul passes into the soul of an animal, (while) a soul that once was a human being may pass from an animal's soul back into a human being.[14]

It seems, then, a rather felicitous coincidence that *Graecae litterae* are mentioned just where Caesar engages with Plato's *Phaedrus* in such various forms. If one hesitates to credit coincidence with such felicity, one could postulate that 'Greek letters' or, rather, 'Greek literature' (cf. Cic. *Verr*. 4.106 *opinio, iudices, quae constat ex antiquissimis Graecorum litteris ac monumentis*) serves as another and perhaps more traditional signpost than the one discussed above.

I have referred above to the 'well-read reader', who may be said to be an approximation to the construct of the 'ideal reader', whom studies of reader-response and narratology have defined as being able to 'understand perfectly and approve entirely every authorial word or intention'.[15] While it seems doubtful that Plato's discussion of writing and memory was as well known towards the end of the Republic as Quintilian's passing remark suggests it was 150 years later,[16] there was at least one man among Caesar's contemporaries who was decidedly familiar with the dialogue. As will turn

[12] On the Lucretian echoes (*multa praeterea*, *de rerum natura*) in this passage (and elsewhere), see C.B. Krebs, 'Caesar, Lucretius and the dates of *De rerum natura* and the *Commentarii*', *CQ* 63 (2013), 751–8, esp. 755.

[13] ὅταν δὲ … κακίας πλησθεῖσα βαρυνθῇ [*sc*. ἡ ψυχή], βαρυνθεῖσα δὲ πτερορρυήσῃ τε καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν πέσῃ, τότε νόμος ταύτην μὴ φυτεῦσαι εἰς μηδεμίαν θήρειον φύσιν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν πλεῖστα ἰδοῦσαν εἰς γονὴν ἀνδρὸς γενησομένου φιλοσόφου ἢ φιλοκάλου ἢ μουσικοῦ τινὸς καὶ ἐρωτικοῦ, τὴν δὲ δευτέραν …

[14] I speak of 'the most cogent additional reason', as the Druidic belief in metempsychosis by itself would hardly have sufficed to evoke the passage in the *Phaedrus*; in fact, Ennius' well-known dream of being Homer reincarnate—but only after passing through a peacock—would make a Pythagorean reminiscence just as likely, if not more so; see O. Skutsch, *The* Annals *of Quintus Ennius* (Oxford, 1985), on Enn. *Ann*. 1.9.

[15] For an overview, see G. Prince, 'Reader', in P. Hühn et al. (edd.), *Handbook of Narratology* (Göttingen, 2009), 398–410. The quotation is on page 398.

[16] Quint. *Inst*. 11.2.9 *quamquam inuenio apud Platonem obstare memoriae usum litterarum.* There is very little to suggest knowledge of Plato among Cicero's contemporaries; surprisingly, not even Lucretius refers to him in *De rerum natura*, even though he certainly knew of Plato through Epicurus' writings (as Andrea Nightingale informs me *per litteras*).

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out, he was not just the ideal reader but, I should like to suggest, the 'intended reader' of this passage too.[17]

Cicero admired the *Phaedrus* and referred to and quoted from it repeatedly in his early philosophical dialogues.[18] As recently as 55, he had pointed to it as the model for his own treatise *De oratore* (1.28): *cur non imitamur, Crasse, Socratem illum, qui est in Phaedro Platonis? nam me haec tua platanus admonuit* … 'Why don't we, Crassus, imitate the famous Socrates, as he is presented in Plato's *Phaedrus*? For this plane-tree of yours reminds me …'. Caesar, in turn, not only read Cicero's *chef-d'œuvre*; he also responded to its view on *Latinitas* as developed in the third book by offering an alternative which he presented in his treatise *De analogia*, most probably written in 54 and pointedly and mischievously dedicated to Cicero.[19] Third, the place of Caesar's allusion to Plato had especial significance for Cicero as well, since the Aeduan Druid Diviciacus had stayed with him in 61 B.C.E.[20]

By weaving parts of the *Phaedrus* into his digression on the Druids, Caesar shows himself to be as well-versed as Cicero, *Platonis aemulus* (Quint. *Inst*. 10.123; cf. Quintus Cicero, *Comment. pet.* 46), in the dialogue the latter had most recently chosen for his model. This kind of acknowledgement, challenge and one-upmanship ties in neatly with a perhaps lifelong shared interest and rivalry in *intellectual* matters that more often than not led to disagreements.[21] But there may be more: Cicero, who would write about learning from Diviciacus of the Druids' prophetic powers,[22] would have remembered too that Plato mentions a prophetic oak tree in that very passage (*Phdr.* 275b5–8): οἱ … ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Δωδωναίου ἱερῷ **δρυὸς** λόγους ἔφησαν μαντικοὺς πρώτους γενέσθαι. τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε … ἀπέχρη **δρυὸς** καὶ πέτρας ἀκούειν … 'Those at the shrine to Zeus in Dodona said that an oak's words were the first to be prophetic. To those men back then it sufficed to listen to an oak and a rock.' This is noteworthy because the Romans made an etymological connection between δρῦς and Druid, as Pliny shows (*HN* 16.249):

> nihil habent druidae (ita [Galli] suos appellant magos) uisco et arbore, in qua gignatur, … sacratius … ut inde appellati quoque interpretatione Graeca possint druidae uideri.

[17] I here mean 'intended' more literally and specifically than it was advanced by E. Wolf in his influential paper 'Der intendierte Leser. Überlegungen und Beispiele zur Einführung eines literaturwissenschaftlichen Begriffs', *Poetica* 4 (1971), 141–66.

[18] W. Görler, 'From Athens to Tusculum: gleaning the background of Cicero's *De oratore*', *Rhetorica* 6 (1988), 215–35, esp. 220. I have discussed the discursive function of this reference in C.B. Krebs, 'A seemingly artless conversation: Cicero's *De Legibus* (1.1–5)', *CPh* 104 (2009), 90–106, esp. 96–7.

[19] This argument was first proffered by G.L. Hendrickson, 'The *De analogia* of Julius Caesar; its occasion, nature, and date, with additional fragments', *CPh* 1 (1906), 97–120. Among more recent elaborations on that view, see first and foremost A. Garcea, *Caesar's De Analogia. Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 2012), esp. 78–113.

[20] As Cicero himself mentions in *De diuinatione* (1.90): *... in Gallia druidae sunt, e quibus ipse Diuitiacum Aeduum, hospitem tuum laudatoremque, cognoui* [*sc*. Quintus], *qui et naturae rationem, quam φυσιολογίαν Graeci appellant, notam esse sibi profitebatur* …. Caesar mentions him earlier in his digression (*BGall.* 6.12.5): *qua necessitate adductus Diuiciacus auxili petendi causa Romam ad senatum profectus infecta re redierat*.

[21] I am hoping to offer a wider discussion of Caesar and Cicero's intellectual differences, entitled 'A sibling rivalry?' (forthcoming).

[22] Cic. *Inu. rhet.* 1.90 *qui et naturae rationem quam φυσιολογίαν Graeci appellant notam esse sibi profitebatur et partim auguriis, partim coniectura, quae essent futura dicebat*.

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The Druids (as the Gauls call their magicians) consider nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree bearing it … so that it may be supposed that it is from there that they received their name, from the Greek word meaning 'oak'.[23]

Whether or not Lucan alludes to this connection (*Dryadae ... nemora alta remotis incolitis lucis*, 1.451–4), his late antique scholiast certainly knew (*Comment. Lucan.* 1.453) that 'the Druids are the philosophers among the Gauls, named after trees, as they inhabit remote woods' (*sunt autem druidae philosophi Gallorum* ***dicti ab arboribus****, quod semotos lucos incolant*). And so, I should like to suggest, did Caesar; and Cicero.

For Caesar trusted that a reference in his portrait of Druids to a canonical text wherein prophetic oak trees figured would not be lost on Cicero; more, he may have hoped that his intellectual peer would appreciate the sophisticated play. It is then easy to see why, despite their fundamental political disagreement, Cicero would, after a visit of the dictator in 45, exclaim (*Att.* 13.52) 'that a visitor of mine could be so onerous and yet not disagreeable' (*o hospitem mihi tam grauem ἀμεταμέλητον!*). For he and his onerous guest had 'talked about nothing serious but literary matters aplenty' (*σπουδαῖον οὐδὲν in sermone, φιλόλογα multa*). Perhaps the *Phaedrus* was among the topics they discussed.[24]

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[23] This may be right: 'The second element of this compound is the root of the verb *weyd- "see, know" (Skt. *Véda*, etc.). The first element is presumably PIE *derw-, *dru- "oak", which metaphorically also meant "strong, firm". *dru-wid- is therefore the priest with "strong insight"', in: R. Matasovic, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, http://dictionaries.brillonline.com.

[24] I wish to thank Andrea Nightingale and Richard Martin (both Stanford University) for helpful discussion of individual points and especially Tony Woodman (UVA) for comments on an earlier draft. I am also indebted to audiences at the University of Texas at Austin, Boston University, University of Virginia and UC Davis, and to the participants in Stanford's second Historiography Jam in April 2017 as well as Brandon Bark (Stanford) for help with the proofs.

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