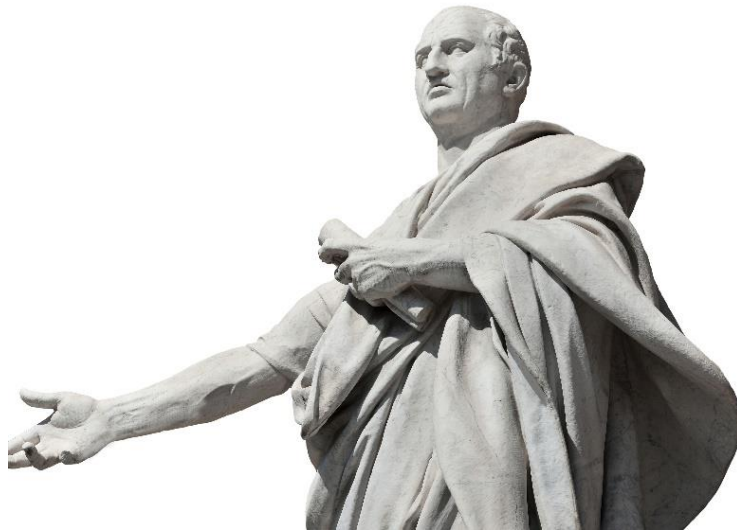


# BELLARIA LXXIII



## CICERO EPISTULAEI

### Introduction

Cicero was born a Roman citizen in 106 BC into a wealthy family in Arpinum (about 70 miles east of Rome), with connections in Rome (citizenship was bestowed on all Italians only after the Social War of 90-88 BC). When Cicero was about ten, his father moved to Rome and Cicero was educated there in the skills of public oratory with a view to career in law and politics. He served briefly in the army.

In this period the Roman republic was in trouble. Dynasts such as Marius, Cinna and Sulla with private armies at their back were fighting it out for personal power. Sulla claimed to have restored the republic, and retired from power in 79 BC. Cicero's career proper now began. His voice soon gave out, and for that and other reasons he took a three-year sabbatical in Greece and Asia Minor. In 76 BC he returned to Rome and began his climb up the slippery pole to the consulship in 64 BC, which he gained as a *nouus homo* ('new man', i.e. no previous member of his family had been consul).

Catiline was a candidate for that position, and in 63 BC launched a dangerous *coup d'état* in the name of the poor and dispossessed. Cicero claimed the credit for his defeat and boasted about it ever after, but was not popular with the poor and because he ordered the execution, without trial, of five of the conspirators, he lay himself open to a charge of illegality. This was to haunt him for many years.

In this famous and toe-curling letter, Cicero (now no longer the force he once was because of the rise of Pompey, Caesar and Crassus) asks the historian Lucius Luceius to give him a special place in the history of recent events that Lucius was writing. The letter rather brings out some of the worst features of Cicero's character but also gives fascinating insights into what Romans thought popular history should be all about—not very different from today either, though minus the sex.

April 55 BC

TO LUCIUS LUCCEIUS

From Cumae

[*ad fam.* 5.12]

Note: the occasional use of the royal 'we', 'our'.

### Your work inspires me to hope you will glorify me



Though I have often tried to say to you personally what I am about to write, a certain awkward shyness prevented me: but, now in your absence, I shall put my cards brazenly on table: a letter does not blush. I am inflamed with an inconceivably ardent desire, nor, as I think, one to be ashamed of, that my name should gain lustre and celebrity through your works.

And though you have often shown me that you will do so, yet I hope you will pardon my impatience. For the style of your composition, though I had always entertained the highest expectations of it, has yet surpassed my hopes, and has taken such a hold upon me, or so fired my imagination, that I was eager as quickly as possible to have my achievements put on record in your history.

*coram me tecum eadem haec agere saepe conantem deterruit pudor quidam paene subrusticus, quae nunc expromam absens audacius: epistula enim non erubescit. ardeo cupiditate incredibili neque, ut ego arbitror, reprehendenda, nomen ut nostrum scriptis illustretur et celebretur tuis.*

*quod etsi mihi saepe ostendisti te esse facturum, tamen ignoscas uelim huic festinationi meae; genus enim scriptorum tuorum, etsi erat semper a me uehementer expectatum, tamen uicit opinionem meam, meque ita uel cepit uel incendit, ut cuperem quam celerrime res nostras monumentis commendari tuis.*

I know you are busy, but I long for immortality and your assessment of my achievements



For not only the thought of being spoken of by future ages makes me snatch at what seems a hope of immortality, but it is also the desire of fully enjoying in my lifetime an authoritative expression of your judgment, or a token of your kindness for me, or the charm of your genius. Not, however, that while thus writing I am

unaware under what heavy burdens you are labouring in the portion of history you have undertaken, and by this time have begun to write ... Yet, after all, a man who has once passed the border-line of modesty had better put a bold face on it and be frankly impudent.

*neque enim me solum commemoratio posteritatis ad spem quandam immortalitatis rapit, sed etiam illa cupiditas, ut uel auctoritate testimonii tui uel indicio beneuolentiae uel suauitate ingenii, uiui perfruamur. neque tamen, haec cum scribebam, eram nescius, quantis oneribus premerere susceptarum rerum et iam institutarum ... sed tamen, qui semel uerecundiae fines transierit, eum bene et nauiter oportet esse impudentem.*

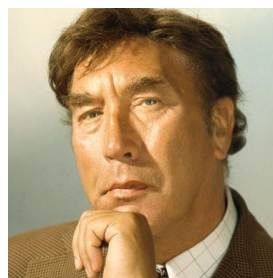
**Do not hesitate to overstate the importance of my actions**



And so I again and again ask you outright, both to praise those actions of mine in warmer terms than you perhaps feel, and in that respect to neglect the laws of history. I ask you, too, in regard to the personal predilection, on which you wrote in a certain introductory chapter in the most gratifying and explicit terms — and by which you show that you were as incapable of being diverted by Pleasure as Xenophon's Hercules was—not to go against it, but to yield to your affection for me a little more than truth shall justify.

*itaque te plane etiam atque etiam rogo, ut et ornes ea uehementius etiam, quam fortasse sentis, et in eo leges historiae negligas gratiamque illam, de qua suauissime quodam in prooemio scripsisti—a qua te flecti non magis potuisse demonstras quam Herculem Xenophontium illum a Voluptate—eam, si me tibi uehementius commendabit, ne aspernere, amorique nostro plusculum etiam, quam concedet ueritas, largiare.*

**My story is worthy of your genius, your understanding of history, your judgement of rights and wrongs and awareness of the attacks made against me**



But if I can induce you to undertake this, you will have, I am persuaded, matter worthy of your genius and your wealth of language. For from the beginning of the conspiracy to my return from exile, it appears to me that a moderate-sized

monograph might be composed, in which you will, on the one hand, be able to utilize your special knowledge of civil disturbances, either in unravelling the causes of the revolution or in proposing remedies for evils, blaming meanwhile what you think deserves denunciation, and establishing the righteousness of what you approve by explaining the principles on which they rest. And on the other hand, if you think it right to be more outspoken (as you generally do), you will bring out the perfidy, intrigues, and treachery of many people towards me.

*quod si te adducemus, ut hoc suscipias, erit, ut mihi persuadeo, materies digna facultate et copia tua. a principio enim coniurationis usque ad reditum nostrum, uidetur mihi modicum quoddam corpus confici posse, in quo et illa poteris uti ciuiliū commutationum scientia uel in explicandis causis rerum nouarum uel in remediis incommodorum, cum et reprehendes ea, quae uituperanda duces, et, quae placebunt, exponendis rationibus comprobabis. et, si liberius, ut consuesti, agendum putabis, multorum in nos perfidiam, insidias, proditorem notabis.*

### Readers adore changes of circumstance and fortune



For my vicissitudes will supply you in your composition with much variety, which has in itself a kind of charm, capable of taking a strong hold on the imagination of readers, when you are the writer. For nothing is better fitted to interest a reader than variety of circumstance and vicissitudes of fortune, which, though not welcome to us in actual experience, will make very pleasant reading: for the untroubled recollection of a past sorrow has a charm of its own.

*multam etiam casus nostri uarietatem tibi in scribendo suppeditabunt plenam cuiusdam uoluptatis, quae uehementer animos hominum in legendo tuo scripto retinere possit; nihil est enim aptius ad delectationem lectoris quam temporum uarietates fortunaeque uicissitudines: quae etsi nobis optabiles in experiendo non fuerunt, in legendo tamen erunt iucundae: habet enim praeteriti doloris secreta recordatio delectationem.*

### There is great pleasure in reading of the misfortunes of great men



To the rest of the world, indeed, who have had no trouble themselves, and who look upon the misfortunes of others without any suffering of their own, the feeling of pity is itself a source of pleasure. For what man of us is not delighted, though feeling a certain compassion too, with the death-scene of Epaminondas at Mantinea? He, you know, did not allow the javelin to be drawn from his body until he had been told, in answer to his question, that his shield was safe, so that in spite of the agony of his wound he died calmly and with glory. Whose interest is not roused and sustained by the banishment and return of Themistocles?

*ceteris uero nulla perfunctis propria molestia, casus autem alienos sine ullo dolore intuentibus etiam ipsa misericordia est iucunda. quem enim nostrum ille moriens apud Mantineam Epaminondas non cum quadam miseratione delectat? qui tum denique sibi euelli iubet spiculum, posteaquam ei percontanti dictum est clipeum esse saluum, ut etiam in uulneris dolore aequo animo cum laude moreretur. cuius studium in legendo non erectum Themistocli fuga redituque retinetur?*

**People are fascinated by their fluctuating fortunes and glorious deaths**



Truly the mere chronological record of the annals has very little charm for us—little more than the entries in the *fasti*: but the doubtful and varied fortunes of a man, frequently of eminent character, involve feelings of wonder, suspense, joy, sorrow, hope, fear: if these fortunes are crowned with a glorious death, the imagination is satisfied with the most fascinating delight which reading can give.

*etenim ordo ipse annalium mediocriter nos retinet quasi enumeratione fastorum: at uiri saepe excellentis ancipites uariique casus habent admirationem expectationem, laetitiam molestiam, spem timorem; si uero exitu notabili concluduntur, expletur animus iucundissima lectionis uoluptate.*

**Consequently, my own 'drama' is worth special treatment set apart from your main historical narrative: I long to be complimented by *you*.**



Therefore it will be more in accordance with my wishes if you come to the decision to set apart from the *main* body of your narrative, in which you embrace events in

their historical sequence, what I may call the drama of *my* actions and fortunes: for it includes varied 'acts', and shifting scenes both of policy and circumstance.

Nor am I afraid of appearing to be angling for your favour by flattering suggestions, when I declare that I desire to be complimented and mentioned with praise by you above all other writers. For you are not a man who does not know his own worth, and you do not consider those to be sycophants who praise you rather than the envious who do not.

*quo mihi acciderit optatius, si in hac sententia fueris, ut a continentibus tuis scriptis, in quibus perpetuam rerum gestarum historiam complecteris, secernas hanc quasi fabulam rerum euentorumque nostrorum; habet enim uarios actus mutationesque et consiliorum et temporum.*

*ac non uereor, ne assentatiuncula quadam aucupari tuam gratiam uidear, cum hoc demonstrum, me a te potissimum ornari celebrarique uelle; neque enim tu is es, qui, qui sis, nescias et qui non eos magis, qui te non admirentur, inuidos quam eos, qui laudent, assentatores arbitrere.*

**I am confident you too will win glory from your praise of me**



Nor, again, am I so senseless as to wish to be consecrated to an eternity of fame by one who, in so consecrating me, does not also gain for himself the glory which rightfully belongs to genius. For the famous Alexander himself did not wish to be painted by Apelles, and to have his statue made by Lysippus above all others, merely from personal favour to them, but because he thought that their art would be a glory at once to them and to himself ...

*neque autem ego sum ita demens, ut me sempiternae gloriae per eum commendari uelim, qui non ipse quoque in me commendando propriam ingenii gloriam consequatur. neque enim Alexander ille gratiae causa ab Apelle potissimum pingi et a Lysippo fingi uolebat, sed quod illorum artem cum ipsis, tum etiam sibi gloriae fore putabat...*

**Your own reputation can only enhance mine**



And, moreover, it will more redound to my present exultation and the honour of my memory if I find my way into your history, than if I had done so into that of others, in this, that I shall profit not only by the genius of the writer as Timoleon did by that of Timaeus, Themistocles by that of Herodotus—but also by the authority of a man of a most illustrious and well-established character, and one well known and of the first repute for his conduct in the most important and weighty matters of state—so that I shall seem to have gained not only the fame which Alexander on his visit to Sigeum said had been bestowed on Achilles by Homer, but also the weighty testimony of a great and illustrious man; for I like that saying of Hector in Naevius, who not only rejoices that ‘he is praised’, but adds, and ‘by one who has himself been praised’.

*atque hoc praestantius mihi fuerit et ad laetitiam animi et ad memoriae dignitatem, si in tua scripta peruenero, quam si in ceterorum, quod non ingenium mihi solum suppeditatum fuerit tuum—sicut Timoleonti a Timaeo aut ab Herodoto Themistocli—sed etiam auctoritas clarissimi et spectatissimi uiri et in rei publicae maximis grauissimisque causis cogniti atque in primis probati—ut mihi non solum praeconium, quod, cum in Sigeum uenisset, Alexander ab Homero Achilli tributum esse dixit, sed etiam graue testimonium impertitum clari hominis magnique uideatur; placet enim Hector ille mihi Naeuianus, qui non tantum ‘laudari’ se laetatur, sed addit etiam ‘a laudato uiro.’*

I really do not want to have to write my own panegyric



But if I fail to obtain my request from you, which is equivalent to saying, if you are by some means prevented—for I hold it to be out of the question that you would refuse a request of mine—I shall perhaps be forced to do what certain persons have often found fault with, write my own panegyric, a thing, after all, which has a precedent of many illustrious men.

*quod si a te non impetraro, hoc est, si quae te res impedierit—neque enim fas esse arbitror quidquam me rogantem abs te non impetrare—cogar fortasse facere, quod nonnulli saepe reprehendunt: scribam ipse de me, multorum tamen exemplo et clarorum uirorum.*

*[But there are many drawbacks to doing this]*

I am impatient for men to know of my achievements—and for me to enjoy them while I can



And why, you may well ask, when you have already often assured me that you intended to record in your book with the utmost minuteness the policy and events of my consulship, do I now make this request to you with such earnestness and in so many words? The reason is to be found in that burning desire, of which I spoke at the beginning of my letter, for something prompt: because I am in a flutter of impatience, both that men should learn what I am from your books, while I am still alive, and that I may myself in my lifetime have the full enjoyment of my little bit of glory.

*ac, ne forte mirere, cur, cum mihi saepe ostenderis te accuratissime nostrorum temporum consilia atque euentus litteris mandaturum, a te id nunc tanto opere et tam multis uerbis petamus, illa nos cupiditas incendit, de qua initio scripsi, festinationis, quod alacres animo sumus, ut et ceteri uiuentibus nobis ex libris tuis nos cognoscant et nosmet ipsi uiui gloriola nostra perfruamur.*

**Please tell me what you intend**



What you intend doing on this subject I should like you to write me word, if not troublesome to you. For if you do undertake the subject, I will put together some notes of all occurrences: but if you put me off to some future time, I will talk the matter over with you. Meanwhile, do not relax your efforts, and thoroughly polish what you have already on the stocks, and continue to love me.

*his de rebus quid acturus sis, si tibi non est molestum, rescribas mihi uelim; si enim suscipis causam, conficiam commentarios rerum omnium, sin autem differs me in tempus aliud, coram tecum loquar. tu interea non cessabis et ea, quae habes instituta, perpolies nosque diliges.*

As far as we know, Lucius never did write up Cicero's achievements, though Cicero does tell us in letter to his close friend Atticus that he had sent Lucius the *commentarii* that he mentions here.

**Next week:** Pompey.