

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Caesar in Elsinore and Elsewhere: Topicality and Roman History

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As Lisa Hopkins argues in *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage*, a spate of thematic correspondences between Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* lend weight to the idea that the historical narrative of the Julio-Claudian dynasty provides a frame through which English audiences would have understood the trials of the Danish court both in *Hamlet* and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹ Correspondences of this kind might also make it reasonable to expect that there may be something sustained and deliberate in the way in which the Julio-Claudian dynasty provides a referential anchor for the presentation of more topical material throughout Shakespeare's career. This paper will consider the uses of the Caesars by focusing on Julius Caesar, chiefly on the basis that the coincidence of this name enabled Shakespeare's company to make a series of thinly-veiled references to the prominent lawyer and eventual Chancellor of the Exchequer who also bore this name. Sir Julius Caesar—he was among those who were knighted by James *en route* to London in 1603²—was, I contend, a perfect target for topical treatment by the players: his name could be mentioned explicitly via reference to the historical Caesar, with no more than a choice phrase needed to then cue a topical reference for the play's Elizabethan or Jacobean audiences. Given the coincidence in name, there is surely merit in speculation over which of the myriad references to the historical Caesar might also be read as a reference to Sir Julius, but my goal is to go

¹ Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), pp. 35-45.

² To aid the reader in distinguishing between figures, I will use 'Sir Julius' throughout to refer to Julius Caesar Adelmare, the Elizabethan and Jacobean figure, and either 'Julius Caesar' or 'Caesar' to refer as appropriate to both the historical Roman Emperor and representations of him in Elizabethan and Jacobean stage plays.

beyond the sort of ‘political lock-picking’ that David Bevington rightly set out to counter nearly five decades ago.³ If, as Bevington noted, topical references can be unlocked today, then they would certainly have been identified by Elizabeth and her court, where such lock-picking is known to have taken place. In addition to pointing out the topical references in a play, we must attempt to account for why they would be countenanced in the first place. This is a question of their *use*. I will attempt here to unpack topical material with a view to offering a plausible account of the utility of references to Sir Julius given that all such references also explicitly entail a configuration of the mythography of ancient Rome.

Topical reading assumes that the reference is sufficiently well-known at the time for it to be understood as such by its immediate audience. Sir Julius was certainly a man of no small importance: his father, Caesar Adelmare,⁴ had been physician to Elizabeth, and Sir Julius was throughout his own life to acquire numerous high offices. Born in 1557, he became a ward of the Lord High Treasurer, William Cecil, following Adelmare senior’s death in 1568.⁵ Later, Cecil and Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, helped him to gain quick preferment. He gained his Doctorate in Law from the University of Paris in 1581, and was immediately made a commissioner responsible for controlling piracy, then appointed as the High Judge of the Court of the Admiralty in accelerated fashion in 1584, before becoming the Master of the Chancery in 1588 and Master of the Court of Requests in 1595. He was appointed Chancellor and Under Treasurer of the Exchequer by James in 1606, holding that post until 1614, before being appointed Master of the Rolls directly afterwards. His career is marked by a pattern in which, as Lamar Hill has explained, Sir Julius ‘sought a place for which he was not seen to be fully qualified, he tried to turn out an incumbent, he employed the good offices of powerful patrons, and he willingly ventured a great deal of money.’⁶ This adventurous approach with money manifested in him a propensity for pursuing his share of returns too aggressively in the opinions of others. Hill’s biography of Sir Julius is filled with accounts of the squabbles between him and other prominent figures, usually over money, and even records Sir Julius’s own complaints about the visits he received from

³ David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 9.

⁴ Adelmare is commonly referred to as Caesar, which is the form he adopted upon gaining his naturalization in 1558, although his given name was Cesare. Adelmare’s decision to adopt the name of Caesar meant that his son Julius would be inheriting ‘a royal nickname rather than adopting an imperial namesake’—William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 128.

⁵ Lamar Hill, *Bench and Bureaucracy: The Public Career of Sir Julius Caesar, 1580-1636* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 3-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

the Queen, since such visits demanded the outlay of a gift, which he claimed was unlikely to ever be returned to him via direct financial reward in spite of the several preferments he received—it was common knowledge after 12 September 1598, for example, that during the Queen’s visit to Caesar’s estate at Mitcham, he had identified himself in his supplication as ‘the eldest judge, the youngest and the poorest’, in reference to his frequent pleas regarding financial hardship.⁷

One public squabble is particularly relevant: George Carey, who in 1595 was a privateer and Vice Admiral of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, became embroiled in a bitter dispute with Sir Julius after the latter began bypassing the Lord Admiral’s collector, William Hardie, instead seeking moneys directly from those privateers whose ships sailed into the purview of the Thames; during early 1595, Carey was asked by Sir Julius to directly remit to him one of the payments owed from a shipment, but Carey refused, and the matter was escalated to the Lord Admiral, who attempted to calm the situation by agreeing to let Carey pay him instead. As it happened, before Carey’s payment could be made to the Lord Admiral, Sir Julius took it upon himself to bypass the Lord Admiral altogether and withdrew his share directly from the coffers of the High Court of the Admiralty, using his judicial authority to do so.⁸ Carey was not at all pleased with the judge’s conduct in this case, as Hill records: ‘Carey’s pride was at stake, and he wanted to save face by dealing only with the Lord Admiral.’⁹ A little more than a year later, Carey would acquire the patronage of The Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Sir Julius would also bring public ridicule upon his Court of Requests after the 1598 publication of *The Ancient State Authoritie, and Proceedings of the Court of Requests*, in which he complained that judges sitting with the Common Pleas and Queen’s Bench were undermining his Court’s authority, causing his court to be treated as ‘a general and public disgrace among the vulgar sort.’¹⁰ Consequently, the Court of Requests came to be known as the ‘Poor Man’s Court’.

The public profile and reputation of Sir Julius explain an explicit topical reference in *Edward IV*, usually attributed to Thomas Heywood, and which I think establishes a baseline account of how topical references to this figure were used by others. In this play, a character is designated the ‘Master of St. Katherine’s’, who appears on stage only in the final scene to be what Richard Rowland has called ‘the unwitting killjoy whose excessive deference brings the king’s “merry pastime” with the tanner to a

⁷ Ibid, pp. 93-4.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 24-5.

⁹ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁰ Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 72-3.

premature end.’¹¹ The Master speaks but one line—‘All health and happiness to my sovereign’ (23.73)—but it is enough to kill the mood, leaving Edward to declare, ‘The Master of St. Katherine’s hath marred all’ (23.74). Since 1582, the commissary to the Master of St. Katharine’s by the Tower, an 11-acre housing precinct for the poor and infirm, was none other than Sir Julius, and in 1596, he acquired the full Mastership, having pursued it vigorously with the Queen for almost a decade. Yet as Rowland points out, the Master of St. Katharine’s was the specific title of the individual responsible for the care of the inhabitants of St. Katharine’s Tower, whereas the officer more chiefly responsible for management of the precinct as a whole was the Crown appointed judiciary officer, which in this case was Sir Julius, and the wider public understood that this person was the ‘Master’ of the St. Katharine’s precinct.¹² This point is necessary if *1 Edward IV* was first staged before 1596—after which Sir Julius becomes the Master of St. Katharine’s by title as well as by dint of responsibility. The date is difficult to secure, but there is a clue, given that both the entry for the title in the Stationer’s Register for 28 August 1599 and the 1600 Quarto’s title page state it had been lately acted by ‘the Earle of Derby his seruants’—Lord Strange’s Men operated briefly under Derby’s name from September, 1593, until the creation of The Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1594.¹³ Since this company ceased to function under Derby’s name by April, 1594, it is thought by some that Heywood’s play must have been on stage by late 1593 or early 1594.¹⁴

What is even less clear is why a reference to a ‘Master of St. Katherine’s’ is here at all, let alone to function as the killjoy. Rather than preparing for any appearance at the Winter Courts towards the end of 1593, Derby’s Men performed from October through December in Leicester and Coventry, and appeared in Ipswich in March 1594.¹⁵ After the formation of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, a new company performed under the sixth Earl of Derby’s name sporadically in the provinces from September 1594 to 16 October 1599.¹⁶ They are finally recorded as appearing at Court during February, 1600 and January, 1601. These dates and locations are important because from 1593 to the end of 1599, by which time *1 Edward IV* appears in the Stationer’s Register as a

¹¹ Richard Rowland, *Thomas Heywood’s Theatre, 1599-1639: Locations, Translations, and Conflict* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 59.

¹² *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. by Richard Rowland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 199.

¹³ Rowland, *Edward IV*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3

¹⁵ Edmund K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), II p. 120; and Terence G. Schoone-Jongen, *Shakespeare’s Companies: William Shakespeare’s Early Career and the Acting Companies, 1577-1594* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 67.

¹⁶ Chambers, pp. 126-27.

Derby's Men's play, no company with this name performed within the vicinity of London, where a reference to the Master of St. Katharine's would have the greatest topical currency. Whether the play belongs to the Derby's Men who would become The Lord Chamberlain's Men or to the subsequent group of players who took on Derby's name may thus be inconsequential, but I confess to being inclined toward the latter since 1593 is earlier than we normally presume Heywood to have been writing, given that he was most likely studying at Cambridge University until the same year.¹⁷ I suggest part of the difficulty here is not so much the topicality of the St. Katharine's precinct; rather, it is the relative fame from 1593 to 1599 of the figure on whom the one-line barb is based. As the list of his achievements demonstrates, by 1593, the 'Master' of the St. Katharine's precinct was also widely known as the person in charge of the Chancery, the Court of the Admiralty, and the commissioner for piracy causes, as well as being among other things a twice elected Member of Parliament, and treasurer of the Inner Temple. That the 'Master' speaks but one deferential line is significant, I suggest, since it could be understood as a poke at Sir Julius's well-known penchant for currying favor, and his role as a killjoy being in line with his habit of making public complaint but also with his official duties as a member of the judiciary. It is to the Hobs—the bailiff—after all, that the line about him having 'marred all' is given.

The same reputation may well help us to situate Sir Julius as a likely target for some of the earliest references to Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's plays, which brings us to a question of the use of Rome within topical readings. In all three of the *Henry VI* plays, there are direct references to the historical Caesar: even in his earliest attempts at dramatic reconfigurations of the chronicles of English monarchs, Shakespeare was using Imperial Rome as a referential anchor. In *3 Henry VI*, both Henry and Margaret invoke Caesar at a time of lament: Henry, reflecting upon his losses, declares 'No bending knee will call thee Caesar now' (3.1.18),¹⁸ and Margaret bewails the loss of her son by comparing his murderers to 'They that stabbed Caesar' (5.5.52). By comparing their fortunes to those of the historical Caesar, in both cases the royals establish more than an analogous link; they also speak to the idea of an imperial lineage connecting the rulers of Britain to Imperial Rome. Indeed, Andrew Hadfield has argued in *Shakespeare and Republicanism* that the first tetralogy represents Shakespeare's version of the civil war narrative encapsulated in Lucan's epic *Pharsalia*, with the History plays reflecting

¹⁷ Tanya Pollard (ed.), *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook* (Malden, Massachusetts, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 213.

¹⁸ All references to Shakespeare's plays are from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

the demise of Caesar in the rise to power of the Tudors.¹⁹ Yet we might go further by pointing out that the notion of a Tudor lineage that dates to Imperial Rome also gives it historical precedence before Papal Rome. As Hopkins points out, the valence of the Caesars for Elizabethan rule and even more so for Jacobean rule was a reaction to the sense that the historical authority of Rome had been dispersed in one direction to the Papacy and in another direction to Ottoman Emperors and Russian Czars: ‘England itself laid increasingly embattled claim to be the only true inheritor of the cultural authority of Rome via the Brutus myth and the idea of the *translatio imperii*.’²⁰ At the same time that the *Henry VI* plays align English rule with Caesar’s Roman rule, they place emphasis on his defeat and, ‘by analogy, with the fragmentation and instability of centres of power.’²¹

There are six references to Caesar’s name in the *Henry VI* plays, two in each of the three parts, and all are dispersed among different characters and are given in the context of a description of the loss of power or life. Yet in one of these references, I think it is possible to identify a gesture toward Sir Julius. In *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk bemoans his imminent demise: ‘Brutus’ bastard hand / Stabbed Julius Caesar; savage islanders / Pompey the Great; and Suffolk dies by pirates’ (4.1.138-40). The reference would ring false in any historical sense for audience members familiar with the well-told story of the execution of Suffolk in 1450, having boarded one of Henry’s own warships only to find the captain of the ship, the Duke of Exeter, declare him a traitor—a mock trial ensued, ending with Suffolk’s execution. In Shakespeare’s play, he is to be killed by pirates. It is unlikely that the change was made because of any sensitivity over the name of Exeter: the title had been forfeited in 1461, and the disgraced Exeter left no male heir to his estate upon his own untimely demise at sea in 1475—more than a century later, the playwright had no fear of reprisal from an unflattering portrayal of Exeter. Yet a reference to pirates, soon after a reference to Julius Caesar, might have rung loud in the ear of any Elizabethan as a reference to Sir Julius and his role at the time in policing piracy—it was a task he pursued vigorously for seven years, albeit often in conflict with the Privy Council and the Queen herself, whose treasury was relatively well served by profits obtained from English privateers.²² A triumph of pirates in Shakespeare’s play is aligned by analogy with the historical Caesar’s death while at the same time being conceivably imagined as the failure of the authorities to police piracy at the time when

¹⁹ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 103-29.

²⁰ Hopkins, p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

²² Amanda J. Snyder, *The Politics of Piracy: Pirates, Privateers, and the Government of Elizabeth I, 1558-1588*. Thesis. (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2006), pp. 62-7.

Sir Julius had been in charge of this activity. Exeter's absence from Shakespeare's version of events is perhaps doubly suspicious when we recall that the Duke of Exeter had also been the Constable of the Tower of London and it is further matter of historical record that Suffolk met his end on the Nicholas of the Tower.²³ The district of St. Katharine's is called 'by the Tower' because of its close proximity to the Tower of London, so it might be expected that any intended topical reference would require the inclusion of some more explicit reference to the Tower. Yet Exeter's role needs to be excised in order to develop the reference to piracy, which more directly references Sir Julius.

In both *Richard II* and *Richard III*, references are made to the Tower of London in direct connection with the Roman Caesar: in *Richard III*, upon being told that he shall be restricted to 'the Tower', Prince Edward replies 'I do not like the Tower of any place—/ Did Julius Caesar build that place, my Lord?' (3.1.68-9), prompting a discussion that lends to him his resolve to win France again; and in *Richard II*, as Kristen Deiter points out, the deposition of Richard is moved from the Tower, where it historically took place, to Westminster Hall, so that at the end of the same scene the order can be dramatically given for him to be *conveyed to* 'Julius Caesar's ill-erected Tower' (5.1.2).²⁴ Deiter comments on the significance of both the connection and the treatment of it in the latter play: 'It would have generated interest in London audiences to see that, as opposed to the royal ideology, the Tower's association with Caesar was insufficient to legitimate the monarch.'²⁵ Opportunities to dismiss the connection between the historical Caesar and the current monarchy could also be easily tooled to dismiss the legitimate authority of Sir Julius, whose pursuit of the title at St. Katharine's may be seen in the light of the already established pattern in his career of pursuing authority through titles rather than through legitimate use of office. Indeed, in *Richard III*, the discussion that follows Edward's question about the origins of the Tower leads Richard to say, 'Without characters fame lives long' (3.1.81), to which Edward responds, 'That Julius Caesar was a famous man' (84). The pronominal 'that' used by Edward suggests a more immediate figure with the same name but who is not self-evidently a 'famous man,' perhaps due to his very public pursuit of characters.

Each of the references upon which I have touched to this point is likely to have been in use before the dispute between Carey and Sir Julius—my sense is that Shakespeare's

²³ Nigel Jones, *Tower: An Epic History of the Tower of London* (New York: Random House, 2011), pp. 93-95.

²⁴ Kristen Deiter, *The Tower of London in English Renaissance Drama: Icon of Opposition* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 65-6.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 66.

plays were being constructed at the time in the light of a broad-reaching figuration of the Caesars within a representational mode in which, as Hopkins shows, ‘they could so readily be used to figure contemporary English rulers’ on the English stage.²⁶ The coincidence of the name of Sir Julius also gave itself to moments of occasional topical mirth. The motivation to ramp up these topical references is increased, I suggest, when Carey becomes the company’s patron in 1596. *The Merchant of Venice* is likely the first play written for their new patron, and a play that lampoons Sir Julius seems designed for the patron’s pleasure in the light of their dispute. In *Merchant*, there is of course no specific reference to the Roman Caesar so its references to Sir Julius must be understood directly, without recourse to the refigurations of Rome through the contemporary political scene. Maxine McKay has demonstrated that Portia’s arguments echo the debate over the authority of the courts of equity,²⁷ wherein her moralistic reasoning fails legal standards that would have been required at the courts of law. We may add that the Court of Requests quickly became known for the moralistic pseudo-legal judgements being made by Sir Julius in support of the female complainants whose pleas were often heard there, after he began presiding over common pleas in 1595.²⁸ Moreover, in the story of the Venetian merchant Antonio’s pursuit of justice against Shylock, there may be resonances of a situation in 1596 in which Sir Julius’s stepfather, Michael Lok, pursued George Dorrington in Venice for an unpaid shipping tax, precipitating a crisis of diplomatic relations upon which Elizabeth asked Sir Julius himself to intercede.²⁹

Merchant may not have pleased, but not perhaps for any failure of the topical attacks on Sir Julius to amuse the company’s new patron. I have noted elsewhere that this play, which was mentioned in 1598 by Francis Meres as one of Shakespeare’s finest comedies, and was registered to James Roberts in the same year, remained subsequently out of print for more than two years—I suggest that events in Venice in 1598 involving the attempts by Anthony Shirley to secure trade agreements on behalf of the Earl of Essex rendered Shakespeare’s depictions of a merchant of Venice more politically sensitive than at the time of its initial performances.³⁰ Space prevents me from reiterating this argument in full, but it may suffice here to point out that the players were routinely mindful of the risks associated with linking their fictions too explicitly to the

²⁶ Hopkins, p. 6.

²⁷ Maxine MacKay, ‘*The Merchant of Venice*: A Reflection of the Early Conflict Between Courts of Law and Courts of Equity,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.4 (1964), 371-75.

²⁸ Laurie Johnson, *The Tain of Hamlet* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 254-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁰ For detailed study of the connections between these events, see *ibid.*, pp. 125-35.

volatile politics of the day. In the Histories written during this time—the remaining three parts of the second tetralogy—there is a sustained attempt to develop more fully the referential field in which Roman history is yoked to the narrative of the rise of the House of Lancaster.³¹ Curiously, these three plays provide just two references to Caesar by name: Pistol’s comparison of packhorses with Caesars, cannibals, and Trojans in 2 *Henry IV* (2.4.160-164); and, in *Henry V*, the Chorus’s comparison of ‘conqu’ring Caesar’ with Harry (5.0.28). A range of additional figures from the Caesar story are referenced in *Henry V*—Brutus, Antony, and a host of other Romans—enabling Henry to register by negative comparison as a Christian Englishman.³² Neither of the Caesar references need be read in this context as topically connected to Sir Julius. The reluctance to use the name of Caesar might even be read in the context of the controversy surrounding the use of the name of Sir John Oldcastle in *1 Henry IV*—in 1596, William Brooke succeeded Henry Carey as Lord Chamberlain, with George Carey inheriting only the title of Baron Hunsdon and, of course, a playing company; and Brooke, who was related to Oldcastle, seems to have been chiefly responsible for having the name changed to Falstaff by no later than the middle of 1597.³³

In the popular *Merry Wives of Windsor*, we might see an opportune grab at reclaiming the topical edge that had been compromised in the *Henriad*. Brooke’s death in March, 1597, enabled Carey to finally acquire the office of Lord Chamberlain, and he was accepted into the Order of the Garter in April of the same year, leading many scholars to suppose that the play was written specifically to commemorate the occasion.³⁴ Shakespeare certainly seems content to have used Brooke’s name as the alias that Master Ford adopts in *Merry Wives*, and I think we may see a potential topical reference to Sir Julius in the Host foolishly lauding Falstaff early in the play by calling him ‘an emperor: Caesar, kaiser, and pheezer’ (1.3.9), in mocking salutation of the great triumvirate of Caesar, Kaiser, and Vizier. It is this latter triumvirate that is offered by the editors of the Arden 3 edition as a correction from the Quarto text of *Merry Wives*,³⁵ but I might add here that ‘pheeze’ had already been used by Shakespeare in *Taming of the Shrew* and would later appear in *Troilus and Cressida*, with the vague meaning listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a threat related to being able to ‘do for’ or

³¹ Hopkins, pp. 65-66.

³² Hopkins, p. 66.

³³ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7; Charles Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 73-5.

³⁴ See, for example, Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p. 97.

³⁵ Hopkins, p. 56n4.

‘settle the business of’ a matter with somebody³⁶—it is not hard to imagine the specific ‘Caesar’ to whom this meaning of ‘pheazer’ is likely to have applied after 1595, especially in this play written in celebration of the patron’s newest achievements. If *Merry Wives* represented the cautious return to the use of Caesar’s name to provide a topical dig at Sir Julius, another play from before the end of the century must represent the boldest expansion on the same strategy: I refer, of course, to *Julius Caesar*.

Some scholars have argued that *Julius Caesar* was the first play performed—or at least the first intended for performance—at the newly constructed Globe Theatre in 1599: Steve Sohmer, in particular, presents evidence based on the current concerns at the time about the adoption in Europe of the Gregorian calendar, usurping the Julian calendar.³⁷ We might thus view the entire play as an extended exercise in rendering classical history topical in the most immediate sense of the term; perhaps, that is, as an occasional play. By 1598, as we already noted, Sir Julius had presided over the Court of Requests for several years and had published his complaint, appealing to the ancient authority of the State he saw bestowed upon him and his Court. Knowing that such a prominent but much derided figure bore the same name as the assassinated figure at the core of this play, and recollecting the public dispute in which Carey had been embroiled with Sir Julius, it is difficult to imagine that audience members would be deaf to the potential for any of the numerous barbs directed at Caesar to also sound as jibes at the judge who presided over their ‘Poor Man’s Court.’ The first scene concerns itself with the admonition of the commoners by Flavius and Murellus for rejoicing in Caesar’s triumph, and ‘all the poor men of your sort’ (1.1.57) are ordered to abandon their celebrations. Thereafter, much is made of the question of Caesar’s ambition—on no fewer than fourteen occasions, the word ‘ambition’ or ‘ambitious’ is used to describe Caesar and to justify the assassination: as Brutus says plainly, ‘as he was ambitious, I slew him’ (3.2.26-7). Even Antony’s reasoned observation that Caesar ‘did thrice refuse’ the offer of the crown (3.2.98) has already been countered by Casca’s description of the sham theatricality of the same occasion in Act 1, Scene 2. Further, in Act 2, Scene 1, Brutus’s ‘abuse of greatness’ speech hinges on a reference to the ‘common proof / That lowliness is young ambition’s ladder,’ (2.1.21-2) with the proviso that the ambitious man, upon attaining success, will turn his back, ‘scorning the base

³⁶ *OED*, ‘feeze, v.3a’

³⁷ Steve Sohmer, *Shakespeare’s Mystery Play: The Opening of the Globe Theatre, 1599* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); see also, for example, James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005). The reader may further wish to consider arguments that I have offered about the Lord Chamberlain’s Men making architectural links between their theatre and the *Theatrum Marcelli* of Ancient Rome, with particular reference to Caesar: *Tain*, pp. 238-41.

degrees / By which he did ascend' (26-7). The ambitious Sir Julius, whose recent disputes over the threat posed by the common law courts to his own authority had prompted the publication of a complaint, would surely signify as topical here.

The potential for this play to reference Sir Julius might also be considered in the context of the enigmatic lines that Ben Jonson reported as evidence of Shakespeare having definitely 'blotted out line' despite the insistence by his fellow players that this was not the case—in his *Timber, or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter*, Jonson claimed:

*His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter: as when he said in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him: 'Caesar thou dost me wrong.' He replied: 'Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause;' and such like, which were ridiculous.*³⁸

Space precludes a fuller account of the several hundred years' worth of critical debate over this comment,³⁹ except to note that disputes have waged over the prospect that Jonson offers a deliberate misquotation or else Shakespeare (or somebody) amended these lines prior to the publication of the Folio, in which they read 'Know Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied.'⁴⁰ While scholars have focused on the content of Caesar's words in the different versions presented here, the interlocutor reported by Jonson—'Caesar thou dost me wrong'—is also removed in the Folio: nobody says this line or anything like it in the scene in question. Instead, Caesar attends on the plea of Metellus that his brother Publius might have his banishment repealed—Caesar rejects these pleas, declaring that 'These couchings and these lowly courtesies / Might fire the blood of ordinary men / And turn preordinance and first decree / Into the law of children' (3.1.36-9). As we have seen, Sir Julius, who was made Master of Requests Ordinary at the Court in 1595, was in fact predisposed to pass judgments for 'couchings' of this kind. The Folio omits 'just cause' from Jonson's reported words, but it also omits the complainant for whom Caesar 'dost me wrong.' I wonder if the players, having presented the lines in this form in 1599 or thereafter, were persuaded to remove

³⁸ Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter* (1640), ed. by Felix E. Schelling (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1892), p. 23.

³⁹ See, most recently, Graham Watts, *Shakespeare's Authentic Performance Texts: The Case for Staging from the First Folio* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), p. 58; or for a fuller summary of past discussions, see John Dover Wilson's, 'Ben Jonson and *Julius Caesar*,' *Shakespeare Survey* 2 (1966), 36-43.

⁴⁰ The editors of the *Oxford Shakespeare* follow a longstanding tradition, established by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1766, of rendering this line in somewhat conflated form as 'Know Caesar doth not wrong but with just cause, / Nor without cause will he be satisfied' (3.1.47-48). On the history of this conflation argument, see Wilson, pp. 39-41.

the initial complaint in order to not draw explicit attention to any individual, such as their patron, to whom Sir Julius had been perceived to have done some wrong—in its place they present only Caesar’s rant against the ‘low-crooked court’sies’ (3.1.43) with which Metellus presents ‘his suit to Caesar’ (28), an echo perhaps of the published complaint of Sir Julius.

According to Hopkins, *Hamlet* retains the historical links to the treatment of the Julio-Claudian dynasty developed most fully up to that time in *Julius Caesar*—she points out that ‘For all its setting in Elsinore, *Hamlet* as a whole could be said to be more interested in antique Romans than in Danes,’⁴¹ given the preponderance of Latinate names in the text and overt references both to Roman history and to plays of the period about Roman history, including Shakespeare’s own Caesar play: as Polonius declares, ‘I did enact Julius Caesar, I was killed i’th’ Capitol’ (3.2.99-100). For Hopkins, *Hamlet* marks ‘a moment of cultural transition’ in which the pattern of representing the English monarchy through Roman history ‘begins to acquire its full valency,’ partly because it deals with the looming Jacobean succession in its Julio-Claudian references, but mainly also because it ‘draws on its many allusions to late Elizabethan Roman plays (including *Julius Caesar*) to stage a contest between modes of representation ... which activates an analogous debate about whether drama should have a political function.’⁴² Our question here is whether this metatheatrical treatment of Caesar at Elsinore could include any topical treatment of Sir Julius as part of its extended allegorical frame. The ‘To be or not to be’ speech begins with a series of abstracted binaries, but in the latter portions of the speech Hamlet addresses specific forms of grievances against persons—who, he asks, would bear the oppressor’s wrong, the ‘poor man’s contumely,’⁴³ the law’s delay, the insolence of office, and such like, ‘When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin’ (3.1.70-5). The insolence of office and merit of the unworthy could of course refer to Claudius, but why the reference to the law’s delay, when the play has made no issue of a delay in law? The opposite applied as Hamlet was unable to contest the election because of the speed with which Claudius secured the crown. The word ‘bodkin’ provides a crucial clue here: among the sources from which the term might previously have been known, the most famous include Chaucer’s *Monk’s Tale* and John Lydgate’s translation of *The Fall of Princes*, both of which describe Julius Caesar as

⁴¹ Hopkins, p. 36.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁴³ The Folio gives the line as ‘poor man’s contumely,’ whereas the Second Quarto had offered ‘proud man’s contumely.’ As was the case with the supposedly misreported lines from *Julius Caesar*, the Folio seems to be strengthening the topical potential of lines in dispute.

being assassinated with a bodkin.⁴⁴ Just as ‘bodkin’ may cue the more knowledgeable members of the audience to recognise a Caesar reference here, ‘the poor man’s contumely’ and ‘law’s delay’ can easily be read in the light of what we have already discussed as a reference to Sir Julius and his complaint of 1598.

Another topical reference to Sir Julius can be located, I suggest, in Act 4, Scene 6, in the letter by which Horatio learns that Hamlet has made his way back to Elsinore. The mention of the pirates might well be enough to cue a reference to Sir Julius, as we have seen, but the letter goes further, to point out that Hamlet has agreed to ‘do a good turn’ (4.6.20-21) for these pirates, and that the sailors who bring his message to Horatio should gain direct passage to the King—this somewhat innocuous set of instructions hinges, of course, on the pirates and sailors having unmediated access to powerbrokers at court; no mention is made of obligations to intermediaries or payment collectors. In this sense, Sir Julius is brought to mind by pirates but his authority is elided by the removal of the need for the mediating office he filled in the Court of the Admiralty—the same authority Carey had felt he overreached in their dispute of 1595. Sir Julius may also be seen as a viable target for the mock legal discussion undertaken by the clowns in Act 5, Scene 1, wherein the uneducated gravediggers mimic the rhetoric of a lawyer: ‘It must be *se offendendo*’; ‘argal, she drown’d herself’; ‘Nay, but hear you, goodman delver’; ‘Mark you that’; ‘But is this law?’; and so on (5.1.9-21). If the clowns do not convey fully enough this mockery of the law, Hamlet himself follows soon after: he intimates that the first skull tossed from the grave may be a politician, a courtier or even ‘Lady Worm,’ but that the next (and therefore one that lay beneath the first) may be that of a lawyer—‘Where be his quiddits now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?’ (5.1.96-7). The deceased lawyer is also considered to have been, in his time, ‘a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries’ (5.1.101-3), in what could be a general attack on the profession but also certainly well suits the reputation of Sir Julius when it came to titles, lands, and money. Yet if the reference to Sir Julius remains lost on its audience, Hamlet makes the potential reference more explicit, shortly thereafter, when Caesar is mentioned by name for the third and last time in the play, in what amounts to little more than a fart joke: ‘Imperious Caesar, dead and turn’d to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away’ (5.1.208-9).

Similarly, in *Measure for Measure*, Escalus compares himself with the historical Caesar

⁴⁴ See Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor’s editor’s gloss from the Arden 3 edition of *Hamlet* (London: Arden, 2006), p. 286; and *OED*, ‘bodkin, 1.’ For a detailed examination of Shakespeare’s debt to Chaucer here, see Seth Lerer and Deanne Williams, ‘What Chaucer Did to Shakespeare: Books and Bodkins in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*,’ *Shakespeare* 8.4 (2012), 398-410.

in his first exchange with Pompey (2.1.238), and then passes judgements at will while his counterpart Justice is kept silent but for a brief exchange with Escalus at the end of the scene. The message here seems clear enough: Escalus, as Caesar, silences justice. Furthermore, as the arrest of the suitably-named Pompey for being a ‘whoremaster’ is being carried out in Act 3, Lucio enters to deliver these telling lines: ‘How now, noble Pompey! What, at the wheels of Caesar? Art thou led in triumph? What, is there none of Pygmalion’s images newly made woman to be had now, for putting the hand in the pocket and extracting clutched?’ (3.1.311-15)—the image of the historical Caesar’s triumph is here recast as the fate of a womaniser, a matter also for the Court of Requests. The same connection may be identified in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Octavius comments on perjury and ‘law’ when he is describing women’s weaknesses to Thidius (3.12.29-33). References are easily found in *Antony and Cleopatra* to Sir Julius’s financial habits, his commission on piracy, his methods of gaining preferment, and his legal practices. The play gives a pivotal role to Octavius Caesar and, as such, he is named as Caesar on no fewer than 159 occasions. Potential references to Sir Julius include Octavius’s reactions to the news of the pirates in Act 1, Scene 4, or in numerous jibes—in this vein, consider Pompey’s ‘Caesar gets money / Where he loses hearts’ (2.1.13-14) or his ‘Julius Caesar / Grew fat with feasting there’ (2.6.65-6); Enobarbus’s ‘high-battled Caesar / Will unstate his happiness’, ‘men’s judgements are / A parcel of their fortunes’ (3.13.28-31), or ‘Knowing all measures, the full Caesar will / Answer his emptiness! Caesar, thou hast subdued / His judgement, too!’ (34-6); several gripes by Antony, such as ‘the wheeled seat / Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded / His baseness that ensued’ (4.15.75-7); Cleopatra’s ‘Nor th’imperious show / Of the full-fortuned Caesar ever shall / Be brooched with me, if knife, drugs, serpents, have / Edge, sting or operation. I am safe.’ (4.16.24-7) or ‘’Tis paltry to be Caesar / Not being Fortune, he’s but Fortune’s knave, / A minister of her will’ (5.2.2-4); and even Decretas’s ‘He is dead, Caesar: / Not by a public minister of justice’ (5.1.19-20). Perhaps the last word on Caesar in the play is rightly given to Cleopatra, whose ‘O, couldst thou speak, / That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied!’ (5.2.301-3) has prompted debates over whether the representation of Octavius is ultimately positive or negative, and whether Cleopatra, in death, gains the upper hand by bringing any schemes he had been pursuing to nought.⁴⁵ The word ‘unpolicied’ has been read as a reference to Octavius’s plans for Cleopatra, but the word more correctly refers to being not politically or socially organised,⁴⁶ and so the connection of this word to the name of the evidently well-placed Sir Julius would be particularly damning.

⁴⁵ See Robert P. Kalmey, ‘Shakespeare’s Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History,’ *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 18.2 (Spring, 1978), 275-87; and Richard A. Levin, ‘That I Might Hear Thee Call Great Caesar “Ass Unpolicied”,’ *Papers on Language and Literature* 33.3 (Summer, 1997), 244-64.

⁴⁶ *OED*, ‘policied’; ‘unpolicied’

I hope, then, to have demonstrated that Shakespeare's use of the Caesars enabled his company to develop a pattern of mockery of Sir Julius over the bulk of his career. Further evidence for this may be found, however, from there being a period during which references to Caesar vanish from his plays. Caesar's name appears in half of all Shakespeare's plays and we scarcely find any run of two or three plays without reference to Caesar being made, but it is absent from those plays that scholars normally date from late 1606 to 1610: the company's repertory in this interval includes *Pericles*, *Coriolanus*, *Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, none of which contain even a passing reference to the name of Caesar. If we want to find a reason for this hiatus, we need to look no further, I suggest, than the fact that on 3 July, 1606, Sir Julius was appointed Chancellor and Under Treasurer of the Exchequer by James.⁴⁷ As Sybil Jack has shown, the office of the Exchequer has been mistakenly understood as a principally financial one, whereas in common practice it was understood since the time of Henry VII to be a primarily legal institution.⁴⁸ John Currin has also noted that the role of the Exchequer fulfilled the domestic accountancy role of balancing the treasury books, such that its legal reach was defined by this function alone.⁴⁹ Yet as Lamar Hill points out, in his first year in office, Sir Julius made a number of changes to protect himself against any perception of impropriety, the curious result being that the Under Treasurer momentarily acquired a level of authority over the King's Treasury that paralleled that of the Lord High Treasurer.⁵⁰ His mind was soon set on how best to serve the King by sufficiently furnishing the Treasury with the funds it required to cover the monarch's own responsibilities—Sir Julius himself wrote in a letter of 9 June, 1607, 'how can the kings majesty pay that which he owes when that which is owing is unpaid?'⁵¹ He set himself to resolving this by aggressively pursuing debt collection and policies to enhance revenue. It must have become patently apparent to all who had previously been involved with Sir Julius in any squabble over money, that this new role gave him very much the upper hand. I think it is no coincidence that in the four years after he gained this position, the name he shared with the Roman Emperor disappears from the repertory of Shakespeare's company.

By the end of 1610, though, Shakespeare wrote a play that contains 12 references to the historical Caesar and, I suggest, uses these to develop a complex series of topical

⁴⁷ Hill, pp. 119, 282n20.

⁴⁸ Sybil M. Jack, 'In Search of the Custom of the Exchequer,' *Parergon* 11.2 (1993), 89-105.

⁴⁹ John M. Currin, "'Pro Expensus Ambassadorum': Diplomacy and Financial Administration in the Reign of Henry VII,' *The English Historical Review* 108.428 (1993), 589-609.

⁵⁰ Hill, pp. 126-30.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 283n43.

references to contemporary events in which Sir Julius had been embroiled. Unlike the earlier pattern that covered the plays up to 1606, in which references to Caesar enabled the players to mock Sir Julius, *Cymbeline* offered tribute to him in a number of ways.⁵² Caesar's success at the end of the play in securing the anachronistic tribute of 'three thousand pounds' (3.1.9), in spite of his military defeat, enables the play to recognise the efforts of Sir Julius in securing with the Earl of Salisbury, Robert Cecil, a proposal known as The Great Contract, which would remove the complicated and outdated feudal rights system and allow fixed annual payments to be made directly to the Treasury from each of the realm's provincial parliaments.⁵³ This ending has been a focus for critical debates over whether Cymbeline's capitulation to Rome is a negative or positive commentary on James's relations with Rome and his reluctance to police the Oath of Allegiance he had instigated in 1606.⁵⁴ We might add that Sir Julius had played a small but significant role in an incident arising from the ongoing dispute over the Oath after it attracted vitriolic responses from the Pope and Cardinal Bellarmine. James had written *A Premonition to Christian Princes* in response to Bellarmine in 1609, but when the English Ambassador to Venice, Henry Wotton, presented a copy of the book to the Duke at the palace, it was at first received with a smile before being immediately suppressed.⁵⁵ Wotton resigned, but James accepted the exigencies of the situation and asked Caesar to intercede with Lord Salisbury to maintain good relations with Venice. If Shakespeare's audiences might miss the reference to James's *Premonition*, the play adds additional clues: when the Italian Giacomo is seducing Innogen, he refers to her touch as being able to 'force the feeler's soul / To th'oath of loyalty' (1.6.102-3) and opposes it to 'falsehood,' a word he reinforces immediately—'falsehood as with labour' (1.6.108-9). James's *Premonition* protests at Bellarmine accusing him seven times of using 'falsehood' in instituting the Oath of Allegiance.⁵⁶

Further to this, while describing the death of Christ at the hands of the Romans, James concludes nevertheless that 'he could not be a friend to *Caesar*, that was not his

⁵² More detailed discussion of this play in connection with the recent events in the life of Sir Julius—including the loss of two of his adult children—is offered in Laurie Johnson, "'To pay our wonted tribute,'" or Topical Specificity in *Cymbeline*,' in *The British World: Religion, Memory, Society, Culture*, ed. by Marcus K. Harmes, Lindsay Henderson, Barbara Harmes, and Amy Antonio (Conference Proceedings, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, 2012), 129-40.

⁵³ Hill, pp. 150-81.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Donna B. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp. 128-62.

⁵⁵ Logan Pearsall Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 100-07.

⁵⁶ King James I, *The Political Works of James I*, ed. by Charles Howard McIlwain (Union, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2002), p. 115.

enemie'⁵⁷ and, in Shakespeare's play, *Cymbeline* is described in terms of this same contradiction: at the start of Act 3, Lucius declares he is sorry that he must pronounce 'Caesar, that hath more kings his servants than / Thyself domestic officers—thine enemy' (3.1.63-4). By the end of the play, *Cymbeline* wins the conflict but submits to Caesar, both friend and enemy in equal measure. In an analogous move, the play also submits at last to the very Caesar to whom the players had routinely been belligerent in the past, but to whom they now offered tribute in the form of topical references that enable him to be aligned both with the Roman Emperor to whom *Cymbeline* pays tribute as well as to the ancient British monarch on whose legend the story is anachronistically based. This late play represents the last time that Caesar would be mentioned by Shakespeare, and I suggest that in its positive topical references to Sir Julius it seeks to close the account on the company's past history of mocking mistreatment of him and his name. In doing so, it demonstrates perhaps with more perfect clarity than earlier examples the capacity of the playwright to interweave ancient Roman history, contemporary politics, and non-monarchical topical subject matter, even as it breaks the pattern of lampoonery that had characterized all prior examples. Shakespeare's last use of Caesar thus represented the pinnacle of this historical-topical approach. Yet the potential for topical currency to be made from the name of Julius Caesar did not end with Shakespeare—as we opened with an account of a non-Shakespearean play, we may bookend the discussion of Sir Julius by recalling a tale recounted by Edward Earl of Clarendon in *The history of the rebellion and the civil wars in England*.⁵⁸ Clarendon observes that in 1628 Sir Julius had asked the Lord Treasurer to give a vacancy to his son Robert Caesar; the Treasurer, upon being reminded of this sometime later asked that he be given a note to help him remember it when he could attend to the matter: on the note, the Earl of Tullibardine simply wrote, 'Remember Caesar'. Upon reading the note several days later, the Lord Treasurer concluded that a plot was being hatched upon his life and set his household to defences. Once the mistake was realised, great mirth ensued; and in the name of Caesar, once again, Sir Julius found his own ambitions becoming the source of a story that invited ridicule.

⁵⁷ James, p. 131.

⁵⁸ Edward Earl of Clarendon, *The history of the rebellion and the civil wars in England* (1641: Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1826), pp. 91-5.