

‘To pay our wonted tribute,’ or Topical Specificity in *Cymbeline*

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Introduction

Shakespeare scholarship habitually scorns topical readings if perhaps for no other reason, as Leah Marcus observed in *Puzzling Shakespeare*,² than because it is also a staple of anti-Stratfordian claims that the Earl of Oxford or some other author wrote Shakespeare’s plays. Nevertheless, the late plays are also invariably read as Shakespeare’s topical homage to his king and patron, James Stuart. It was taken as given by many critics writing at around the same time, and indeed by Marcus herself, that the division of the kingdoms that confronts King Lear is a commentary on James’s own project for union, *circa* 1606.³ Along the same lines, the later *Cymbeline* (1610) is frequently seen as a portrayal of issues tied to British national identity in keeping with the campaign to imagine Jacobean rule as the union of the previously disparate monarchies of England, Scotland, and Wales. The largest portion of the ‘James’ section of *Puzzling Shakespeare* attends to a reading of *Cymbeline* as topical in 1610 to the extent that it presents both ‘a partial analogue and prefiguration’ of Jacobean Britain,⁴ while Willy Maley has examined the potential for the play’s Roman connections to engage with debates being held at that time in Parliament over the nomenclature of ‘Great Britain’: ‘What we are presented with in *Cymbeline* is a Union Jack in the box ... cloudily wrapped in a *rapprochement* between Britain and Rome.’⁵ Huw Griffiths has examined the distributions of geographical markers in the play to show that ‘Britain’ is constructed as a geopolitical reality in distinction from Wales and Rome in *Cymbeline*, whereas naming of this kind was relatively absent from *King Lear*,⁶ and Ros King’s extensive study, *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain*, provides readings of the play’s relevance to British national identity formations from the Jacobean period to the twenty-first century.⁷ In all these topical readings of *Cymbeline*, in particular, the focus is on what we might call ‘big-picture topicality,’ given the coverage of issues of nationhood, political union, and kingship writ

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² Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp.34-35.

³ See, for example, Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare’s Revision of King Lear* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (eds), *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of King Lear* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, pp.148-56; and Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.106-108.

⁴ Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p.125.

⁵ Willy Maley, ‘Postcolonial Shakespeare: British Identity Formation and *Cymbeline*,’ in *Shakespeare’s Late Plays: New Readings* (eds Jennifer Richards and Richard Knowles), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.145-57; esp. 148-49.

⁶ Huw Griffiths, ‘The Geographies of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*,’ *English Literary Renaissance* 34, 3 (2000), pp.339-58.

⁷ Ros King, *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

large. Demonstrating that the late plays are typically Jacobean does, of course, aid in undermining the Oxfordian argument—Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, died in June, 1604—but it also means that the analysis of topicality in the play stops short of identifying more precise historical analogues. This essay argues that one immediately relevant analogue can be found in a prominent figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean politics: Sir (he was knighted by James in 1603) Julius Caesar. I contend that some features of the play can be seen to oscillate between the big-picture topical references to British union and a more localised concern with rendering account for a number of personal conflicts in which the players and their patrons had been embroiled with Caesar.

British history and British fortunes

Certainly, no other Shakespeare play is so concerned with the fortunes of 'Britain' even though it is something of an anachronous subject of the play—the historical Cunobelinus was ruler only of a group of tribes around Hertfordshire in Southern England and it is the Roman biographer Suetonius who gives to him the designation 'Britannorum Rex' (King of Britain) seventy years after his death.⁸ Yet Britain as it is portrayed in *Cymbeline* is not Shakespeare's creation: Shakespeare's debts to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Raphael Holinshed, chroniclers of British history, are slight but noteworthy. Monmouth anglicized the monarch's name to be Kymbelinus and gave the names of his sons as Guiderius and Arviragus,⁹ and Holinshed only changed the Latin name formation to give the monarch's name as Kymbeline.¹⁰ Shakespeare may have owed greater debts in the construction of *Cymbeline*'s Britain to the iconography of the savages of the New World initially generated by Theodore de Bry and later adapted by John Speed in 1611 to illustrate contrasts between barbaric pre-Cunobeline Picts and civilised Britons.¹¹ As Richard Hingley has shown, William Camden's series of editions of *Britannia* (1586 onwards) and John Clapham's *The Historie of Great Britannie* (1606) had drawn on a discovery of Cunobeline coins as the basis for the historiographical re-imagining of the reign of Cunobelinus as the dawn of civilised Britain. Speed's twin volumes *The Historie of Great Britaine* and *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (1611) appropriate de Bry's images as illustrations of the rise of civilised

⁸ Martin Millett, *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 21.

⁹ J.A. Giles (ed.) *The British History of Geoffrey of Monmouth in Twelve Books* (trans. A. Thomson), (London, 1842), vol.IV, pp.11-12, 75.

¹⁰ Yet he retains the Latin formations for Guiderius and Arviragus. Walter George Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: The Chronicle and the Historical Plays Compared*, 2nd edn (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), p.10.

¹¹ Richard Hingley, *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: A Colony So Fertile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 29-52.

Britain, linked to historical maps of the locations of the peoples of the British isles. Hingley lists *Cymbeline* as a 1611 play, enabling him to situate Speed as a source for Shakespeare, but even if we date *Cymbeline* to 1610, therefore before Speed, Hingley's observations about the climate of opinion in which *Cymbeline* was written remain valid.¹² The Britons as depicted in *Cymbeline* repeatedly find themselves conflicted between their savage heredity and their newly Roman heritage. Yet there remain parts of the play that cannot be traced either to old history or contemporary iconography: the storyline in which Belarius steals Cymbeline's two sons is, for example, missing from any of the play's sources. Indeed, even the depiction of Cymbeline as a monarch who is declared the enemy of Rome over the matter of the unpaid annual tribute of three thousand pounds, is apocryphal. Both Monmouth's and Holinshed's Kymbelinus maintained peaceful relations with Rome; his successor Guiderius was personally responsible for withholding the annual tribute and led the resistance against the resulting Roman invasion. Such changes should alert us to questions of motive: if the play serves to blend topical immediacy with historical source materials, what purpose is served by changing the source materials? I proceed here from the assumption that one reason to change received history is to foreground a more contemporary or topical point of reference.

Sir Julius Caesar and his critics

Critical debates about the play's depiction of British relations with Rome c.1610 focus rightly on the question of whether Cymbeline's capitulation to Rome is a negative or positive commentary on James's relations with Rome and his reluctance to more vigorously police the Oath of Allegiance that he had instigated in 1606.¹³ The Oath had attracted vitriolic responses from both the Pope and Cardinal Bellarmine, and James penned *A Premonition to Christian Princes*, his response to the latter, in 1609. It is difficult to reconcile Cymbeline's submission to Rome with James's steadfast opposition, but I will show here that the Elizabethan Caesar represents a topical reference point through which Shakespeare manages the link between the *Premonition* and Cymbeline's final decision to 'pay our wonted tribute' (5.6.463)¹⁴ to Rome. Before I do this, it is important first to consider why the Elizabethan Julius Caesar should be a target for topical references c.1610. One answer to

¹² Hingley adds John Fletcher's *Bonduca* (1609) and a range of official documents and letters to support a claim that Camden's re-imagining of Cunobeline rule as the dawn of Britain had gained substantial purchase by 1609. Hingley, *Recovery*, p.44.

¹³ See, for example, Donna B. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp.128-62.

¹⁴ All references to Shakespeare plays are from John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

this question is this: because he had been consistently a target for topical material in plays performed by Shakespeare's company for at least seventeen years. As early as late in 1593, an obvious topical reference to Caesar, then Master of St Katherine's home for the infirm, was included in the play of *1 Edward IV* written by Thomas Heywood and performed by The Earl of Derby's Men. The play includes the character named as the Master of St. Katherine's, who is then derided at the end for being a killjoy who brings the entertainment to a close, which Richard Rowland identifies as a cue for Elizabethan audiences to identify this figure with the contemporary Caesar.¹⁵ Although it is not known for certain whether Shakespeare was a member of this company (an incarnation of Lord Strange's Men, and of which most of the personnel formed The Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594), there are many scholars who argue that this is the case.¹⁶ In any case, even if Shakespeare was not a member of the company that produced a jibe at Caesar in a Heywood play of 1593, we can be more certain that Shakespeare is directly involved in the production of a play which, in 1596, conspicuously makes a derogatory topical reference to this figure: *The Merchant of Venice*.

Similar mocking gestures can be found in both *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* (1599).¹⁷ The decision to perform a play about the assassination of Julius Caesar in the initial repertory at the newly opened Globe Theatre is easily read on these terms alone as a nod and a wink in the direction of the Elizabethan Caesar: *Totus mundus agit histrionem*, indeed.¹⁸ Polonius draws the audience's attention to the same historical event and the play in which it is enacted when he informs Hamlet that he acted as Julius Caesar and was 'killed i'th' Capitoll. Brutus killed me' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.99-100). Polonius's death reinforces the reference, and possibly adds a further level of sinister mockery in the direction of the figure that bears the same name as the assassinated Roman Emperor. Hamlet himself provides a potentially cryptic reference to the mixed successes in the career advancement of the Elizabethan

¹⁵ Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV: By Thomas Heywood* (ed. Richard Rowland), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.199.

¹⁶ See, for example, Heywood, *Edward IV*, 2; Robert E. Burkhart, 'Finding Shakespeare's "Lost Years",' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, 1 (1978), pp.77-79; Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), pp.30-50; Terence G. Schoone-Jongen, *Shakespeare's Companies: William Shakespeare's Early Career and the Acting Companies, 1577-1594* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), pp.173-77.

¹⁷ The dates of both plays are held to be in dispute by some scholars, but I am persuaded by the arguments for both plays to have been among those planned for initial production at the new Globe Theatre in 1599. See, for example, Steve Sohmer, '12 June 1599: Opening Day at Shakespeare's Globe,' *Early Modern Literary Studies* 3, 1 (1997), pp.1-46; James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), pp.284-320.

¹⁸ 'The whole world plays the player,' held by convention to have been the Latin motto of the Globe Theatre. For a detailed historical examination of the likelihood of this having actually been the case, see Tiffany Stern, 'Was *Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem* Ever the Motto of the Globe Theatre?' *Theatre Notebook* 51 (1997), pp.122-27.

Caesar at this time. In what is now arguably the most famous Shakespearean soliloquy of them all, Hamlet asks ‘To be or not to be?’ before contemplating the range of tribulations that ‘the whips and scorns of time’ might inflict upon a person, including ‘the proud man’s contumely,’ ‘the law’s delay,’ and ‘the insolence of office’ (3.1.58-75). The reference a few lines later to a ‘bare bodkin’ is, as it happens, also a potential reference to the historical Caesar: among the sources from which the playwright might have taken the term ‘bodkin’, two of the most famous are Chaucer’s ‘Monk’s Tale’ and John Lydgate’s translation of *The Fall of Princes*, both of which describe the manner in which Caesar was assassinated as being with bodkins.¹⁹ Hamlet’s tribulations can easily be read as referring to other characters in the play—‘disprized love’ for Ophelia, ‘merit of th’unworthy’ and ‘the insolence of office’ for Claudius, for example. Yet we might wonder why there is a reference to the law’s delay, when no part of the play until this point has made an issue of any delay in law? Indeed, the very opposite applied with Hamlet being denied the opportunity to contest the election because of the speed with which Claudius was able to secure the crown. The ‘poor man’s contumely’ may seem equally out of place in the concerns of the Prince, but to the ears of the Elizabethan, *circa* 1599, it would have resonated with perfect clarity the ridicule that Caesar had brought upon his own Court of Requests after the publication in 1598 of his *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 had undermined his Court’s authority, such that Requests had come to be viewed as ‘a general and public disgrace among the vulgar sort.’²⁰ The ‘Poor Man’s Court,’ as Caesar’s Court came to be popularly known, was not helped by his eager protestations, and Hamlet’s observations about the ‘poor man’s contumely’ and the law’s delay would have pointed in this context straight to Caesar’s recent complaints.

Without going into other plays in any detail, it is not hard to imagine similar topical use is made of Caesar’s name in subsequent plays. In *Measure for Measure* (1603), for example, we find Escalus, who compares himself with the historical Caesar by name in his first exchange with Pompey (2.1.238), passing judgements willy-nilly while his counterpart, named Justice, is kept silent throughout the play but for the briefest exchange with Escalus at the end of the same scene. *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) uses Octavius Caesar as a pivotal figure and he is named as Caesar on 159 occasions—the name of Caesar appears more often in this play, in fact, than in the play that bears Julius Caesar’s name. Thus we might find

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Arden 3 edition (eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor), (London: Arden, 2006), n 286; *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘bodkin, n.1’.

²⁰ Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.72-73.

potential references to the Elizabethan Caesar in Octavius's handling of the messenger's news of the pirates in Act 1, Scene 4—Caesar having instituted new measures to clamp down on piracy during his time with the Admiralty—or in any number of jibes uttered about Caesar by the Egyptians in the play, or indeed in Caesar's own reference to perjury and 'law' when describing women's weaknesses to Thidius (3.12.29-33), which could lock in an association for the Elizabethan audience between Cleopatra and the women's business that frequently concerned the Court of Requests.²¹ If Shakespeare might have seemed to be peaking in his mockery of Caesar with this play, a significant change in circumstances took place in the same year. On 3 July, 1606, the Elizabethan Caesar was appointed by James as Chancellor and Under Treasurer of the Exchequer.²² This appointment made Caesar one of the most powerful figures in England, gaining direct authority over the finances of the realm. Caesar's appointment appears to coincide with a cessation in Shakespeare's use of the name in his plays. While the name of Caesar appears in half of all Shakespeare's plays, the name is absent from those that follow the appointment of Sir Julius Caesar to the Exchequer: the period from 1606 to 1610 saw the appearance in the repertory of The King's Men of *Pericles*, *Coriolanus*, *Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, none of which contain even passing reference to the name of Caesar. *Cymbeline* bookends this period and it marks the return to the use of the name Caesar in one of Shakespeare's plays: the name is used twelve times in reference to both Julius and Augustus Caesar.

Why did Shakespeare become topical?

If the play's references to Caesar signal the return to topical references to the Elizabethan Caesar, we must remain mindful of this hiatus in which five plays and the better part of four years passed without any such reference, since this hiatus speaks, perchance, to motive. Why, we might ask, would Shakespeare risk offence in this way, and why would the reference be considered topical c.1610? I want to begin answering this by looking back to 1608, when tragedy twice befell Caesar. From his first marriage, Caesar had fathered five children, three of whom died in infancy, the last of which also claimed Caesar's first wife, Dorcas, in 1595. By what may seem a twist of fate, he two surviving children were those that had been named after their mother and father. By 1608, then, his 24 year old daughter and his 20 year old son continued to preserve the lasting memory of his first marriage with

²¹ In at least one non-Shakespearean play of this period, the company presented the fall of Caesar in a manner that could be read as topical: as Roslyn Knutson has shown, the controversial *Sejanus* by Ben Jonson depicts an over-reaching Sejanus plotting the fall of Caesar in order to gain advancement. Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594-1613* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1991), p. 128.

²² Hill, *Bench*, pp.119, 282n20.

their names, Dorcas and Julius. In 1608, both of Caesar's adult children died, only a few months apart. Dorcas died of dropsy, but the events surrounding the death of Julius have an uncanny ring to them: he was a student in Padua and after being injured in a fencing contest, sought revenge on his opponent, attempting to shoot him with a pistol, before falling over and being run through; Caesar spent March and April of 1608 petitioning both the King and his ambassador in Venice to have his son's killer, Antonio Brochetta, tried for the murder. Echoes of *Merchant*, with a Venetian setting and its depiction of the pursuit of a debtor named Antonio, might have seemed eerily too close to the bone if Shakespeare was contemplating any return to the topical treatment of Caesar at this time. That *Merchant* had been revived for two performances at Court in 1605 should not be overlooked here: it was still in the active repertory of the King's Men, almost a decade after it had been written, up to a year before Caesar's appointment to the Exchequer.²³ Following this tragedy, throughout 1609, Caesar focused his activities on attempting with the Earl of Salisbury, Robert Cecil, to solve the problems of the finances of King James. Their combined efforts culminated in Cecil's proposal in February, 1610, of the Great Contract, an agreement that would see James relinquish all claims to moneys from the complicated and outdated feudal rights system in exchange for a single fixed annual payment from each of the realm's parliaments.²⁴ Debates about the Contract endured throughout the first half of 1610, with both James and the MPs threatening to abandon the proposal at different times, and only direct intervention by Caesar had enabled the topic to maintain any momentum beyond the summer recess, although we should remember that neither Caesar nor Cecil were in a position to implement them without parliamentary sanction.²⁵ The proposal was finally abandoned late in the year. Caesar had supported the proposal in session but he privately wrote that it did not go nearly far enough in securing sufficient revenue to enable James to govern effectively.

I argue here that the topicality of Caesar references in *Cymbeline*, written during 1610, hinge on the role that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had taken in brokering a peace, albeit unsuccessfully, for an agreement that would see annual payments made directly from provincial parliaments to the monarch of the realm. Yet I also think that the untimely demise of Caesar's two adult children in 1608 is present as a tragic memory to which the resolution of *Cymbeline* pays respect. It is not hard to imagine that the tribute of three

²³ James C. Bulman, *Shakespeare in Performance: The Merchant of Venice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p.13.

²⁴ Hill, *Bench*, pp.150-81.

²⁵ On Cecil and Caesar's collaboraton see John Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown: Finance under James VI and I, 1603-1625* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), p.80.

thousand pounds demanded by the long deceased Julius Caesar constitutes a none-too-sly wink at the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, not only in the sense that it addresses his well known habit of being outspoken on the matter of debts owing to him but also in the sense that his current job was overseeing the proper procedures of the court. John Currin has shown that the role of the Exchequer was delimited during the creation of the ‘chamber system’ by Henry VII, with the oversight of diplomatic expenditures devolving in informal fashion to the Privy Chamber, so the Exchequer assumed a more domestic accountancy role, balancing the treasury books.²⁶ If the role of the Chancellor of the Exchequer had remained unchanged by the eight men who held the position after the death of Henry VII, nevertheless, it is abundantly clear from the historical record that Caesar took it upon himself to reinvigorate the office: as Lamar Hill has shown, Caesar’s first year in office was spent coming to grips with the scale of the machinery of State over which he now presided, pursuing what changes he deemed necessary to protect himself against any perception of impropriety, but by the end of that first year in office, his mind turned to broader questions of his responsibility to the King; Caesar 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?’²⁷ His next years in the role are marked by the push for the Great Contract, of course, as well as a staggering amount of correspondence sent out from the Office of the Exchequer to press the King’s debtors into settling their debts.²⁸ To these same debtors, his correspondence as Chancellor and Under Treasurer must have seemed remarkably familiar; Hill notes that his earlier career was marked by a propensity for complaining about financial matters: ‘Caesar complained of financial difficulty at every turn—overworked, underpaid, expending his wealth in the queen’s service, losing an inheritance (so he said) for want of compensation.’²⁹ That Caesar’s pursuit of the debt continues to haunt subsequent generations of English monarchs and Roman Emperors in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* could be read as the hyperbolic inflation of this Elizabethan Caesar’s notorious persistence in fiscal affairs. In the play’s most telling paradox, Cymbeline is triumphant over Roman military forces yet cedes to Caesar the long unpaid tribute.

Yet if Shakespeare wants the ending of *Cymbeline* to represent the payment of an overdue tribute to the present Caesar, it is not enough, I suggest, for the tribute to be a representation of a financial settlement. Although hyperbolic, the representation will also be

²⁶ John M. Currin, “‘Pro Expensus Ambassadorum’: Diplomacy and Financial Administration in the Reign of Henry VII,” *The English Historical Review* 108, 428 (1993), pp.589-609.

²⁷ Hill, *Bench*, pp.126-30, 283, n43.

²⁸ Hill, *Bench*, pp.150-78.

²⁹ Hill, *Bench*, p.88.

reductive, in so far as it defines the figure simply as the *caricature* of a debt collector. In the happy return of Cymbeline's two sons, however, we may glimpse a presentation of a fantastic scenario that the Elizabethan Caesar might well have wished for after 1608. Having been stolen as infants by Belarius, Cymbeline's sons are renamed as Polydore and Cadwal. The second name may have been taken from an ancient king of a region of northern Wales known as Gwynedd (or Venedocia, as the Romans called it),³⁰ which may well be read as a reference to the fact that in 1610, James's son Henry was invested as Prince of Wales in an act that formally united the Scottish, English, and Welsh titles held by the heir to the English throne. The name Polydore seems only to refer to one of Raphael Holinshed's acknowledged sources for his *Chronicles*, the Italian historian Polydore Virgil, author of *Anglica Historia* (1534).³¹ Yet in the names that are invented for these two sons, I think we also see an echo of a gesture toward the Elizabethan Caesar's deceased daughter and wife (both of whom were named Dorcas), resonating in one half of each name: Poly-*dore* and *Cad*-wal. Furthermore, in the final scene in which Posthumus—whose name translates as 'after-death'—is spared from the gallows, Cymbeline's sons are resurrected: he thought them to have been dead for twenty years, but now they are returned. It is a fantasy of resurrection that Caesar himself would have dearly hoped to experience, and it is in this, I suggest that the play's final scene gives to Caesar overdue tribute by virtue of presenting to him the fantastic possibility of a return of the deceased.

Venice

There is one other major event of 1609 that is worth discussing here, and it is one in which Caesar played a small but significant role. I have already mentioned the political fallout that was current in 1609 from the publication of James's *Premonition*. One local expression of this fallout took place when the English Ambassador to Venice, Henry Wotton, presented a copy of the book to the Duke at the palace, who received the book smilingly but then had it immediately suppressed.³² Wotton ostensibly resigned in a fury, but James accepted the political reality of the Duke's reaction and asked Caesar to intercede with Lord Salisbury.³³ We should remember that ambassadors could not simply resign without the King's permission. The Venetian Ambassador to England was also a key to these negotiations. His name was Marc'Antonio Correr. Once again, Venice was a focus of Caesar's attentions, and

³⁰ Horace Howard Furness, jr.,(ed), *The Tragedie of Cymbeline: A New Variorum Edition* (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott & Company, 1913), p.3.

³¹ Furness, *Cymbeline*, p.3.

³² Logan Pearsall Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp.100-107.

³³ Pearsall Smith, *Life*, p.106.

once again, the name of an Antonio was pivotal. Such matters are purely coincidental, to be sure, but it is worth again reminding ourselves that if *Merchant* had once been written to mock Caesar, coincidences of this kind might have served to twist the dagger. In the events of 1609, though, the potential for mockery went beyond the personal life of the Elizabethan Caesar. Now, the names and locations reverberating with a potential for renewed topicality were contributing to a potential flashpoint in the ongoing and volatile relations between England and Rome over the Oath of Allegiance. Just as *Cymbeline* might have written back to Caesar in tribute, as an apology of sorts for previous topically constructed references in the plays from around 1596 to 1605, the depiction of Cymbeline's relations with Rome also addresses itself to Caesar's and, by further extension, James's dealings in 1609 with Rome. The precipitating factor compelling James to pen his *Premonition* was of course Bellarmine's refutations of the Oath of Allegiance, and I suggest that we can read the name of the outlawed Belarius as a play on Bellarmine's name, wherein the 'mine' in Bellarmine becomes the 'i + us' in Belarius, and the name he takes on in his exile, Morgan, means literally 'big mouth' from the early modern meanings of 'mor' and 'gan'.³⁴ Cymbeline's decision to pardon Belarius can be read along such lines as the escalation of Cymbeline's and therefore Britain's beneficence above that of Rome, or in the same chain of associations, of James's moral superiority over Bellarmine.

Lest Shakespeare's audiences for this play be unsure of the topicality of ongoing disputes over James's *Premonition*, the play adds an additional series of cues. One explicit reference is to be found when the Italian Giacomo is trying to seduce Innogen in the first Act: he refers to her touch as being able to 'force the feeler's soul / To th'oath of loyalty' (1.6.102-103) and he opposes it to 'falsehood,' a word he repeats immediately—'falsehood—falsehood as with labour' (1.6.108-109). In James's *Premonition*, he protests at Bellarmine accusing him seven times of using 'falsehood' in his document instituting the Oath of Allegiance.³⁵ Beyond this level of resonance, though, there is one way in which the play evokes the *Premonition* and at the same time offers a show of peace to the Elizabethan Caesar, to be found in a line penned by James: 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 enemie.'³⁶ Cymbeline is explicitly described in terms of this same contradiction. At the start of Act Three, Lucius declares he is sorry that he must pronounce 'Caesar, that hath more kings his servants than/Thyself domestic officers—thine enemy'

³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'more, adj., pron., adv., n.3, and prep.' and 'gan, n.1'

³⁵ King James I, *The Political Works of James I* (ed. Charles Howard McIlwain), (Union, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2002), p.115.

³⁶ James, *Premonition*, p.131.

(3.1.63-64) to Cymbeline. By the end of the play, Cymbeline wins the conflict but submits once more 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 been belligerent in the past, but to whom they now—after their former enemy had endured extreme tragedy and remarkable success in turn—offered tribute in the form of topical references that enable Caesar to be aligned both with the Roman Emperor to whom Cymbeline pays tribute as well as to the self same ancient British monarch, to whom Jacobean supporters were turning to build a new myth of origin. While it engages with the iconography of early Britain in retelling one of that nation's foundational stories, then, this very Jacobean play was nevertheless just as concerned with topical material on a far more myopic scale. The precipice on which the British world of Cymbeline teeters, albeit as pure anachronism, is thus also a locus for a personal set of commentaries on a key contemporary figure and the long standing scores that the company sought fit, perhaps, at last to settle.