

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘Of higher state / Than monarch, king or world’s great potentate’: The Name of Caesar in Early Modern English Drama

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Scholars have long acknowledged and widely commented on the emphasis placed in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (1599) on the titular character’s third-person self-referencing and relentless repetition of his own name as parts of a well-devised strategy of self-aggrandizement.¹ However, they have paid virtually no attention to the appearance of similar features in other early modern English plays portraying Caesar as a stage character, such as Thomas Kyd’s *Cornelia* (1594), the anonymous *Caesar’s Revenge* (c. 1595), William Alexander’s *Julius Caesar* (1607), and John Fletcher and Philip Massinger’s *The False One* (c. 1620). The primary aim of this essay is to offer a comprehensive and comparative view of Caesar’s self-naming in early modern English drama. It will therefore first provide an in-depth discussion of Caesar’s self-mythopoeic use of his own name so abundantly displayed in Shakespeare’s play, backed by an

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¹ See for example Edward Dowden, *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London, 1875), p. 285; Mungo William MacCallum, *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays* (London: MacMillan, 1910), pp. 230–2; Reginald Anthony Foakes, ‘An Approach to *Julius Caesar*’, *SQ*, 5 (1954), 259–70; Manfred Weidhorn, ‘The Rose and Its Name: On Denomination in *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 11 (1969), 671–86 (pp. 681–6); Madeleine Doran, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 132–48; Michael Platt, *Rome and Romans according to Shakespeare* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1976), pp. 173–234, *passim*; Jan H. Blits, *The End of the Ancient Republic: Shakespeare’s ‘Julius Caesar’* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1982), *passim*; Alessandro Serpieri, ‘Reading the Signs: Towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama’, trans. by Keir Elam, in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 119–43, *passim*; Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 79–107, *passim*.

unavoidable survey of the main critical contributions on the subject. Then, it will especially focus on the broader significance attached to Caesar's name in medieval and early modern England and attempt an explanation of its ubiquity in early modern English drama at large as a particular manifestation of certain late Elizabethan and Jacobean political misgivings and anxieties.

Caesar's habit of speaking of himself as though he were speaking of another person, probably inspired by Xenophon's *Anabasis*, is a peculiarity of the *Commentarii de bello gallico*, where Caesar repeats his own name no fewer than 775 times.² This narrative device marks a clear separation between Caesar-as-narrator and Caesar-as-actor. It is usually interpreted as an attempt on Caesar's part to convey a semblance of 'epistemic objectivity' by stepping outside himself and making the reader believe he is describing situations as though he were a mere observer.³ The perspective illusion entailed by the use of third-person narration indeed produces remarkable results in terms of credibility. As Giovanni Cipriani observes,

[Caesar], hidden behind the voice of an 'impersonal' narrator, [...] can use [...] an unusual alibi, by which he is apparently bound to know only as much as the Caesar-character does [...]. This intelligent use of internal focalization allows him to adjust the richness and completeness of information as he pleases, since he need not [...] possess a unified and [...] complete vision of the events he is reporting.⁴

Words seemingly become impersonal, and the third-person self-referencing combines both psychological (the dissociative distancing of the individual from his or her own actions) and sociological (the idea that a name represents a unit within a social structure) aspects.⁵ Whatever the most appropriate explanation for the strategy used by Caesar in the *Commentarii* may be, it is not hard to see how the third-person self-referencing could be readily put to dramatic use, as it easily merged with one of the most obvious and essential theatrical needs, that is, the convention by which now and then characters have to speak of themselves in the third person to help their

² Nic Fields, *Warlords of Republican Rome: Caesar versus Pompey* (Haverton: Casemate, 2010), p. 5.

³ Andrew M. Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 152.

⁴ Giovanni Cipriani, 'I *Commentarii* e l'obbligo della reticenza', in *La disfatta della Gallia (De bello gallico, VII)* by Caio Giulio Cesare (Venezia: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 9–46 (p. 30), my translation.

⁵ Marvin Spevack, 'Beyond Individualism: Names and Namelessness in Shakespeare', *HLQ*, 56 (1993), 383–98 (p. 397).

identification by the audience.⁶ However, as this essay will make clear, what really carries special significance in both Shakespeare's and several other early modern English 'Caesar' plays is not so much Caesar's third-person self-referencing in general as the specific insistence with which he and the other characters repeat his name.

'Caesar' is the proper name most often spoken in Shakespeare (346 times). It acquires supreme importance in the eponymous play, where Caesar appears alive in only three scenes (1.2, 2.1, 3.1) out of a total of eighteen, pronouncing only 150 lines (out of a total of 2,500!) and 1,126 words, equating to no more than 5.8 per cent of the text.⁷ At first, Caesar's insistent repetition of his own *cognomen* (nineteen times in the entire play) and of personal pronouns referring to himself (an impressive seventy-one instances) might mistakenly appear to be nothing more than a distasteful exhibition of haughtiness or an instrument to express his hubris.⁸ Take, for example, the scene where the dictator boldly proclaims his adamant resolution to leave his house in spite of his spouse's complaints:

Caesar shall forth: the things that threatened me
Ne'er looked but on my back: when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished. (2.2.10-12)⁹

Far from being merely an instance of what John Dover Wilson spitefully defined as a 'habit of self-deification which annoys many modern readers', the utterance 'Caesar shall forth', repeated twice more shortly afterwards—'Yet Caesar shall go forth' (2.2.28); 'And Caesar shall go forth' (2.2.48)—succeeds in creating a rhythmical repetition whose effect is almost hypnotic and incantatory.¹⁰ Here, as Alessandro

⁶ S.K. Viswanathan, "Illeism with a Difference" in *Certain Middle Plays of Shakespeare*, *SQ*, 20 (1969), 407–15 (p. 408).

⁷ Platt, p. vi. Foakes, p. 266, estimates that Caesar's name appears a total of 211 times in the play; David Daniell, introduction to *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare (Walton-On-Thames: Nelson, 1998), pp. 1–141 (p. 42), comments that 'Caesar' 'is spoken by all characters more than any other name'. Marvin Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance of the Works of Shakespeare*, 9 vols (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968–80), III (1968), p. 573, calculates that 'Caesar's name is repeated 219 times in the play, whereas Brutus's is mentioned only 134'. Blits, p. 7 n. 8, observes that 'only Caesar's name is mentioned more often than "man"'.
⁸ Daniell, p. 41.

⁹ Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by Daniell. All references are to this edition unless otherwise noted. Hereafter cited in text.

¹⁰ John Dover Wilson, introduction to *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), pp. vii–xxxiii (p. xxvii). Shakespeare's Caesar's utterance was probably inspired by the Duke of Guise's words in Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*, in *The Plays of*

Serpieri notes, ‘the verb of motion, in conjunction with the symbolic name, assumes [...] symbolic value as a sacred public manifestation’.¹¹ These Caesarean self-referencing utterances are therefore not simply deployed to remind the audience that, as Warren Chernaik remarks, ‘a great man like Julius Caesar is not bound by standard grammatical rules and conventions’ (Caesar is here *supra grammaticos*, after all). Nor do they merely serve to portray what Mungo William MacCallum labelled as ‘an exaggerated case of *noblesse oblige*’ or to attribute to Caesar the features traditionally associated with the stage braggart.¹² In fact, they must be interpreted as aimed at the creation of a larger-than-life identity and an immortal legacy: Caesar is not content with earthly power; he desires to transcend his mortal status and be transfigured through language into a ‘political’ myth of his own, very different from those associated with his figure in the Middle Ages and unrelated to the traditional and ‘empty’ motif of his apotheosis.¹³

Caesar demands his name to become a title that can surpass individual identities (as Caesar, *Kaiser*, *Car*) and bestow precise characteristics upon whoever bears it. He gets so much into the part as to talk about himself in the third person even while conversing with Calphurnia and at the point of death.¹⁴ In this respect, Caesar’s ‘illeism by proper name’—in Deborah T. Curren-Aquino’s felicitous definition—clearly points to a profound tension between a public and private dimension, which results in Caesar’s private identity being totally subsumed by his public image, which he supervises in the minutest detail as if to create a code of conduct which anyone intending to adopt the title of Caesar must respect.¹⁵

As a ‘Caesar’, Caesar has no need to lie because he can do as he pleases. When he decides not to go to the Senate and Calphurnia suggests that he send word that he is ill, he replies:

Shall Caesar send a lie?

Christopher Marlowe, ed. by Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 22.66: ‘Yet Caesar shall go forth’; 22.85: ‘Thus Caesar did go forth’.

¹¹ Doran, p. 134; Serpieri, p. 127.

¹² Chernaik, p. 93; MacCallum, p. 231.

¹³ Historically, Caesar was elevated to the rank of divinity by Augustus on 1 January 42 AD; on the literary level, the reason for Caesar’s apotheosis is ‘shadowed in Virgil’s fifth Eclogue, worked up as Ovid’s crowning metamorphosis, and mentioned in most of the historians’. See Harry Morgan Ayres, ‘Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in the Light of Some Other Versions’, *PMLA*, 25 (1910), 183–227 (p. 211).

¹⁴ ‘*Et tu, Brute?*—Then fall, Caesar’ (*Julius Caesar*, III. 1. 77).

¹⁵ Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, ‘Self-Naming in Shakespeare’s Early Plays’, *Names* (1987), 147–63 (p. 148).

Have I in conquest stretched mine arm so far
To be afeard to tell greybeards the truth?
Decius, go tell them Caesar will not come. (*Julius Caesar*, 2.2.65–8)

There is no need for further explanations for the senators, save that

The cause is in my will, I will not come
That is enough to satisfy the Senate. (*Julius Caesar*, II. 2. 71)

To be sure, these seem the words of an arbitrary ruler, annoyed by the Senate's irksome requests and convinced it has no authority whatsoever over him.¹⁶ Caesar later makes a point of explaining to the conspirators that, no matter how strict and inflexible he may seem, he does act according to the only principle of justice he can abide to, namely, the one he himself has set down:

Know Caesar doth not wrong but with just cause,
Nor without cause will he be satisfied. (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.47–8)

The lines are cited here not as they appear in the *First Folio* (1623), commonly followed by editors of the play—'Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause / Will he be satisfied'—but as they are reconstructed in the *Oxford Shakespeare* on the strength of what Ben Jonson reports in *Discoveries* and *The Staple of News*.¹⁷ The addition of 'but with just cause' definitely makes the two lines more appropriate to the character's temperament. Caesar indeed regards himself, at the height of his arrogance and delusion of grandeur, as the supreme judge of right and wrong, thereby conveying an extremely idiosyncratic, above-the-law idea of justice.¹⁸

¹⁶ Platt, p. 199. On the question whether Shakespeare's Caesar is a tyrant, see especially Robert S. Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', *RQ*, 38 (1985), 271–89.

¹⁷ Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*, ll. 480–81, ed. by Lorna Hutson, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (hence *CWBJ*), ed. by David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), VII (2012), p. 522; *The Staple of News*, Induction, l. 30, ed. by Joseph Loewenstein, in *CWBJ*, VI (2012), p. 20. The emended line is, however, particularly controversial: it was first suggested by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1778 and has been adopted since only by Henry N. Hudson in 1879 and by the Oxford editors in 1986. For a detailed treatment see Michael L. Stapleton and Sarah K. Scott, 'Doing Wrong with Just Cause? A History of *Julius Caesar* 3.1.47–48', <<http://users.ipfw.edu/stapletm/NVSJC/docspdf/Justcause.pdf>> [accessed 13 July 2014].

¹⁸ On this point, see also Ian Donaldson, "'Misconstruing Everything': *Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus*", in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. by Grace Ioppolo (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 88–107 (p. 103).

An even more important aspect is that a Caesar must never show fear. When a victim eviscerated during a divinatory sacrifice is found to have no heart, he comments on the haruspices' ominous report with the following words:

Caesar should be a beast without a heart,
If he should stay at home today for fear.
No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well
That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
We are two lions littered in one day,
And I the elder and more terrible,
And Caesar shall go forth. (*Julius Caesar*, 2.2.42–8)

The show of confidence and courage mutates here into an off-putting strain of megalomania: Caesar already feels powerful enough to compete not just against men or institutions but against an abstract entity like danger. As he explains to Antony after voicing his reservations on Cassius's 'lean and hungry look' (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2.193), which would seem to conceal a melancholic and therefore dangerous disposition:

I rather tell thee what is to be feared
Than what I fear: for always I am Caesar.¹⁹ (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2.210–12)

Thus he reiterates what he has already remarked shortly before in reference to the same Cassius:

I fear him not:
Yet if my name were liable to fear
I do not know the man I should avoid
So soon as that spare Cassius. (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2.197–200)

'[I]f my name were liable to fear', Caesar stresses. It is irrelevant whether he actually feels fear in his heart; the important thing is that his name remain impenetrable to it. He already seems to regard his name as an independent reality, a talisman to ward off fear, and holds the conviction that his very words possess a sort of corporeal presence of their

¹⁹ As Barbara J. Baines, "“That every like is not the same”: The Vicissitudes of Language in *Julius Caesar*", in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Horst Zander (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 139–53 (p. 141), observes, 'As God in Exodus 3:14 declares, "I am that I am", so Caesar is Caesar. Reflecting Caesar's self-perception, Cassius is correct when he says, "this man / Is now become a god" (I. 2.115–16)'.

own.²⁰ The repeated utterance of his own name apparently provides Caesar with powers he probably feels he would not otherwise possess.

So, Caesar intends to erect an ideal ‘self’, indestructible, invulnerable and unshakeable: ‘above and separate from ordinary human beings’, in Rebecca W. Bushnell’s phrasing.²¹ To accomplish this goal, he shows himself immovable to the senators begging him to recall Cimber’s brother from exile. The dictator seems to relish his own definition of himself as

constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament. (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.60–2)

Of all the individuals who populate the globe, he knows only one

That unassailable holds on his rank
Unshaked of motion (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.69–70),

that one being himself, of course. There is certainly considerable irony—as well as a clear sense of immediate retribution—in Caesar’s being assaulted right after having defined himself ‘unassailable’. Nonetheless, the comparison with the North Star and, some lines later, the identification with Mount Olympus (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.74) are clearly part of an attempt—which will ultimately prove to be successful—to project a mythical, nearly divine image of himself, and provide a portrayal of himself as an exceptional, invulnerable man: Caesar concludes his life with a cosmogonical representation of his own immovable regality.²² The purposiveness of the fashioning of such a quasi-supernatural image is confirmed by the unbridgeable gap between this idealized image and the real man, who is marred by several physical weaknesses, some of them invented by Shakespeare—his being hard of hearing and his slight physique.²³

²⁰ Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in the Drama* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 70; David Lucking, *The Shakespearean Name: Essays on ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘The Tempest’, and Other Plays* (Bern: Lang, 2007), p. 135.

²¹ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 148.

²² Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Shakespeare politico. Drammi storici, drammi romani, tragedie*, trans. by Robin Benatti and Francesca Materzanini (Rome: Fazi, 2005), p. 173; Vanna Gentili, *La Roma antica degli elisabettiani* (Bologna: Mulino, 1991), p. 67.

²³ That Caesar was a poor swimmer is disproved by Plutarch, ‘Caesar’, in *Parallel Lives*, ed. by Bernadotte Perrin (London: Heinemann, 1919), ll. 8, Suetonius, ‘The Life of Julius Caesar’, l. 1, in *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, ed. by J.C. Rolfe (London: Heinemann, 1913), and Cassius Dio, *Roman*

Caesar knows that the Roman people expect this transcendent superiority of his: therefore, he must ignore his bodily limits and his physical decay lest he disclose his frail human nature.²⁴ The obvious imbalance between these two faces ends up creating, in Julia Griffin's words, the effect of a 'powerful presence with a blank behind it. This Caesar is monumental, a Colossus; but he is also a hollow man, an unintegrated sum of fixed image and aging matter'.²⁵ As a result, Caesar-the-man seems to end up being overwhelmed by the greatness of Caesar-the-myth.²⁶

The audience at the Globe in 1599 would have been particularly sensitive to the portrayal of this dissociation, since the discrepancy between a powerful leader's image and actual physical condition was familiar to Queen Elizabeth I's subjects as she entered her sixty-seventh year.²⁷ Caesar's frailties might hint at those Elizabeth had to cope with as an old woman and, just as Shakespeare's dictator tries to advertise a fixed and perfect image of himself, so did the Queen devote much effort to the same end, personally supervising the production of her royal portraits, which had to show her as an eternally young woman, her true complexion hidden by a mask of youth.²⁸ Through this strategy, Elizabeth managed to propagandize her own image as eternal and immutable, to appear *semper eadem*. In this sense, not only did she and Caesar share a similar situation of political uncertainty, they also shared a similar condition of rulers whose existence was equated to myth and divinity: Elizabeth was Diana, Cynthia, Astraea, a fascinating goddess charming anyone with whom she spoke; Caesar was a *divus*, another creature elevated to myth right after death.²⁹

History, ed. by Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), II. 40. 4–5. It does seem, however, that Caesar was afflicted with epilepsy, the *falling sickness* mentioned by the conspirators in *Julius Caesar* (1.2.255), but, as MacCallum, p. 219, remarks, 'not only does Shakespeare accentuate these bodily infirmities; he introduces them in such a way and in such a connection that they convey an ironical suggestion and almost make the Emperor ridiculous'.

²⁴ Luciano Cavalli, *Giulio Cesare, Coriolano e il teatro della Repubblica. Una lettura politica di Shakespeare* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006), p. 35.

²⁵ Julia Griffin, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition', in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. by Miriam Tamara Griffin (Hoboken, Wiley: 2009), pp. 371–98 (p. 382). Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of 'Julius Caesar', 'Measure for Measure', 'Antony and Cleopatra'* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. 26–27, rightly observes that 'Caesar, by [...] collaborating [...] in his own deification, yet reminding us of his weaknesses on each of his appearances, underlines this dissociation'.

²⁶ See also Dowden, p. 285.

²⁷ James Shapiro, *1599* (London: Faber, 2005), p. 178.

²⁸ Cristina Vallaro, '*Julius Caesar*' e '*Antony and Cleopatra*'. *Momenti di storia romana in William Shakespeare* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2010), p. 62; Shapiro, p. 178.

²⁹ Vallaro, pp. 12, 31.

The emancipation of Caesar's name is completed in the instant of his death when by exclaiming 'Then fall, Caesar' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.77) he seals the exchange between body and name, and he makes his death appear as a sort of godly martyrdom. His success is evidenced by the events immediately following his murder and there is unmistakable irony in the fact that in a complete reversal of Brutus's hopes—'O that we then could come by Caesar's spirit / And not dismember Caesar!' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.168–9)—the conspirator only manages to kill the man but not the spirit, thereby actually accelerating the transition from republic to empire he was purportedly trying to prevent, while the spirit of Caesar acquires more power than he ever possessed before the murder.³⁰ Indeed, Caesar's attainment of immortality coincides with his physical death: his name has already begun to take on a life of its own. The people, at the news of his assassination, are already loudly calling for another Caesar, eager to bestow the honour on Brutus (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.51), while Antony can refer to the dead dictator using the indefinite article: 'Here was a Caesar: when comes such another?' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.243).³¹ This is the moment when Caesar's name is first cultified, being no longer primarily a personal noun, glorified as far as to be transformed into a myth.³² The evocative power of Caesar's name cannot be torn to pieces as can his body: it survives as an imperishable symbol, as spirit, eventually freed from the frailties which hindered Caesar-the-man. The spirit of Caesarism bridging the ages of republican and imperial Rome is embodied by the ghost who visits Brutus shortly before the battle of Philippi and whose power the latter is obliged to recognize:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails. (*Julius Caesar*, 5.3.94–6)

As Bushnell concludes, Caesar's image 'literally comes back to haunt Brutus and Cassius. No longer a complex character, he becomes a powerful abstraction'.³³

Caesar's faith in the power of words and the almost magical efficacy of their relentless repetition exposes the mistaken judgment of Brutus and Cassius, sceptical to the end. In 1.2 Cassius precisely wonders:

³⁰ Weidhorn, pp. 685–86; Horst Zander, 'Julius Caesar and the Critical Legacy', in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, pp. 3–55 (p. 6)

³¹ Charney, p. 69; Joseph Larry Simmons, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1974), p. 79.

³² Platt, p. 204; Krippendorff, p. 188.

³³ Bushnell, p. 148.

‘Brutus’ and ‘Caesar’: what should be in that ‘Caesar’?
 Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
 Write them together: yours is as fair a name:
 Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.
 Weigh them, it is as heavy: conjure with ’em,
 ‘Brutus’ will start a spirit as soon as ‘Caesar’.
 Now in the names of all the gods at once,
 Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed
 That he is grown so great? (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2.141–9)

Here, Cassius tendentiously places the two nouns on the same level of grapheme, phoneme and consistency in order not only to reduce the concept Caesar stands for to a simple word, but especially, as Serpieri observes, to launch an attack against ‘the very heart of the symbolic world-order, i.e. the motivated Name [...]. He questions [...] the signifier “Caesar” [...] and thus he reduces the motivated to the arbitrary, demythologizing the proper name’.³⁴ While skilfully seeking flatteringly to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy through an appeal to republican principles, Cassius is therefore also trying to dismantle Caesar’s entire self-mythopoeic effort by claiming that his name is not crucial to the order and harmony of the cosmos and that language cannot have any creative effect on the world.³⁵

As Ralph Berry points out, only ‘in *Romeo and Juliet* (III. 3) is there elsewhere in the canon such a sense of name as containing vital essence, of name as an objective reality in itself’.³⁶ A closer look at the passage quoted above reveals yet another inflection of the age-old controversy regarding the essence of proper names: are they arbitrary and conventional or motivated and mimetic? The controversy harks back as far as Plato’s *Cratylus*, the first-ever reflection on the origins of language. Here the two perspectives are voiced by Cratylus, who is convinced that names are an integral part of an individual’s identity, and Hermogenes, who is persuaded otherwise. The debate, further complicated by the views expressed by Aristotle’s works and the *Bible*, was current in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and still aroused great interest during the Renaissance.³⁷

³⁴ Vallaro, p. 53; Miola, p. 275; Weidhorn, pp. 681–82; Serpieri, p. 127.

³⁵ Vallaro, p. 53. The Tribunes in the first scene of the play carefully avoid mentioning Caesar by name to the same effect (Blits, p. 31).

³⁶ Ralph Berry, ‘*Julius Caesar*: A Roman Tragedy’, *Dalhousie Review*, 61 (1981), 325–33 (p. 329).

³⁷ Anne Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 11.

From this point of view, although the interest in the onomastic aspects of personal names is traditionally associated with comedy, *Julius Caesar* can be construed as an attempt to reflect upon language and its ability to craft reality.³⁸ No name holds power in and of itself, for names are arbitrary signs; at the same time, however, the way names are used can set their magical powers free and even lead to immortality. As Linda Woodbridge mentions, a ‘sizeable body of early modern magical beliefs deals with the danger of drawing attention to somebody, making him or her conspicuous, through uttering his or her name’.³⁹ Proper names were indeed thought to possess magical properties both in popular superstition and in that body of hermetic and Neo-Platonic writings circulating in England in the sixteenth century. One of the most important representatives of this tradition was the German magician, occult writer, theologian, astrologer and alchemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), who argued forcefully for the existence of magic in proper names in the first book of his *De occulta philosophia* (Paris, 1531).⁴⁰

That the proper names of things are very necessary in Magical Operations, almost all men testify [...]. [M]agicians say that the proper names of things are certain rays of things, everywhere present at all times, keeping the power of things [...]. For [...] proper names result to things and are put upon them by him who numbers the multitude of the stars, calling them all by their names [...]. Adam [...], that gave the first name to things [...], gave them all names according to their natures [...]; which names, indeed, contain in them wonderful powers of the things signified.⁴¹

Agrippa was basically popularizing the hermetic/cabalistic magic formulated by Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, and his works would exert a strong influence on

³⁸ Lucking, p. 133.

³⁹ Linda Woodbridge, ‘Shakespeare and Magical Grammar’, in *Style: Essays on Renaissance and Restoration: Literature and Culture in Memory of Harriett Hawkins*, ed. by Allen Michie, Eric Buckley and Harriett Hawkins (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 84–98 (p. 84). See also Alexander H. Krappe, *The Science of Folklore* (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 250.

⁴⁰ On Agrippa see John Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 53–72.

⁴¹ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *The Philosophy of Natural Magic*, ed. by Lauron William de Laurence (Chicago: Scott, 1913), pp. 212–13. When not already modernized in the reference editions, the spelling and punctuation of quotations from texts in early modern English has been modernized according to the guidelines established by Stanley Wells in *Modernizing Shakespeare’s Spelling: With Three Studies of the Text of ‘Henry V’ by Gary Taylor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 3–36.

John Dee and Giordano Bruno, whose theories would, in turn, have a pervasive impact upon late-sixteenth-century England.⁴²

The magical quality of proper names, particularly as creators of immortal entities, was described by Friedrich Gundolf in a memorable passage in a book treating Caesar's posthumous reputation:

A name is more than mere sound: antiquity recognized names as magic spells; many primitive tribes held it a third entity by the side of body and soul. The name means the significance of happening and being, and he who creates a phenomenon or law with his name has attained immortality beyond his own personal existence, as well as he who has become an image [...]. In the centuries in which his myth grew dim, Caesar continued to lead a magic existence by the consecration of his name.⁴³

In the history of republican Rome, the *cognomen* 'Brutus' carried the greater prestige and potential; yet in the end it was 'Caesar' that proved to be truly effective. The importance of Caesar's name in the play might also account for its being named after Caesar and not Brutus, in that, as Horst Zander puts it, it 'exhibits a linear movement that dramatizes the rise of Caesar, first in a physical, then in a spiritual and mythical sense', and not merely because the play deals with 'Caesarism', as posited by MacCallum, or because 'Shakespeare is obliged to call the play after him, its highest-ranking personage', as proposed by Harold Bloom.⁴⁴ In Shakespeare's play, Caesar creates an alternative identity to his earthly one, a mythical self beyond time, by magnifying his own name and endowing it with almost magical connotations; then he dies, stabbed to death by Brutus and Cassius. The two of them, doubtful to the end as to the power of language, triumph over his body but not his spirit, which will haunt them and eventually overwhelm them. And all this occurs, beyond dispute, in the name of Caesar.

⁴² On this topic, see for example Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964); *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979); Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1980); Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, eds, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (Washington: Folger, 1988); Thomas O. Jones, *Renaissance Magic and Hermeticism in the Shakespeare Sonnets: Like Prayers Divine* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1995).

⁴³ Friedrich Gundolf, *The Mantle of Caesar*, trans. by Jacob Wittmer Hartmann (London: Grant Richards, 1929), pp. 60–61.

⁴⁴ Zander, p. 6; MacCallum, p. 232; Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), p. 104.

Caesar's effort to turn his own name into a symbolic entity is however not exclusive to the titular hero of Shakespeare's play, as a closer look at several other early modern English literary works reveals. To be sure, Caesar's name had already reached symbolic status in the Middle Ages, when, as Gundolf explains, it was 'the most lauded earthly name [...] in Europe together with Alexander's and Charlemagne's', having become 'the name of a universal, remote magic, the imperium, ever present and intangible', as well as being 'associated with conceptions of definite properties and indefinite deeds'.⁴⁵

A quick enumeration of a few legends associated with Caesar will probably help realize the pervasiveness of his name in medieval culture. In local Latin annals and vernacular poems, Caesar was reported to be, amongst other things, the implausible founder of innumerable towns (Andernach, Boppard, Cambrai, Cherbourg, Chicester, Exeter, Frejus, Friaul, Ghent, Jülich, Magdeburg, Mainz, Merseburg, Oppenheim, Rouen, Seville, Speyer, Tournai, Verdun, Wolgast, Wollin, Worcester, Worms, Florence, Paris, London); builder of the Louvre, the Tower of London, of castles at Canterbury, Rochester, Dover and in several places across France and Germany; builder of the baths at Aachen, Aix, and Bath, of Bristol Castle, the castle and town of Salisbury, the Tower of Dunother, the magical castle of Adamante, the castle of Exeter, the River Lavant; responsible for the introduction into England of the common Roman nettle, *urtica romana*; conqueror of the Monopods; explorer of the lands of Gog and Magog; father of Auberon (king of the fairies) and Saint George by Morgan le Fey, husband or son of Brunehaut (queen of the fairies), grandson of Judas Maccabeus, father of Helis (Knight of the Swan), of the dwarf Tronc or even son of a baker; murdered by Virgil's friends or by Ganelon's ancestors.⁴⁶

For the Middle Ages, at all events, Caesar was above all the first Roman Emperor. This historical inaccuracy—probably stemming from a mistranslation of the Latin noun *imperator* ('commander')—continued to thrive during the Renaissance, appearing not only in the report of the Swiss traveller Thomas Platter, who alluded to Shakespeare's

⁴⁵ Gundolf, pp. 81, 61, 80. Gundolf also points out that 'Kaisar is one of the first Latin loan-words in German' (p. 71). On the penetration of the name into Germanic languages, see Dietrich Briesemeister, 'Caesar im Mittelalter', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 4 vols (Munich: Artemis, 1983), II (1983), col. 1353: 'Der Name ist von der antiken Herrschertitular aus zum Begriff geworden und bedeutet schlichtweg Kaiser. Das Wort wurde frühzeitig in die germ. Sprachen entlehnt—ahd. *cheisar*, *keisur*, ndt. *kaiser*, got. *kaisar*, ae. *casere*, an. *keisari*—und kam über diese auch ins Slav.: akslav. *cesar*'. Daniell, p. 28, observes that '[t]he use of the form "kaiser" for an all-conquering absolute monarch goes back to 1225. The verb "Caesarize", "to play the Caesar", is recorded by *OED* from John Davies of Hereford, in his *Microcosmos* of 1603, in the line "This pow'r [...] Caesarizeth o'er each appetite"'.
⁴⁶ Arturo Graf, *Roma nella memoria e nelle immaginazioni del Medio Evo*, 2 vols (Torino: Loescher, 1882–83), I (1882), pp. 257–58, 266–71, 301–02; Gundolf, p. 69–70, 76.

play as to ‘die Tragedy vom ersten Keyser Julio Caesare’, but also in many literary and historiographical works, such as Thomas Cooper and Thomas Lanquet’s *Chronicle* (1549), John Stow’s *Annals* (1580), John Merbecke’s *A Book of Notes and Common Places* (1581), Everard Digby’s *Dissuasive from Taking Away the Livings and Goods of the Church* (1590), Thomas Fenne’s *Fruits* (1590), Richard Jones’s *The Book of Honour and Arms* (1590), Ludovic Lloyd’s *The Consent of Time* (1590), Thomas Nashe’s *Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem* (1593), Robert Allott’s *Wit’s Theater of the Little World* (1599), William Fulbecke’s *Historical Collection of the Continual Factions, Tumults and Massacres of the Romans* (1600), William Leighton’s *Virtue Triumphant* (1603), Pedro Mexia’s *Historia imperial y cesarea* (1545, translated as *The History of All the Roman Emperors* in 1604 by William Traheron), and Fletcher and Massinger’s *The False One*, where Caesar is indicated as ‘Emperor’ in the list of ‘The Persons Represented in the Play’.⁴⁷

This misconception is probably one of the reasons why up until the sixteenth century, as Madeleine Doran points out, Caesar’s name

was evocative of many things: the greatness of Rome in its palmy days, Caesar’s own greatness as ruler of Rome and the world, the instability of fortune and the falls of princes, the evils of power and of tyrannicide. The most important thing about Caesar’s name, one might say, was the fame of it.⁴⁸

The ideas of power conveyed by the name ‘Caesar’ and its function as a title emerge for example in George Gascoigne’s *A Hundredth Sundry Flowers* (1573), where the word ‘Keysar’ is deployed to denote a man for whom greater glory is impossible; in Anthony Copley’s *Love’s Owl* (1595), where ‘Caesar’ is seen as a title of wisdom as well as political power; in Thomas Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr* (1619–23), where it is explicitly stressed that ‘great Julius / [...] to his successors left the name of Caesar’, and in Edward Nisbet’s *Caesar’s Dialogue of A Familiar Communication*

⁴⁷ Historically, *imperator* was a distinction of military rather than civil authority, which Caesar was awarded as a hereditary title in 45 BC (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, IV. 43. 44): this might have been the source of the mistake. On Caesar as the first Emperor in the Middle Ages see also Graf, pp. 248–49; Platter’s account is cited in E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), II (1923), pp. 364–65. See also Remington Edward Rose, *Julius Caesar and the Late Roman Republic in the Literature of the Late 16th Century, with Especial Reference to Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar* (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1964), p. 16. John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, *The False One*, ed. by Robert Kean Turner, in *The Dramatic Works of the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966–96), VIII (1992), hereafter cited in text.

⁴⁸ Doran, p. 121.

Containing the First Institution of a Subject in Allegiance to His Sovereign (1601).⁴⁹ Here, the dialogue between father and son which gives the work its title begins as follows:

SON. Because as the kings of Egypt were always called Pharaohs, so I think the Roman Emperors were ever called Caesars, and the Roman Emperors were most high and mighty princes, I take it that by the name of Caesar you understand our high, gracious and imperial sovereign.

FATHER. Our sovereign indeed, my son, do I understand, who [...]—God and her own conscience excepted—being countable to any but being so absolute a sovereign and so sovereign an Empress, truly meriteth the true title of Caesar.

As Remington Edward Rose notes, the

author of this tract has availed himself of all the connotations of might, dominion, glory, and undisputed power which cluster around the idea of ‘Caesar’ [which] is, for him, a grand and noble one proper to be translated into nationalistic sentiment.⁵⁰

That the name ‘Caesar’ was synonymous with greatness can be also observed in the story of the son of Cesare Adelmare, an Italian physician who served both Queen Mary I and Elizabeth at court. Baptized Julius Adelmare (1557/58–1636), he later took on the anglicized form of his father’s name, thereby replacing his real surname. He later became famous as a judge and as Master of the Court of Requests with the name of Sir Julius Caesar. Clearly, adopting the name of the conqueror of Gaul amounted in this case to an attempt to identify with his glory and authority.

The sense of might and supreme power implied by the name of Caesar also menacingly surfaces in no fewer than four early modern English plays aside from Shakespeare’s, mostly in connection with Caesar’s explicit urge to set up a new line of sovereignty in which his own name replaces the title of king. The most direct literary influences in this case were probably exerted by Plutarch’s observation that Caesar’s name was regarded in itself as ‘dreadful unto every man’, and by a passage from Marc-Antoine Muret’s neo-Latin play *Iulius Caesar* (1544), in whose opening monologue Caesar explains:

⁴⁹ Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953–61), III (1958), v. 2. 10–11.

⁵⁰ Cit. in Rose, pp. 262–63, who points out that Caesar’s name is likewise used as a mere title by Samuel Rowland in *Ave Caesar: God Save the King* (1603).

Reges vel ipsi Caesaris nomen timent.
[...]
Plus est vocari Caesarem; quisquis novos
Aliunde titulos quaerit, is iam detrahit.⁵¹

The idea that Caesar intimidates all kings on earth by the mere echo of his name certainly reflects the early modern conviction recorded by Stith Thompson that ‘a high-sounding name would frighten the enemy’ and is recalled in Kyd’s *Cornelia* (a translation of Robert Garnier’s *Cornélie*, 1574), a play characterizing him as an overweening tyrant.⁵² Here Caesar, intoxicated with his own power, boasts that

There lives no king, how so great e’er he be,
But trembleth if he once but hear of me.⁵³

In an outburst of egotism more than customary for the Renaissance stage Caesar, the dictator repeats his name an impressive four times in a mere nine lines:

Caesar is now earth’s fame and fortune’s terror,
And *Caesar*’s worth has stained old soldiers’ praises.
Rome, speak no more of either Scipio,
Nor of the Fabii or Fabritians;
Here let the Decii and their glory die.
Caesar hath tamed more nations, ta’en more towns
And fought more battles than the best of them.
Caesar doth triumph over all the world

⁵¹ *Plutarch’s Lives, Englished by Sir Thomas North in Ten Volumes* (1579; repr., London: Dent, 1910), p. 318; Marc Antoine Muret, *Iulius Caesar*, ed. by Andreas Hagmaier (Leipzig: Gruyter, 2006), I. 8. 11–12: ‘Even kings themselves now fear Caesar’s name. [...] To be called Caesar means more: whosoever hankers after new titles from anywhere else already disparages them’ (my translation).

⁵² Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legend*, 6 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58), VI (1958), K 1951.5. On Caesar in *Cornelia* see Gillian Jondorf, *Robert Garnier and the Themes of Political Tragedy in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 33–4; Martine Jeanine Gary, *The Theme of Caesar and Brutus in Sixteenth-Century Tragedy* (PhD Thesis, University of Denver, 1979), pp. 222–4; Chernaik, p. 89; Domenico Lovascio, *Un nome, mille volti. Giulio Cesare nel teatro inglese della prima età moderna* (Roma: Carocci, 2015), pp. 37–56.

⁵³ Thomas Kyd, *Cornelia*, in *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. by Frederick S. Boas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 4.2.33–4, hereafter cited in text.

And all they scarcely conquered a nook. (*Cornelia*, 4.2.35–43, my emphases)

Caesar is the only subject to exert some sort of agency here: by insisting on his own name, he seeks to wipe out the prestigious ones of the ancient generals and kings whose actions have already been obscured by his achievements, which he obviously does not fail to list with painstaking accuracy a few moments later (*Cornelia*, 4.2.44–54).

The inherent potentialities of the contrast between the title of Caesar and that of king are exploited to the fullest in the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*, where Caesar is portrayed as a despicable, intemperate usurper.⁵⁴ When he is offered a diadem to crown him king, he surprisingly refuses to don the crown. At first, the reason for his refusal seems to be the awareness of the Roman people's deep-rooted hatred towards the title of king: accepting the crown would expose him to pointless and all but inevitable dangers. Nonetheless, when he is offered the diadem a second time, Caesar bombastically reveals the true reason behind his decision:

Content you, lords, for I will be no king,
An odious name unto the Roman ear.
Caesar I am and will be Caesar still:
No other title shall my fortunes grace,
Which I will make a name of higher state
Than monarch, king or world's great potentate.
Of Jove in heaven shall ruled be the sky,
The earth of Caesar, with like majesty.⁵⁵

As this unrestrainable delusion of grandeur shows, Caesar is convinced that his deeds place him far above the mere title of monarch. Indeed, he believes himself to be history's chosen one to impose his own name upon a new generation of sovereigns of unlimited ambition. The insistence upon his name will endure up until the moment of his murder, when he will in vain try to resist the violence of the stabs by means of its echo:

'Tis Caesar, Caesar, whom your poniards pierce;
Caesar whose name might well affright such slaves. (*Caesar's Revenge*, 3.6.
1706-7)

⁵⁴ On the anonymous play's Caesar as a tyrant see Lovascio, *Un nome, mille volti*, pp. 57–82.

⁵⁵ *The Tragedy of Caesar's Revenge*, ed. by Frederick S. Boas (Oxford: Malone, 1911), 3.4.1504–11, hereafter cited in text.

At that instant, it is true, his name can do nothing against the conspirators' blades, but it will not be long before his spirit returns to claim vengeance against his murderers, similarly to what happens in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

The conviction held by the conqueror of Gaul that he is superior to kings both in title and authority also marginally appears in Alexander's *Julius Caesar*, where the dictator—depicted as a ruthless and deceitful tyrant in execution—clearly states that

greatness to be great must have my name,
To be a Caesar is above a king.⁵⁶

Something similar can be found in Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One*—where Caesar's neglect of his manly and military obligations caused by his unrestrained passion for Cleopatra jeopardizes the safety of the State—when Caesar disdainfully replies to the eunuch Photinus (Ptolemy's mischievous counsellor, who has just made an attempt on Caesar's life):

Presumptuous villain,
Upon what grounds hast thou presumed to raise
Thy servile hand against the king or me,
That have a greater name? (*The False One*, 3.2.39–42)

In this play the name of Caesar even takes on a sort of hieratic connotation. The Roman general deliberately ignores Antony's proposal to station a military garrison on the coast because he trusts the power of his own name to the point of considering it sufficient to ward off the danger of an enemy attack:

Not a man, Anthony;
That were to show our fears and dim our greatness:
No, 'tis enough my name's ashore. (*The False One*, 2.3.6–8)

But the awe inspired by Caesar's name is well-known to other characters as well, as Cleopatra's response to Photinus's threats clearly shows at the end of the play:

⁵⁶ William Alexander, *Julius Caesar*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander*, ed. by Leon Emile Kastner and Henry Buckley Charlton, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1921–29), I (1921), 2.1.329–30, hereafter cited in text. On Alexander's Caesar as a tyrant in execution see Domenico Lovascio, "All our lives upon ones lippes depend:" Caesar as a Tyrant in William Alexander's *Julius Caesar*, *MRDE*, 29 (2016), 68–102.

let the name of Caesar
Which nations quake at, stop thy desperate madness
From running headlong to thy confusion. (*The False One*, 5.4.63–5)

In most of these excerpts, Caesar shows he would not be satisfied with the title of king because, as Platt explains with reference to Shakespeare's play, '[h]ighest in the ranks of honor is not "King" but to compel men to take one's particular name as a title of rulership and a source of legitimacy'.⁵⁷ As Paris in Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626) points out, in Caesar's 'great name / All kings are comprehended'.⁵⁸ The arrogant distinction between Caesar's *cognomen* and the title of *rex* can be traced back to classical sources: it is to be found in Suetonius's *Divus Julius*, who inspired Francis Bacon to relate in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) that

Caesar did extremely affect the name of king and some were set on, as he passed by, in popular acclamation to salute him king, whereupon, finding the cry weak and poor, he put it off thus in a kind of jest, as if they had mistaken his surname: *Non Rex sum, sed Caesar* (I am not King, but Caesar); [...] first it was a refusal of the name, but yet not serious; again, it did signify an infinite confidence and magnanimity, as if he presumed Caesar was the greater title, as by his worthiness it is come to pass till this day; but chiefly it was a speech of great allurements towards his own purpose, as if the State did strive with him but for a name, whereof mean families were vested, for Rex was a surname with the Romans, as well as King is with us.⁵⁹

Bacon portrays Caesar as a shrewd politician and keenly identifies the overlapping meanings of his retort. Elsewhere, he had already observed that his name was the only thing Caesar actually 'wished to make famous; because he thought he had himself some

⁵⁷ Platt, pp. 203–04.

⁵⁸ Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, in *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, ed. by Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), III (1976), 1.3.53–4. References to the Caesar/king dichotomy can be also found in other works of the period. See for example Ludovic Lloyd, *The Pilgrimage of Princes* (London: William Jones, 1573), p. 161, where he refers to 'Kynge and Kesars', and Robert Greene's *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587–88), where the phrase 'King nor Keisar' recurs on several occasions.

⁵⁹ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, 15 vols (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1857–74), VI (1864), p. 160 (my emphasis); Suetonius, ILXXX. 1–2. The report of the event is also to be found in Appian, *Civil Wars*, ed. by Horace White (London: Heinemann, 1913), II. 108.

interest in that'.⁶⁰ However, what sounds in Suetonius's account just like a clever motto to avoid an unpleasant situation is received in early modern English drama as part of a well thought-out strategy designed to create a symbol, which will allow Caesar to distinguish himself from the sovereigns of the past, thereby leaving his own personal imprint on history and effacing the memory of previous rulers.

But how to explain the early modern English playwrights' deep interest in the potential of Caesar's name, in the contrast between 'Caesar' and 'King', and in the idea of a new ruler utterly supplanting all predecessors? These features repeatedly appear in works written in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign (Kyd's *Cornelia*, the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*), are absent in George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* (c. 1605), marginally peep out in Alexander's *Julius Caesar*, disappear again in Ben Jonson's *Catiline His Conspiracy* (1611) and finally reappear with renewed vigour in Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One*. Apart from the analogy set up by Shakespeare between Caesar and Elizabeth outlined above, this pattern might also mirror other specific and pressing concerns of the different political phases.

The late Elizabethan plays' focus on Caesar's transformation of his own name into a title to be imposed on future generations in order to replace the trite and bland one of king does not appear simply to reflect Caesar's reputation for renaming after himself the territories he conquered, as William Camden observes in 'The Smaller Ilands in the British Ocean' (1586):

Under these lieth Southward Caesarea, whereof Antonine hath written, scarce twelve miles distant from Alderney, which name the Frenchmen now have clipped so short as the Spaniards have Caesaraugusta in Spaine: for they call it Gearzey, like as *Cherburgh* for *Caesarisburgus* and *Saragose* for *Caesaraugusta*.⁶¹

On the contrary, the motif might constitute yet another indication of the widespread fear that a new war of succession might erupt at the death of the childless queen, thereby repeating the horrors of the fifteenth-century Yorkist-Lancastrian dynastic conflict. Such anxieties tormented English people for the entire duration of Elizabeth's reign but obviously worsened as the queen aged, still obstinately persisting in not naming an heir in a country only recently relieved from the threat of a Spanish invasion. Were a

⁶⁰ Francis Bacon, 'Imago Civilis Julii Caesari', in *Works*, XII (1869), p. 28 (trans., XII, p. 36).

⁶¹ William Camden, 'The Smaller Ilands in the British Ocean', in *Britannia*, trans. by. Philemon Holland (1607), <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/isleseng.html#1>> [accessed 13 July 2014].

successor not named in due course, the dreaded peril might materialize that a dangerous foreign usurper, a present-day ‘Caesar’, might invade England and take advantage of the momentary institutional confusion and political turmoil in order to replace the Tudor dynasty and tear the kingdom apart.⁶²

In the last decade of the sixteenth century, the succession was indeed felt as a concrete problem and as a highly sensitive topic in England. Susan Doran has shown how the period witnessed the publication of a remarkable number of succession tracts—which she interprets as cogent evidence of the urgency of the debate—while Joel Hurstfield has demonstrated that ‘[t]here were, in effect, about a dozen people who in the 1590s could present themselves, with varying degrees of optimism, as the future occupants of Elizabeth’s throne.’⁶³ Given the sensitivity of the topic, together with the explicit prohibition to debate the question, drama ended up becoming the more obvious and convenient outlet for such concerns.⁶⁴ Lisa Hopkins notes that ‘[o]ne of the most controversial potential candidates was Philip II’s elder daughter, the Infanta Isabella of Spain, whose claim, however improbable-seeming, was in fact taken seriously by some and was at the very least a good source of scare-stories’.⁶⁵ And as late as 1599—as Richard Dutton contends—Isabella’s claims were ‘the objective of the so-called “Invisible Armada” that [...] we know came to nothing, but to early audiences of Shakespeare’s play lay just across the horizon.’⁶⁶

⁶² For a recent and more wide-ranging treatment of the question of succession in early modern English literature, see Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561–1633* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

⁶³ Susan Doran, ‘Three Elizabethan Succession Tracts’, in *The Struggle for the Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. by Jean-Christophe Mayer (Montpellier: Institut de la Recherche sur la Renaissance, 2004), pp. 91–117 (p. 115); Joel Hurstfield, ‘The Succession Struggle in Late Elizabethan England’, in *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale*, ed. by S.T. Bindoff, Joel Hurstfield and C.H. Williams (London: Athlone, 1961), pp. 369–96 (p. 372).

⁶⁴ Claire Jowitt, ‘Political Allegory in Late Elizabethan and Early Jacobean “Turk” Plays: *Lust’s Dominion* and *The Turke*’, *Comparative Drama*, 36 (2002–03), 411–43 (p. 412).

⁶⁵ Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession*, p. 3. See also Jean-Christophe Mayer, ‘“This Papist and His Poet”: Shakespeare’s Lancastrians Kings and Robert Parsons’s *Conference about the Next Succession*’, in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. by Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 116–29 (pp. 124–25); Jean-Christophe Mayer, ‘Late Elizabethan Theatre and the Succession’, in *The Struggle for the Succession*, pp. 371–93 (p. 385); Eric J. Griffin, *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain: Ethnopoetics and Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 117, 131.

⁶⁶ Richard Dutton, ‘“Methinks the truth should live from age to age”: The Dating and Contexts of *Henry V*’, *HLQ*, 68 (2005), 173–204 (p. 191). On the Invisible Armada see especially Shapiro, pp. 195–211.

The spectre of Catholic Spain was very much alive in the period from 1588 to King James I's accession to the English throne: in a recent study on the topic, Eric J. Griffin convincingly argues that '[t]he volume of anti-Spanish [printed] material that appeared in England from the late 1580s through the end of Elizabeth's reign' clearly indicates that 'England's anxieties about the Spanish threat increased substantially after the Armada crisis'.⁶⁷ Fears were even magnified by the awareness that Philip II had annexed Portugal precisely by taking advantage of that throne's lack of a direct heir, thereby becoming the first monarch to govern territories in as many as four continents.⁶⁸ Imperial Spain indeed turned into a sort of archetypal enemy for England. In this turbulent situation, Griffin again observes how 'it was becoming fairly common practice for English playwrights [...] to recall actors and events from an internationalist Roman Catholic past in order to rewrite their significance for a nationalist, post-Reformation present'.⁶⁹

With this cultural-political backdrop in mind, it seems safe to assume that the focus on the name of Caesar—the first Roman to invade Britain, as well as, at least for many, the founder of the Roman empire—is likely to have at least partly resulted from an intentional misunderstanding between the proper noun and the title, which was perceived by many as hostile in early modern London as a consequence of the Reformation and the subsequent tensions between Protestant England and the Hapsburg Empire. Caesar's typical *superbia* and ambition would very effectively recall the legendary hubris commonly associated with the sixteenth-century Spanish Hapsburgs, trenchantly encapsulated by Philip II's new motto *Non sufficit orbis*, 'The world is not enough', coined right after the unification of the Iberian Crowns of Spain and Portugal as the first truly global empire. This event spread anxieties all over Europe regarding Spain's universalistic ambitions: imperial panegyrists fashioned the Spanish Hapsburgs as the true heirs of Augustus, who would attain the final unification of the world. This *translatio imperii* would indeed bring Philip II to a 'higher state / Than monarch, king or world's great potentate'; in Miguel de Cervantes's phrasing, he would be *el segundo Felipo sin segundo* (the peerless Philip II).⁷⁰ Caesar was indeed associated precisely with Philip II in works such as L.T. A.'s political pamphlet *Le masque de la Ligue et de l'Hespagnol découvert* (1590, probably turned into English by Anthony Munday as *The*

⁶⁷ Griffin, *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain*, pp. 50, 29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Masque of the League and the Spaniard Discovered, 1592) and E. L.'s verse history *Rome's Monarchy* (1595).⁷¹

Caesar was also frequently used more or less explicitly as a type of the papacy, since Rome had now become the bastion of Catholicism. David Kaula even goes as far as to contend that the identification of Caesar with the pope 'was in fact a commonplace among the Protestant writers, especially in the several Elizabethan commentaries on Revelation, which regarded Caesar as the founder of the universal empire later inherited by the popes.'⁷² Moreover, as Hopkins points out, 'the analogy between Rome and Roman Catholicism was virtually invited by the fondness of successive popes for choosing classicising names such as Pius and Julius, especially since Pope Julius II' chose his title consciously referring to Julius Caesar.⁷³ Early modern Englishmen were accustomed to the special quality of the figure of Caesar, that is, its being able readily to cross the borders between 'Roman' and 'Romish', which made it expedient for authors to deploy Caesar for manifold cultural and political purposes. Caesar's popish overtones do indeed surface in two early modern English 'Caesar' plays through two curious anachronisms. In Alexander's *Julius Caesar* Cicero observes that 'there in Caesar many Marians were' (2.2.724). This is an obvious reference to Gaius Marius's supporters, but it would also immediately evoke the Virgin Mary to an early modern (Protestant) audience.⁷⁴ Similarly, in Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* Caesar is said by Brutus to be holding the 'chair of universal bishop'.⁷⁵ On the face of it, this is an English rendition of the Roman office of *pontifex maximus*, which Caesar did indeed hold in his lifetime. However, as Clifford John Ronan observes, the phrase could also be readily construed as hinting at 'the chief episcopal *cathedra* (chair) of the Catholic (that is, universal) church'.⁷⁶

James I's accession to the English throne and the peace he signed with the Spanish empire in 1604—despite the Parliament's hostility to Spain's aggressive Catholicism—

⁷¹ See Freyja Cox Jensen, *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 148, 141, 127.

⁷² David Kaula, "'Let us be sacrificers': Religious Motifs in *Julius Caesar*", *SSSt*, 14 (1981), 197–214 (p. 202); John E. Curran, *Roman Invasions: The British History, Protestant Anti-Romanism, and the Historical Imagination in England, 1530–1660* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 153.

⁷³ Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ George Chapman, *Caesar and Pompey*, in *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman*, ed. by Thomas Marc Parrott (London: Routledge, 1910–14), I: *The Tragedies* (1910), IV. 1. 39.

⁷⁶ Clifford J. Ronan, *'Antike Roman': Power Symbolology and the Roman Play in Early Modern England, 1585–1635* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 30.

seemingly appeased many fears of the previous decade.⁷⁷ Compared to Elizabeth's, James's connection with Caesar inevitably looks less immediate, especially because historians and literary scholars have tended to concentrate almost exclusively on his self-identification with Augustus. However, Paulina Kewes has persuasively demonstrated that there was a

broader analogy between James and Caesar which was implicit in James's published writings, and which was made explicit in the writings he sponsored and patronized, [...] that for most of his life James held Julius Caesar in far greater esteem than Augustus; and that his self-image owed as much, if not more, to the former as it did to the latter.⁷⁸

On the strength of this realization, it is easier to situate the presence of the idea that a Caesar is above a king barely surfacing in Alexander's play within the complex political climate of the early years of James's English reign, especially his misunderstandings at various levels with his new subjects, which aroused ungrounded fears of arbitrary rule and passionate concerns that James himself might tamper with England's institutions.⁷⁹ Following this line of argument, the force with which *The False One* revives the distinction between the title of Caesar and that of king cannot be regarded as surprising in view of the delicate moment England was again experiencing around 1620, when James's alarming lack of decisive action and markedly Hispanophile foreign policy during the Bohemian-Palatinate crisis raised more than a few eyebrows in London and made the peril of external threats—always connected to the House of Hapsburg—loom large once again, a concern which also informs Fletcher and Massinger's play in many other respects, as convincingly argued by Marina Hila.⁸⁰

I am fully aware that in the last pages of this essay I have been discussing ideas which are seldom more than obliquely hinted at in the plays in question, rather than systematically explored and dealt with. Nevertheless, in these plays Caesar does seem to be conceived of as foreboding dreadful external perils, and by no means as the positive

⁷⁷ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, 'Spain and Europe 1598–1621', in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, ed. by J.P. Cooper, 14 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957–79), IV: *The Decline of Spain and the Thirty Years War 1609–58/59* (1970), pp. 260–82 (p. 269).

⁷⁸ Paulina Kewes, 'Julius Caesar in Jacobean England', *Seventeenth Century*, 17 (2002), 155–86 (pp. 159–60). Kewes especially takes issue with Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 43ff.

⁷⁹ See Lovascio, 'Caesar as a Tyrant in William Alexander's *Julius Caesar*', pp. 68–102.

⁸⁰ Marina Hila, 'Dishonourable Peace: Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One* and Jacobean Foreign Policy', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 72 (2007), 21–30.

model for monarchs proposed elsewhere by early modern English literature and culture.⁸¹ The oblique treatment of the issue of succession might make these claims appear too speculative or far-fetched, but one always has to bear in mind that, as Hopkins comments, ‘when plays do concern themselves with the succession, they tend to do so glancingly, not directly, and in ways more likely to raise discussion [...] than to offer clearly identifiable answers.’⁸² By virtue of his widespread identification in early modern England as the first Roman Emperor—and therefore as the predecessor of the pope—Caesar’s name could easily slip into a status akin to that enjoyed by Tarquin’s in republican Rome. Furthermore, as Griffin contends, ‘a decade after the Armada, England’s Ethnopoetics had become so overcoded that *the mere mention of a name could synecdochically evoke an entire Hispanophobic sign system*’.⁸³

Ultimately, I believe the identification of the insistence on Caesar’s name as a motif carrying disturbing political overtones and consistently shared by several early modern English texts has at least a twofold importance. Not only does it provide a further, trenchant example of the flexibility and versatility associated with the figure of Caesar in early modern England; more importantly, it also clearly illustrates how widely and pervasively Roman history permeated the Elizabethan and Jacobean social imagination and how readily, variedly and effectively the Roman past was regularly integrated in the complex network of cultural negotiations and appropriations which characterized the relations between early modern England and ancient Rome.

⁸¹ See Kewes, pp. 155–86.

⁸² Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession*, pp. 9, 13.

⁸³ See Hopkins, *Cultural Uses*, p. 13, for an intriguing discussion of Tarquin’s name. Griffin, *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain*, p. 96, my emphasis.