The Whore of Babylon and Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*

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*Julius Caesar* is an odd mix of elements. It contains no apparent love interest and, with two exceptions, is populated wholly by men. Its monolithic maleness encompasses the minor characters as well as the major ones, from the Cobbler to the Poets to, it seems, the Romans themselves: in his oration, Antony seven times refers to his auditors as “men” or “countrymen” (women he conspicuously ignores), and Brutus neglects “shows of love” to “other men.” Despite this gender imbalance, the play contains pervasive sexual overtones. It also, as critics have noted, contains numerous religious references, including allusions to the life of Christ.¹ These three seemingly disparate threads—of maleness, of sexuality, and of religion—are in fact integrally allied. Together they form the basis for the subtextual theme of the play.

Rome had a specific meaning in Shakespeare’s England. While it could be seen as a great ancient city whose ruinous fall inspired awe, it was primarily viewed as “the corrupt popish Babylon of Foxe’s martyrology,”² the seat of the Catholic Antichrist, whose ostensibly heretical doctrine was tantamount to spiritual whoredom. The consequent identification of Rome with the Whore of Babylon was thus a Protestant commonplace, a staple not only of the Geneva glosses but of the sermons and tracts of the day.³ In John Bale’s representative words, “No marvel... [Rome] be... called a great whore. For nowhere were ever yet seen so many idol-worshipings, ... so many

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superstitious sects, so many errors in hypocrisy, so many false prophets, and so many prodigious kinds of filthiness, no, not in Sodom itself." Sexual perversion—licentiousness, incest, and especially sodomy—accordingly became the Church’s defining attribute, the Church’s putative sodomitical bent following logically from its mandated celibacy. As Bale explains:

[Pope Gregory VII] was the first (that supreme hypocrite) who by excommunications deprived the ministers of the church of a wife and filled the world with innumerable pederasts. Thus the . . . Roman church has as a result through perverted love and cult of idols become Sodomitical.5

The identification of Rome with sexual perversion was a staple of lay literature as well. The humanist Joseph Scaliger locates “all licentiousness and particularly sodomy in Popish Italy,”6 John Marston’s persona exhorts “falsed . . . Patriotes” studying in Catholic seminaries abroad to leave their “Sodome vilanie” where they found it, and Spenser’s Duessa embodies not simply whorishness but genital deformity.7 The Italianate settings of many Jacobean plays—Othello, Volpone, and The Duchess of Malfi, for example—continue the Reformation image of Italy, conveying “a steamy atmosphere of sexual corruption,” and often having as a stock villain the hypocritical cardinal or pope.8 The Protestant view is encapsulated by Thomas Rogers: “If ye spell Roma backward . . . ye shall find it to be Amor: love in this prodigious [i.e., unnatural] kind,” a sentiment he punctuates with some verse:

At Rome the harlot hath a better life,  
Than she that is a Roman’s wife.9

It is this concept—prodigious or unnatural love—which, I will argue, constitutes the subtextual theme of the play. Conveyed primarily through a pervasive pattern of sexual puns, this theme is part of a larger satire on papal Rome, with Caesar the parodic savior or Antichrist.10

The theme is instated even before commencement of the dialogue, by means of the word “Commoners” (I.i.s.d.), which denotes both “plebeians” and “whores.”11 In response to Marullus’s query, the Cobbler states that he is a workman (a male copulator) who, though he lives by “the awl” (the phallus), disclaims meddling (sexual intercourse) with matters of the tradesman (brothelkeeper or bawd) and with “women’s matters” (female pudenda; sexual intercourse), professing to be merely
a "surgeon" (a treater of venereal disease) of "bad soles" (depraved souls) (I.i.5-22). Subtly corroborating the Cobbler's eschewal of "women's matters" while belying his disclaimer of bawd is the coterie of "men" he leads "about the streets," thereby "to get [him]self into more work" (copulation) (I.i.28-30). Further suggesting the commoners' "whoredom" is their fickleness: they have just shifted their affection from Pompey to Caesar, just as they will later shift it from Caesar to Brutus and from Brutus back to Caesar. What is subtextually depicted, therefore, is a society of male harlots or "feminized" men, who mirror in small the Roman state. As Cassius observes, "But, woe the while! our fathers' minds are dead, / And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits" (I.iii.82-3).

The opening scene is immediately followed by the entrance of Caesar, who supremely embodies Rome's sexual malaise while augmenting its ramifications. Caesar, we learn, is "prodigious grown" (I.iii.77), a phallic pun implying a huge and sustained erection and linking him to the prodigious or unnatural love Bale and Rogers describe. This meaning is substantiated by the "prodigies" marking the storm, "portentous things" that have changed their ordained "faculties" and "natures" to "monstrous quality," boding "some monstrous state" (I.iii.28, 31, 66-71); and further substantiated by "monstrous," a synonym for sexually perverse.12 "State" denotes both condition and body politic, both Caesar and Rome, the realm Platonically mirroring its putative head,13 and Caesar, to quote Cassius, is "Most like this dreadful night" (I.iii.73).

Further linking Caesar to Rome's sexual malaise is his "femaleness," an absence of virility suggested by his childlessness and by the frailty and infirmities that belie his phallic hugeness and render him "feeble" as "a sick girl" (I.ii.127-8).14 These infirmities include his "falling sickness," which denotes both epilepsy and prostitution (the phrase puns on the disease-ridden "falling trade," as prostitution was termed)15, and further allies him with the commoners of the preceding scene. So does his sexual bent: "Let me have men about me that are fat," he intones, adding, in a further phallic pun: "Sleek-headed men" (I.ii.189-90). Caesar, therefore, similarly eschews "women's matters," an eschewal directly responsible for Calphurnia's barrenness—a further symbol of the warped sexuality afflicting Rome.

Caesar's marital frigidity is affirmed in his dialogue with Decius, which pointedly juxtaposes that with Calphurnia. The conspirators' chief concern is "Whether Caesar will come . . . to-day" (II.i.194), a double entendre repeated six times in the first fifteen lines of dialogue between Decius and Caesar. Caesar,
however, declines to “come,” not, he insists, because he “cannot” or “dare not” but because he “will not” (II.ii.62-4). Caesar qualifies this refusal with a further sequence of sexual puns that, together with Decius’s explication of Calphurnia’s dream, reveal the full significance of Caesar’s “femaleness.” Caesar claims that the cause of his refusal is in his “will” (penis) and that this reason should “satisfy” (sexually gratify) the Senate. However, for Decius’s “private [genital] satisfaction,” and because, as he assures Decius, “I love you,” he reveals Calphurnia’s dream of his statue, “Which like a fountain with an hundred spouts / Did run pure blood” (II.ii.71-8). The fountain, as Gail Paster points out, “is conventionally associated with the female sexual organs,” and a flowing fountain denotes defloration—here, rape, a sense punningly substantiated by the “spoil” Caesar’s “hunters” will reap (III.i.205-6). The scene culminates in Decius’s incredible vision of the lactating Caesar, a male “mother” suckling all of Rome:

Your statue spouting blood in many pipes
........................................
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.

(II.ii.85-9)

To quote Paster, “[I]mages . . . of a lactating Christ were familiar in late-medieval Christian worship. The idea took varying forms: the body of the church, itself depicted symbolically as ecclesia lactans, was identified with the body of Christ; or Christ’s nurturing flesh was identified with nurturing female flesh; or the bodily [Crucifixion] wound . . . was depicted near the breast in order to suggest a bleeding nipple.” All these images, furthermore, were related “to the self-sacrificial emblem . . . [of] the mother pelican who, Christlike, pecks her own breast to feed her young” with her blood.17 Caesar thus becomes a grotesque parody of the redeeming Christ, a “savior” whose blood will in fact “revive” Rome by means of his lineal “resurrection”—in symbolic terms, by means of the assured continuance of the Roman Church. Again, we may note, only men will “press” (sexually bear down on) Caesar, “[in return] for” such favors as “relics” and “cognizance.” The scene concludes with Decius averring his “dear dear love” for Caesar (II.ii.102), and Caesar departing with the man who has symbolically seduced him away from and supplanted his wife. Compounding the irony are the love declarations the two have exchanged, in contrast to the
complete absence of such language between Caesar and Calphurnia.

Caesar’s phallic enormity is at once the root of Cassius’s jealousy (“Such men as he be never at heart’s ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves” [I.ii.205-6]) and of Caesar’s political power. “Common suitors”(II.iv.35; the phrase applies equally to the patricians), attracted by his huggeness, perpetually throng around him, jockeying for his favor in a ceaseless ritual of Petrarchan adulation. The journey to the Capitol is accordingly construed as a series of rival solicitations, all of which Caesar, true to his vow of sexual abstinence, rejects. The first is that of Artemidorus:

Here will I stand [maintain an erection] till Caesar pass along,  
And as a suitor [wooer] will I give him this.

The missive is signed “Thy lover, Artemidorus” (II.iii.7-10). Caesar, however, insists that “What touches [erotically caresses] us ourself shall be last serv’d” (III.i.8), a statement presaging his posthumous union with the mob. He likewise declines the “suits” of Trebonius (III.i.4-5), Metellus Cimber (III.i.33-5), Brutus (III.i.52-4; note also II.iv.42-3), and Cassius (III.i.55-7), all conceived in Petrarchan terms: Brutus kisses Caesar’s hand and Metellus proffers “curtsies” and “sweet words” (III.i.42-3), Metellus, Cassius, and Brutus each bowing or kneeling to Caesar in a show of abject adoration (III.i.36, 56, 75). Caesar, however, remains the adamantly chaste and imperious beloved, proclaiming his immunity to the flattery, “fawning,” and “couchings” that “melteth fools” (III.i.36-43). He concludes by reiterating his immovability—subtextually, his vow not to “come”: not without cause will he “be satisfied” (III.i.47-8). The irony, of course, is that Caesar, only moments earlier, had indeed been “mov’d,” by Decius’s flattery, to break his promise to Calphurnia, moreover deserting his wife for his seducer; and it is this inconstancy that both leads to his death and clinches his moral affinity with the “fools” he contemns.

Antony is the agent of Caesar’s regeneration, a role foreshadowed by a cluster of puns that convey a formidable sexual potency. Antony is “gamesome,” or sexually vigorous, a sense corroborated by Brutus’s concession that he “lack[s] some part / Of that quick spirit that is in Antony” (I.ii.27-8). “Spirrit” was a synonym for semen, and “quick” signifies both living (i.e., fertile) and rapidly ejaculatory. The idea of “quickness” is augmented by “run,” “speed,” and “chase” (I.ii.4-8) and physically manifested in Antony’s participation in the race, itself a
fertility ritual. Antony’s robust virility sets him apart from Rome’s womanish men, rendering him singularly capable of rectifying Caesar’s heirlessness and of thus effecting the “rebirth” or lineal regeneration that will negate Caesar’s death and assure his revenge.

Antony’s curing of Caesar’s heirlessness occurs, ironically, at the funeral, the play’s sexual climax and one of the most ingenious seduction scenes in literature. The action subtextually replicates all the stages of the sex act, from arousal to coitus to orgasm. This last stage is attended by the burning of Rome—by the flames emblematic of sexual frenzy—and marks the play’s structural climax as well. Thereafter, the fire imagery all but vanishes, reflecting the detumescence characterizing the second half of the play.

Initiating the sequence of double entendres is the mob’s chant, “[L]et us be satisfied” (III.i.1). Brutus, naively appealing to the mob’s “wisdom,” singularly fails in this regard, notwithstanding his request that they “awake” their “senses” (III.i.16-7). Their sensual awakening will be left to Antony, whose goal—their coitus with Caesar—will entail seducing them from Brutus back to Caesar and rousing them to the requisite sexual pitch. Antony begins, therefore, with some mild titillation: he reminds them of their former “love” for Caesar (III.i.104). He then casually mentions Caesar’s will, thereby rhetorically linking it to the will for which Caesar refused to “come,” simultaneously eroticizing Caesar in language rendering the two wills synonymous. “Testament” puns allusively on “testes”—and it is Caesar’s “testament” that will regenerate Rome by creating “heirs” to perpetuate his legacy. Antony states:

Let but the commons hear this testament,

And they would go and kiss dead Caesar’s
wounds [vaginal orifices],
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying [sexually climaxing], mention it within
their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

(III.i.132-9)

Antony’s speech waxes progressively more erotic; eventually, he transmutes the corpse itself into a phallus and the crowd into the receiving agent:
You will compel me then to read the will?
Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar,
And let me show you him that made the will.


(OIII.ii.159-66)

Orgasm, however—the fertilization that will make possible Caesar's rebirth—is not yet assured. Antony, therefore, moves to the body itself, focusing on Caesar's "mantle" in rhetoric that emphasizes Caesar's femaleness. He does this, as Paster states, by refiguring Caesar's body as a discursive site of desire and stressing his female vulnerability. Caesar's blood "responds to Brutus as to an unkind suitor, with a rather adolescent, even girlish naiveté." As Brutus

pluck'd his cursed steel away,
Mark how the blood of Caesar follow'd it,
As rushing out of doors, to be resolv'd
If Brutus so unkindly knock'd or no;
For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.

(OIII.ii.179-83)

"Angel" was a Petrarchan term of endearment as well as a term for a catamite or whore. That Shakespeare is invoking both senses appears from Brutus's reference to Caesar as "my best lover" (OIII.ii.46), and from the image of Caesar dying of a broken heart when he sees Brutus "stab" (OIII.ii.186)—a further phallic pun. The "rents" the daggers inflict and the resulting rush of blood out of Caesar's "doors" transmute the assassination into the rape prefigured in Calphurnia's dream.

Antony now proceeds to the seduction's finale: the removal of the mantle to reveal the naked body itself (OIII.ii.199). Again double entendres fuse with blatant eroticism: denying his intent "to steal away" their "hearts" (OIII.ii.218), he rivets the mob's gaze directly on the wounds emblematic of vaginal orifices, "mouths" inviting the insertion of "tongue[s]" (note his earlier image of "wounds" that "ope their ruby lips, / To beg . . . my tongue"

III.i.259-61):

I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor
dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits [semen], and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise [become erect] and mutiny
[sexually climax].
All. We'll mutiny.


(III.ii.226-34)

The speech concludes with the coup de grace, the reading of
Caesar's will:

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs for ever: common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.
Here was a Caesar! when comes such another?
1. Pleb. Never, never! Come, away, away!

(III.ii.249-55)

Orgasm—the "flood of mutiny" Antony seeks (III.ii.213)—is
now achieved, symbolically attended by the firing of Rome by
brands that are themselves phallic symbols: "Come, brands, ho!
firebrands! . . . burn all!" (III.iii.35-6). Stimulated by the crowd's
paroxysmal surging (commencing at III.ii.169-70), Caesar also
"comes" (III.ii.254), attaining the orgasm his abstinence
presaged: "The cause is in my will: I will not come" (II.ii.71). The
scene, a subtextual depiction of mass necrophilia, is, appropri-
ately, the play's sexual and structural climax and its crowning
example of prodigious love.20

The events are heavy with religious parody. The Catholic use
of charms or "enchantments" (holy water, for instance) to hallow
or transform is succinctly suggested by Caesar's belief that
Antony's touching of Calphurnia during his "holy chase" will
magically exorcise her "sterile curse" (I.ii.8-9; the words "holy"
and "curse" should be carefully noted in this regard). The adora-
tion of relics, deemed idolatrous by Protestants, is also succinctly
 glanced at, in Decius's explication of the bleeding statue
Calphurnia has dreamed: "men" will "press" Caesar for "relics"
(II.ii.88-9). The prophecy is augmented in Antony's speech to
the mob, as Antony envisions them begging "a hair of [Caesar]
for memory" and dipping "their napkins in his sacred blood"
(III.ii.135-6). These lines additionally allude to the Catholic
practice of dipping cloths in the blood of martyrs. To quote A. O. Meyer, "Great as was the care taken to prevent people showing reverence to the relics of the martyrs, or dipping cloths in their blood, all was in vain. Relics were secured after every execution, and sometimes it was the executioner himself who sold to catholics the martyrs' bloodstained garments."21 Caesar-worship, Shakespeare seems to imply, clearly resembles Roman Catholic worship.

The funeral's ultimate significance, however, resides in the will. The "common pleasures" Caesar bequeaths out of "love" to Rome (III.ii.143) will insure the parodic equivalent of eternal life, a perpetual succession of sons or "heirs" made possible by Caesar's "testament," which gives "To every several man" and his "heirs for ever" the means to "re[-]create [them]selves" (III.ii.244-53). The word "common" should again be noted, as should the fact that Caesar's "pleasures" are relegated to men. The will thus becomes a monstrous parody of Christ's testament, similarly conferred out of love, Caesar's "walks," "arbors," and "orchards" constituting the Heavenly City the pure will inherit, and the mob's union with Caesar suggesting Christ's marriage with the spiritually elect.

Brutus is Caesar's parallel. As purger of Rome, he becomes Rome's new savior, and "king" of a band of followers that are the moral correlative of the mob. An affiliation with the papacy is punningly suggested at the outset, by means of the ancestor whose name he bears and whose role he tacitly assumes:

There was a Brutus once that would brook'd
Th' eternal devil [the pope] to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.

(I.ii.157-9)

The parallel between Caesar and Brutus lies chiefly, however, in their sexual affinity, which makes Brutus Caesar's fitting successor as Rome's "savior." This affinity resides in a prudish preoccupation with "honor"—subtextually, with preserving his chastity—that renders him similarly womanish, courted by men and undergoing a kindred seduction. It is to honor that Cassius must accordingly appeal if he is successfully to woo Brutus away from his "best lover" Caesar (III.ii.46). He therefore begins "modestly" (I.ii.68), the better to establish his own sexual integrity, disclaiming (like Caesar) any "common" proclivities—here, any promiscuity—of which Brutus need be "jealous":

And be not jealous on me, gentle Brutus:
Were I a common laughter [lover], or did use
To stale with ordinary oaths my love
To every new protester; if you know
That I do fawn on men and hug them hard,

then hold me dangerous.

(I.ii.70-7)

Again, the “love” (including hugging) is confined to men. Brutus, preoccupied with Caesar’s growing power, has hitherto been sexually quiescent, neglecting his “shows of love to other men” (I.ii.46). That Cassius has succeeded in igniting the spark that will consume Rome is denoted by the ensuing exchange:

Bru. That you do love me, I am nothing jealous;

Cas. I am glad
That my weak words have struck but thus much show
Of fire from Brutus.

(I.ii.160-75) 22

After the conspirators arrive, Brutus asks them to “Give me your hands all over, one by one” (II.1.112). The men then exchange pledges of “honesty” (II.1.127)—subtextually, vows of chastity or sexual fidelity. The ritual recalls the Anglican marriage service, in which mutual pledges of fidelity are likewise solemnized by the joining of hands:

Forasmuch as .N. and .N. have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have . . . pledged their troth, either to other, and have declared the same . . . by joining of hands: I pronounce that they be man and wife together. 23

The immediately following scene with Portia reinforces the pact’s “marital” import. Like the companion exchange between Caesar and Calphurnia, the scene inversely parallels the preceding one. Again, the word “love” is conspicuously absent. Portia, moreover, twice accuses Brutus of “steal[ing] out of his wholesome bed” (II.1.264, 288), punningly underscoring his perverse new love alliance and the “idle bed” each man keeps at home (II.1.117). In contrast to his thrice-repeated welcome to the conspirators and the “wedding” ritual that caps it, Brutus dismisses Portia with “an angry wafture of [his] hand,” finalizing the rejection with the last words he ever speaks to her in the play: “Leave me with haste” (II.1.246-7, 309). The rejection bodes the dissolution of the marital bond, the repudiation of “that
great vow / Which did incorporate and make us one” (II.i.272-3). This wording, as Kaula points out, invokes

a Christian rather than classical conception of marriage, based on Genesis 2:24 and St. Paul’s homily on marriage in Ephesians 5: “and they twaine shalbe one flesh.” The Anglican Marriage Service explains the larger symbolic meaning of marriage when, paraphrasing St. Paul, it speaks of it as “signifying . . . the mystical union . . . betwixt Christ and his Church,” while the word “incorporate” occurs in the Communion Service: “that we be very members incorporate in thy mystical body.”

Portia’s words recall Cassius’s statement that Casca is “one incorporate / To our attempts” (I.iii.135-6) and Antony’s comment that Brutus “made one” of the conspirators (V.v.72), both punning allusions to the “marriage” pact which has negated and supplanted that with Portia.

Wounded by his remoteness, Portia points out that “the bond of marriage” obligates Brutus to reveal his “secrets” (privities)—

to

unfold [undress] to me, your self, your half,
Why you are heavy, and what men to-night
Have had resort to [sexual intimacy with] you.

(II.i.274-6)

She promises to “bear” these secrets with “constancy” (faithfulness, fidelity), a vow she keeps despite the anguish it entails. The speech recalls the “bond” of “secret Romans” Brutus lauds in his “marriage” pact with the conspirators (II.i.124-5), and the “constancy” he enjoins at II.i.227, both nullified by the infidelity of one or more partners; for we know from III.i.13-22 that someone has divulged their “secret.” The “sick offence” Brutus harbors (II.i.268) thus parallels Caesar’s; as Portia declares, in a possible allusion to the rhymed adage Rogers enunciates above, “Portia is Brutus’ harlot, not his wife” (II.i.287). The fact that talkativeness (here, the leaking of the secret) was a female attribute further suggests the men’s womanishness. Portia’s silence, in contrast (II.iv.6-9)—her fidelity to her oath and to her bond—renders her the “male” in the marriage: as she herself observes, she has “a woman’s might” but “a man’s mind” (II.iv.8).

The last man to arrive at Brutus’s is Ligarius. “Feeble” of “tongue” (phallus) and wearing a “kerchief,” he is another
womanish or "sick man" (II.i.310-5), whom the new Antichrist forthwith heals in a parody of raising Lazarus, but in sexual terms that also burlesque the Catholic rituals of exorcism and conjuration: "Like an exorcist" Brutus "conjur[es] up" (magically raises) his "mortified spirit" (dead semen) (II.i.323-4).\textsuperscript{27} That the cured man thereupon joins the band of "lovers" is indicated by the sexual innuendo and the courtly love exploits he vows:

\begin{quote}
Now bid me run [sexually climax],
And I will strive with things impossible,

And with a heart new-fir'd I follow you,
To do I know not what; but it sufficeth
That Brutus leads me on.
\end{quote}

(II.i.324-34)

The group marriage is now complete: Brutus calls his newest partner "my Caius" and prepares to "unfold" to him his secret.

Brutus's funeral oration further undercuts his vaunted "honesty," revealing him to be, like Caesar, a "common" or mass "lover": he calls the mob "lovers" and "countrymen" (cuntrymen), asking that they "respect" his "honour" even as he concedes killing his "best lover" because he "loved Rome more" (III.ii.13-23, 46). Significantly, the word "love" or a variant occurs eight times in this brief speech, in contrast to its total absence from his dialogue with Portia. The Cinna episode, which ends the first structural segment of the play, provides an ironic commentary on all that has transpired:

\begin{enumerate}
\item 4. Pleb. Are you a married man or a bachelor?
\item Cin. \ldots wisely I say, I am a bachelor.
\item 2. Pleb. That's as much as to say they are fools that marry.
\end{enumerate}

(III.iii.8-18)

The second part of the play attests a general detumescence. Supplanting the fire imagery emblematic of sexual frenzy are images of coldness and death: Cassius is "A hot friend cooling" (IV.ii.19); Caesar's ghost makes Brutus's "blood cold" (IV.iii.279); and "The sun of Rome is set" (V.iii.63), heralding the "night" that will soon close Brutus's eyes (V.v.41). The cooling extends to the conspirators, whose fragmentation further renders their "bond" a mockery. This fragmentation is exemplified in the relationship of the two remaining "lovers," and is signaled by the
coolness with which Cassius greets Brutus's envoy: though "courteous," the reception lacks intimacy, the "familiar instances" that "he hath us'd of old" (IV.ii.16-8). The breach typifies the diseased love and inconstancy that mark the play. As Brutus states—ironically, in light of the "enforced ceremony" his own "love" pact entailed:

Thou hast describ'd
A hot friend cooling. Ever note, Lucilius,
When love begins to sicken and decay
It useth an enforced ceremony.

(IV.ii.18-21)

The zealous partners have degenerated into squabbling lovers: Cassius, grown increasingly womanish, has become the jealous beloved, petulantly taxing Brutus with loving Caesar more "Than ever thou lov'dst Cassius" (IV.iii.106) and proffering his "naked breast" and his "dagger" (phallus) to prove his devotion to the man who, he claims, has broken his heart (IV.iii.99-100, 84). Later, ostensibly reconciled, the two drink to their "love" (IV.iii.161). The gesture, however, cloaks "a serious flaw in the relationship" (see V.i.74-6) and bodes the eternal schism ("this parting was well made" [V.i.119]) signaled by their "everlasting farewell" (V.i.116).28 The parting, like Brutus's from Portia, seals the dissolution of the "marital" bond. Compounding the irony is the fact that nothing has changed: Cassius remains an "underling" (the pun [I.ii.139] reinforces his femaleness), subject to a tyrant as imperious and as absolute as Caesar.29

As Brutus's "marriage" with the conspirators supplants that with Portia, so a new "marriage" supplants that with the conspirators. Fastidiously proper to the bitter end, Brutus awards Strato the privilege of killing him because

Thou art a fellow of a good respect;
Thy life hath had some smatch of honour in it.

(V.v.45-6)

With characteristic modesty (or, more accurately, prudery), he asks Strato to "Hold then my sword [phallus], and turn away thy face, / While I do run [sexually climax] upon it" (V.v.47-8). The pact, which is prefaced by a punning injunction of constancy ("I prithee, Strato, stay thou by thy lord" [line 44]), is solemnized by the joining of hands. Predictably, Brutus dies eulogizing not his country (or his wife) but his "lovers":

My heart doth joy that yet in all my life
I found no man but he was true to me.

(Vv.34-5)

In the play, then, Caesar is the usurping Antichrist, the parodic savior of Babylonian Rome, whose spiritual fornication he embodies. The perversion afflicts every level of society, the patriciate morally paralleling the commons, and the state thus Platonically mirroring the ethos of its putative head.

In accordance with its underlying theme of prodigious love, the play details a subtextual series of marriages, seductions, and divorcements, all indicative of the whorish and unnatural love Rome embodies. Brutus’s seduction by Cassius parallels Caesar’s by Decius. Deriving from the same blindness and inconstancy that characterize the mob, the seductions lead in both cases to marital “infidelity” and schism. The pattern of seductions also includes Antony’s seduction of the plebeians. Virtually all the play’s characters—including Portia—emerge as whores. Gender inversion, a further facet of prodigious love, is manifested in Rome’s “commonalty” of male harlots as well as in the women: Calphurnia is barren and Portia is the “male” in the marriage. The motif culminates in the mob’s coitus with Caesar’s corpse, the union incurring a perpetual succession of “sons” or heirs who will continue Caesar’s legacy. The subtext is reinforced by the play’s structure, with the sexual and structural climaxes occurring simultaneously.

That Shakespeare is operating within an established tradition—one fusing sexual and religious satire—we have already seen. This tradition, we might note, in effect begins with William Baldwin’s translation of Wonderfull Newes of the Death of Paule the .III. (ca. 1552), an antipapal satire that constitutes “the earliest sign of a shift toward the imported standards of Italianate and neoclassical satire that would take hold in England by the end of the century.” Its “phantasmagorical images of perverse sexuality” bring “to life the full animus that Reformation Englishmen felt toward the Vatican” and “approximate the . . . spiritual fornication of the Roman church.”30 This tradition, in sum, is one “in which the opponent is defamed as a sodomite” and whose texts “are an integral part of a mythology that validated Protestantism in general and the English Church in particular.”31

Julius Caesar is unique only in its sodomitical thrust; Protestant satire permeates the canon. Hugh Richmond has shown, for instance, how Shakespeare manipulates formulas of medieval “papistical” drama in ways calculated to exploit Protestant sentiment: “For example, an important element of the
first English tetralogy lies in its elaborate mockery of the miracle plays' celebration of saints' lives." Thus Joan of Arc, admired in sixteenth-century France, appears there as "a holy prophetess" and a "saint" (I Henry VI I.iv.101, I.vi.29) but in England as a "damned sorceress" and a "witch" (III.i.38). In Richard III (I.ii.8), "Lady Anne explicitly triggers Protestant repudiation of saints and their worship when she anticipates Henry VI's beatification."32 In Henry V, Henry of course is Catholic; in order therefore to present him as the ideal Christian king, Shakespeare disassociates him from the Church excesses exemplified by the venal and hypocritical prelates and has him deny the salvational efficacy of works. In Romeo and Juliet, the hypocritical friar counsels lying and deceit, his "magic" linking him to the devil and indirectly leading to the lovers' deaths. Love's Labour's Lost satirizes monasticism, as the lords, taking mock-religious vows, retire to their "academe" (I.i.13) and to three years of fleshly mortification. The play centers, however, on what Protestants deemed the Catholic emphasis on justification by works, such justification blasphemously implying that grace could be bought. The idea underlies the lords' hypocrisy as they seek to "buy" the ladies with flattery and gifts. The ladies, deploiring these "works" and imposing new ones calculated to prove their suitors' "faith," are identified with Protestantism. Measure for Measure also satirizes monasticism, Isabella's very name appearing "to suggest Catholicism, perhaps specifically Spanish Catholicism."33 King John censures papal supremacy outright (III.i.75-86). Whether or not the plays reflect Shakespeare's religious views, it seems clear that they were consistent vehicles for Protestant propaganda, that they exploited contemporary theological issues, and that they were addressed to a rampantly nationalistically-Protestant audience.

The role of Octavius remains to be considered. In the play, the rebirth of Caesarism is embodied in Octavius, at once Caesar's spiritual successor and incarnation. The convergence of roles is variously signaled. At I.ii.210, Caesar asks Antony to "Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf," a line with no basis in Shakespeare's known sources. Fraught with biblical overtones, the "right hand" reference is a blasphemous allusion to Christ's relationship to the Father.34 As the Geneva Bible makes clear: "By the right hand is signified the autoritie and power, which God giveth his Sonne Christ in making him his lieutenant & governour over his Church."35 The allusion is reinvoked by Octavius just before his victory; he tells Antony, "Upon the right hand I. Keep thou the left" (V.i.18). The reiteration underscores the men's spiritual kinship and further fuses their
characters and roles. By the play's end, a single figure—"another Caesar" (V.i.54)—is again in virtual control of Rome.\textsuperscript{36}

It is, however, their sexual affinity that clinches the fusion, an affinity conveyed by the series of puns informing Octavius's last speech:

\begin{quote}
Oct. All that serv'd Brutus, I will entertain them.
Fellow, wilt thou bestow thy time with me?
Str. Ay, if Messala will prefer me to you.
Oct. Do so, good Messala.
Mes. How died my master, Strato?
Str. I held the sword, and he did run on it.
Mes. Octavius, then take him to follow thee,
That did the latest service to my master.
\end{quote}

(V.v.60-7)

"To serve" means to confer sexual attention upon, "to entertain" means to caress erotically preparatory to intercourse, "to take" means to assume carnal possession of, and "die" and "run" both signify sexual climax. That Strato held Brutus's "sword" and induced orgasm at his climactic death confirms him as a worthy "follower," this last pun additionally implying a religious disciple. As Jan H. Blits notes, Octavius takes into service those who served not Rome but Brutus "and who are recommended to him on the basis of their personal devotion."\textsuperscript{37} Together with its implied promise of constancy, the "marriage" between Brutus and Strato, like all the preceding "marriages," is thus rendered a mockery, nullified by Strato's easy switch of allegiance to a new lord who was, moreover, moments earlier, his mortal foe. Thus begins the pattern anew, with another Antichrist firmly enconced and the Whore duly resuscitated.\textsuperscript{38} "Time," in Cassius's final superlative pun, is indeed "come round" (V.iii.23).

\section*{NOTES}

allegorical and homiletic elements.


6 See, e.g., at Rev. 14:8; Rev. 17 and 18 passim; and the Argument prefacing Revelation. Scriptural citations refer to The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition, introd. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969); in them, I have regularized u, v and i, j and silently expanded abbreviations and deleted italics to enhance readability.


6 Schleiner, p. 51.


10 Related studies include Jan H. Blits, "Manliness and Friendship in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar," Interpretation 9, 2-3 (September 1981): 155-67; G. Wilson Knight, "Romantic Friendship," in Shakespeare and Religion: Essays of Forty Years (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), pp. 53-63, both of whom consider the play's theme of friendship (Knight additionally remarks the eroticism charging the play); and Paster, who explores the play's "regendering" motif. Unlike me, Paster, who focuses on the blood imagery, argues that in stabbing Caesar the conspirators "re-mark Caesar's body with femaleness" out of their need "to cause his body . . . to leak like a woman's" and that such bleeding signifies their overmastering of Caesar (p. 296).

Kaula has already demonstrated Shakespeare's association of Caesar with the papacy. As Kaula points out (p. 202), the association was a commonplace among Protestant writers. That the Pope was Antichrist was a further Protestant commonplace, the term "Antichrist" additionally embracing the Roman Church. On the Pope/Antichrist equation, see Christopher Hill, Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 1-33.

11 Julius Caesar citations refer to the Arden edition, ed. T. S. Dorsch (London: Methuen, 1955). Except in cases of character designation, italics in play quotations are mine. Other play citations follow the Arden editions.

My interpretation of this scene closely follows Frankie Rubinstein, A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. xi-xii. Interpretations of subsequent puns are indebted to

12See, e.g., Rubinstein, p. 164; the marginal gloss accompanying William Tyndale's description of Rome's male brothels: "The wicked and monstrous doings of the pope" (*An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue . . .*, ed. Henry Walter, Parker Society [Cambridge, 1850], p. 171); and Thomas Beard's chapter titled "Of effeminate persons, Sodomites, and other such like monsters," in *The Theatre of Gods judgements* (London, 1612): "[T]here are too many such monsters [i.e., sodomites] in the world, so mightily is it corrupted & depraved: neither is it any marvell, seeing that divers bishops of Rome . . . are infected with this filthie contagion" (qtd. by Schleiner, p. 54). In addition to referring to size, "prodigious" meant *unnatural* and *abnormal* or *monstrous* (OED, s.v. "prodigious") 2, 3.

13See Barbara L. Parker, "'A Thing Unfirm': Plato's *Republic* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *SQ* 44, 1 (Spring 1993): 30-43.

14These traits are substantially Shakespeare's additions. See Parker, "'A Thing Unfirm,'" especially p. 33. Those who would argue that effeminacy precludes phallic huggeness should bear in mind that sexual preference neither determines nor governs phallic dimension (or, for that matter, phallic performance).

15Rubinstein, p. xii.

16Paster, p. 289.


18Stephen Booth's gloss on line 4 of Shakespeare's Sonnet 126 is in order here: "'Lover' meant 'friend' in context of a friendship, and this is such a context; 'lover' meant 'paramour' in context of a love affair, and by literary kind this is such a context. The effective meaning of 'lover' (and 'love') in these sonnets is a dynamic and witty conflation of both meanings, which constantly and unsuccessfully strain to separate from one another. (Compare the cruder, less complete, and therefore intellectually more manageable fusion of love of God and sexual love in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*.)" (*Shakespeare's Sonnets* [New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1977], p. 432).

19Paster, p. 297.

20Note Richard Wilson's related point:

Twenty-seven times in thirty lines the favourite Shakespearean phallic pun is repeated through all its libidinous connotations as it is taken up by Antony and passed around the crowd . . . Thus, Caesar's will, which is his butchered flesh, is also by etymological extension his testament—his will power disseminated through his signed and written text—where the potency denied him in his sterile marriage . . . is regenerated from his posthumous stimulation of the desires of the crowd he makes his heir.

("'Is This a Holiday?: Shakespeare's Roman Carnival," *ELH* 54, 1 [Spring 1987]: 31-44, 59.)


22As Maurice Charney notes, "Brutus, fired . . . by Cassius, is now able to fire others" (*Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in the Drama* [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961], p. 61). My interpretation of the fire imagery is largely indebted to Charney (pp. 59-66).
23“The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony,” in Liturgical Services: Liturgies and Occasional Forms of Prayer Set Forth in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, ed. William Keatinge Clay, Parker Society (Cambridge, 1847), p. 220. As Roy Battenhouse has kindly pointed out to me, the “marriage” of Brutus to the conspirators is comparable to that of Othello to Iago (note especially Othello III.iii.467-86).
25See Paster, p. 293.
26Portia’s maleness is further explored by Paster, pp. 293-4.
28This point, with attendant citations, is Thomas McAlindon’s, “The Numbering of Men and Days: Symbolic Design in The Tragedy of Julius Caesar,” SP 81, 3 (Summer 1984): 372-93, 383.
29Brutus’s tyranny is extensively explored in Gordon Ross Smith’s seminal “Brutus, Virtue, and Will,” SQ 10, 3 (Summer 1959): 367-79. See also Dorsch, p. xli.
30King, pp. 371-2.
31Schleiner, p. 67. See also Bruce Smith, p. 166. The reader disposed to question whether the play’s puns would have been apparent to Shakespeare’s audience will recall that sexual punning is not confined to Caesar but pervades the canon. Its sheer ubiquitiousness suggests audience awareness of the device.
33On Henry V, Romeo and Juliet, and Love’s Labour’s Lost, see Barbara L. Parker, A Precious Seeing: Love and Reason in Shakespeare’s Plays (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1987), chaps. 9, 8, and 5, respectively. On Measure for Measure, see Darryl J. Gless, “Measure for Measure,” the Law, and the Convent (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), especially p. 102, to which my views, and my quotation, are indebted.
34See, e.g., Mark 14:62: “And Jesus said . . . ye shal se the Sonne of man sit at the right hand of the power of God”; Mark 16:19: “So after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received into heaven, & sate at the right hand of God”; and Rom. 8:34: “Who shal condemne? it is Christ, which is . . . risen againe, who is also at the right hand of God.”
35Gloss, Matt. 22:44.
36This last point is made by Norman Sanders, “The Shift of Power in Julius Caesar,” REL 5, 2 (April 1964): 24-35, 35. Further parallels are noted by Sanders.
37Blits, p. 166 n.
38This view of Octavius accords with views contained in Elizabethan histories of Rome, as set forth by Robert P. Kalmey, “Shakespeare’s Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History,” SEL 18, 2 (Spring 1978): 275-87: Octavius is considered an “ideal prince only after he is crowned Emperor in Rome after the defeat of Antony; before this precise occasion, the same Elizabethan histories of Rome characterize Octavius as a vicious tyrant who foments bloody civil war and a reign of terror solely for his personal gain.” Thus, as a triumvir, “Octavius is revealed . . . as a pernicious demagogue” and “an ambitious and overreaching tyrant” (pp. 278-80; italics Kalmey’s).