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## “IS THIS A HOLIDAY?”: SHAKESPEARE’S ROMAN CARNIVAL

BY RICHARD WILSON

*Julius Caesar* was the first Shakespearean play we know to have been acted at the Globe and was perhaps performed for the opening of the new Bankside playhouse in 1599. The Swiss tourist Thomas Platter saw it on September 21, and his impressions locate the work within the different cultural practices that went to make the playhouse. To our minds, accustomed to a decorous image of both Shakespeare and ancient Rome, it is just this collision of codes and voices which makes the traveller’s report seem so jarring and bizarre:

After lunch, at about two o’clock, I and my party crossed the river, and there in the house with the thatched roof we saw an excellent performance of the tragedy of the first emperor, Julius Caesar, with about fifteen characters; and after the play, according to their custom, they did a most elegant and curious dance, two dressed in men’s clothes and two in women’s.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the chimney-pots, feather hats and chiming clocks in the play itself, we can absorb the shock of “the house with the thatched roof,” but the elegant jig of Caesar and the boy dressed as Caesar’s wife is too alienating a mixture for us of the “merry and tragical.” Even the Swiss visitor thought it a curious local custom, and he was lucky to see it, because by 1612 “all Jigs, Rhymes and Dances after Plays” had been “utterly abolished,” to prevent the “tumults and outrages whereby His Majesty’s peace is often broke,” alleged to be caused by the “cut-purses and other lewd and ill-disposed persons” who were attracted by them into the auditorium in droves at the close of each performance.<sup>2</sup> Platter was an observer of a theatre already expelling gatecrashers and purging itself of the popular customs that had legitimized their unwelcome intrusion. He was witnessing what Francis Barker admits were “the seeds of an incipient naturalism growing up” inside the Elizabethan theatre, and the inauguration of a new kind of drama in England, where clowns would learn to “speak no more than is set

down for them,” and laughter—as Hamlet prescribes—would be conditional on the “necessary question of the play.” Authority in this theatre would come to be concentrated in “the speech” written in what Hamlet proprietorially tells the players are “my lines” (3.2.1–45), and the mastery of the author as producer would be founded on the suppression of just those practices which Platter thought so picturesque: the unwritten scenario of the mummers’ dance, transvestite mockery, Dick Tarlton’s “villainous” comic improvisation, and the raucous collective gesture of disrespect for “His Majesty’s peace.” Elite and popular traditions coexist in embarrassed tension in Platter’s travel diary, where the excellence of the classical tragedy consorts so oddly with the curiosity of the antic hay. The diarist did not realize, of course, that the sequence he recorded represented the scission between two cultures and for one of them the literal final fling, nor that “the house with the thatched roof” was the scene, even as he applauded the performance, of bitter social separation.<sup>3</sup>

The opening words of *Julius Caesar* seem to know themselves, nevertheless, as a declaration of company policy towards the theatre audience. They are addressed by the Roman Tribune Flavius to “certain Commoners” who have entered “over the stage,” and they are a rebuke to their temerity: “Hence! home, you idle creatures, get you home / Is this a holiday?” Dressed in their festive “best apparel,” these “mechanical” men have mistaken the occasion for a “holiday,” and to the rhetorical question “Is this a holiday?” they are now given the firm answer that for them, at least, it is an ordinary “labouring day” (1.1.1–60). This is an encounter, then, that situates what follows explicitly within the contemporary debate about the value or “idleness” of popular culture, a debate in which, as Christopher Hill has written, “two modes of life, with their different needs and standards, are in conflict as England moves out of the agricultural Middle Ages into the modern industrial world.”<sup>4</sup> And as Flavius and his colleague Marullus order the plebeians back to work, it is a confrontation that confirms Hill’s thesis that the Puritan attack on popular festivity was a strategy to control the emerging manufacturing workforce. The Tribunes oppose “holiday” because it blurs distinctions between the “industrious” and the “idle,” just as their counterparts the London Aldermen complained the theatres lured “the prentices and servants of the City from their works.” In fact, the Tribunes’ speeches echo *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) by the

merchants' censor Philip Stubbes, and in so doing the actors of the Globe were disarming one of the most powerful, because pragmatic, objections to their trade. As Thomas Nashe protested when the first playhouse was opened on the South Bank in 1592, professional players were not to be confused with "squirting bawdy comedians"; they were distinct from "the pantaloone, whore and zany" of street theatre. Their patrons were "Gentlemen of the Court, and the Inns of Court, and captains and soldiers" (a clientele corroborated by the 1602 police raid on the playhouses), and the citizens could rest assured that "they heartily wish they might be troubled with none of their youth nor their prentices." So theatre-owners such as Philip Henslowe were careful to obey the ban on "interludes and plays on the Sabbath," closing their doors on city workers (as James I complained) on the only afternoon when they were regularly free. If working men were present to hear the beginning of *Julius Caesar* and stayed despite it, the implication is clear that they had no business to be there. Theatre, we infer, is now itself a legitimate business with no room for the "idle."<sup>5</sup>

The first scene acted at the Globe can be interpreted, then, as a manoeuvre in the campaign to legitimize the Shakespearean stage and dissociate it from the subversiveness of artisanal culture. As historians such as Peter Burke have demonstrated, revelry and rebellion were entangled in Renaissance popular entertainments, and it was no coincidence that insurrections such as the Peasants' Revolts of 1381 and 1450, the Evil May Day riot of 1517, or Kett's Rebellion of 1549 should have been sparked off at seasonal plays or have had vivid carnivalesque features. The juridical function of folk drama had been to cement the ties and obligations of an agrarian community, and when these were threatened in the transition to capitalist social relations, it was through the "rough music" of folk customs—mummings, wakes and charivaris—that the new masters were called to ritual account. The world of carnival, with its travesty and inversion, was a standing pretext for protest; but if, as happened increasingly in the early modern period, rulers chose to ignore the "wild justice" of festivity, there could be what Burke calls "a 'switching' of codes, from the language of ritual to the language of rebellion," when "the wine barrel blew its top."<sup>6</sup> This is what happened spectacularly in the bloody Carnival at Romans in 1580, and it was what happened less explosively in London during the crisis years of the 1590s, when

hunger and unemployment drove “disordered people of the common sort” (in the Aldermanic phrase) “to assemble themselves and make matches for their lewd ungodly practices” at Shrovetide, May Day or Midsummer: festivals when, like the workers in *Julius Caesar*, they could still “cull out a holiday” from the industrial week. Associating all revels with rebellion, the authorities were instinctively sure that riotous “apprentices and servants drew their infection” from the playhouses where people also caught the plague; but, as Nashe insisted, this analogy was a kind of category mistake, which miscalculated the new theatres’ social role. If the playhouse was, as coroners reported, the site of “frays and bloodshed,” it was as the target of violence, not the origin, as when apprentices rampaged traditionally on Shrove Tuesday to “put play houses to the sack and bawdy houses to the spoil” (in 1617 wrecking the Cockpit Theatre with the loss of several lives). The rough music of charivari was hollered in anger from outside the playhouse walls.<sup>7</sup>

“The disorders of the 1590s were the most serious to menace the metropolis in the decades up to the Civil War,” writes the urban historian Peter Clark in a recent essay, and what concerns him is how this unprecedented metropolitan crisis was contained.<sup>8</sup> The answer must lie at least partly in the success with which the language of carnival as a discourse of legitimation was commandeered by the commercial players and then tamed. For as scenes like the opening of *Julius Caesar* remind us, and as history, in Foucault’s words, “constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which struggle takes place.”<sup>9</sup> It was no mere evasion of authority, therefore, which led to the theatre being situated on the criminalized southern bank of The Thames, where Platter and his party rowed to unbrace and recreate themselves after lunch. In the complex zoning of the metropolis that dates precisely from this time, Southwark was to occupy the position of a policed and segregated annex to the business and residential districts on the river’s northern side. Within its licensed liberties, the Bankside was to have the status of a permanent but strictly circumscribed carnival in the city’s economy of repression and indulgence, a disposal-valve in its regulation of productivity and waste. Suspect and sinistral, until the final suppression of Hogarth’s Southwark Fair in 1762, the South Bank was to function as the unconscious of the capital of trade. Nor, in this geography of desire, was it accidental

that the Globe was built beside those very institutions that, in Foucault's analysis, shaped the discourses of modern subjectivity. Ringed by reconstructed prisons such as The Marshalsea and The Clink, and flanked by the newly refounded St. Thomas's Hospital, the playhouse meshed with a chain of buildings charged with those dividing practices whereby the productive subject was defined by isolation from its negative in the sick, the mad, the aged, the criminal, the bankrupt, and the unemployed: separated, as Flavius urges and the 1569 Charter of St. Thomas's decreed, from "all Idle, Begging people."<sup>10</sup> The wooden operating theatre of St. Thomas's survives as the celebrated arena where the body was cut into diseased and healthy parts. The "Wooden O" of the Globe next door, which must have resembled it in design so much, operated in analogous ways on the body politic to divide and control the visceral language of carnival, separating out productive revelry (or art) from the idleness and infection of rebellion.

If Thomas Platter was a naive theatre critic, as a sociologist he was shrewder. "England," he observed, "is the servants' prison, because their masters and mistresses are so severe." The foreign visitor could see what has been confirmed in detail by Lee Beier in his study of masterless men and the vagrancy problem in Shakespearean England, that the public order system which Foucault dated from the founding of the Paris General Hospital in 1656 was already being established in London by 1599.<sup>11</sup> It was a system based, however, less on crude severity than on the strategy of self-regimentation and surveillance which Brutus proposes in *Julius Caesar* when he argues for a controlled and strictly rational rebellion:

And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,  
Stir up their servants to an act of rage,  
And after seem to chide 'em. This shall make  
Our purpose necessary, and not envious.

(2.1.175–78)

The Shakespearean text belongs to a historical moment when a revolutionary bourgeois politics has not naturalized its own productive processes, and Brutus's realpolitik is a complete statement of the technique of the modern state whereby subversion is produced in both consciousness and society to legitimize the order that subjects it. Unruly passions and apprentices are both checked in this regime, as Hal also demonstrates in his career as agent

provocateur in Eastcheap, by being known and hated: incited to be rejected. This is a system of discipline whose subtlety, as Brutus recognizes, depends not on how it obstructs but on how it manipulates desire, so that sexuality, for example, will no longer be so much forbidden as the very ground through which power controls the community and the individual. And it is just this "subtle, calculated technology of subjection," as analyzed by Foucault, operating in the new factory, hospital or school of Elizabethan London, which surely explains why Bakhtin says so little in his work on the subversiveness of carnival about either Shakespeare or England. His ideas were recently applied to Elizabethan drama by Michael Bristol, who argues for what he terms the "carnivalization" of Shakespearean literature. The argument is not convincing because, as Umberto Eco has remarked, what Bakhtinians crucially forget in their idealization of carnival is precisely the revenge of Lent: that is to say, the confinement of desire within a dialectic of transgression and containment. If carnival were always so emancipatory, Eco adds, "it would be impossible to explain why power uses circuses."<sup>12</sup>

The conditions of modern subjectivity are inscribed within the Shakespearean text. Thus, when Portia tries to persuade her husband to share "the secrets of [his] heart" by divulging the plot she calls the "sick offence within your mind," she challenges him: "Dwell I but in the suburbs / Of your good pleasure? If it be no more, / Portia is Brutus' harlot" (2.1.268–306). Body, language and thought are all held in ideological subjection in the bourgeois order Brutus represents, but when he succumbs to Portia's emotional blackmail he destroys himself by failing to quarantine desire in the suburbs of his self, where it should have been confined like the brothels of the Bankside. In *Julius Caesar* carnival—the language of desire and the flesh—is a discourse that is always mastered by the dominant. Thus, the opening scenes take place on the Roman "feast of Lupercal:" February 14, St. Valentine's Day and the approximate date of Mardi Gras. So Shakespeare's revelling artisans connect with those "bands of prentices, 3,000 or 4,000 strong, who on Shrove Tuesday do outrages in all directions, especially in the suburbs," in contemporary accounts, and whose Kingdoms and Abbeyes of Misrule have been researched, in their European manifestations, by Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>13</sup> In the play their carnival ceremonies have been appropriated by Caesar to legitimize his intended coronation. Antony therefore runs in the

“holy chase” to “touch” Calphurnia for fertility (1.2.7–8), while Caesar himself performs in the Shroving game by pretending to give “the rabblement” the freedom that they shout for. This would be the tactic of King James’s *Book of Sports* (1618), of royalist propagandists such as Herrick, and ultimately of the Restoration, when (contrary to Bakhtin’s thesis) the rituals “of May-poles, Hock-carts, Wassails, Wakes” could be harnessed to the legitimation of a program of social conservatism. It belongs to the world of what Hill calls “synthetic monarchy,” of Elizabeth’s Accession Day anniversary and the Stuart revival of “touching.” And by this appropriation of the discourse of festival Caesar turns politics into theatre as “the tag-rag people clap and hiss him, according as he pleas’d and displeas’d them, as they do the players” (1.2.255). He is the Carnival King, a Lord of Misrule who governs by exploiting his subjects’ desires with his “foolery” (1.2.232), manipulating “fat, Sleek-headed men” (1.2.190), as he indulges Antony in plays and music when he “revels long a’ nights” (2.2.116). Provoking them “to sports, to wildness, and much company” (2.1.189), Caesar is the master of revels who knows that “danger” belongs to the “lean and hungry” who can discipline the body to their purposes. So his Roman carnival becomes a model of authoritarian populism, the true regimen of bread and circuses.<sup>14</sup>

According to Anne Barton the theatre image in *Julius Caesar* is uniquely positive and “the actors are no longer shadowy figures: they are the creators of history.”<sup>15</sup> This may be true, but it oversimplifies the process that the play rehearses whereby discourses, which are the means of struggle, are themselves shaped by that struggle as it unfolds. It unfolds in the Shakespearean text like carnival itself, as a masquerade in which successive ideologies which had seemed to be authoritative are “discovered” and discarded as power is displaced. On Mardi Gras the aim is to see without being seen behind the carnival mask; and here the eye of power strips the mask of discourse from its antagonist, revealing—as Cassius demonstrates with his satirical broadsheets “wherein Caesar’s ambition shall be glanced at”—the naked drives discursive practices hide (1.2.315). Thus the plebeians who are masterless in their holiday guise are exposed by the Tribune’s Puritan analysis as Caesar’s “idle creatures”; but Puritan discourse is itself “put to silence” when it tries to “pull the scarfs” from Caesar’s images (1.2.282). That demystification belongs to the knives of the aristocratic fraction, whose mask of constitutionalism—with its



common law reverence for ancient custom and contempt for the absolutist yoke—is worn “like Roman actors do” (2.1.226), until Antony seizes the pulpit/stage in turn and reveals the carnivorous butchery their Lenten rhetoric conceals. This is the radical potentiality of Renaissance tragedy that Jonathan Dollimore and others would mobilize as a critical weapon: the revelry with which one discourse decodes the authority of another, as Antony deconstructs the discursivity of the “honourable men” (3.2.120–230). With “their hats pluck’d about their ears, / And half their faces buried in their cloaks” (2.1.73–74) or masked by handkerchiefs (2.1.315), the plotters who meet in Pompey’s theatre assume the anonymity of carnival and arrogate its dispensation to kill a scapegoat in their coup against Caesar, just as the real rebels of the Dutch Revolt had started their uprising against the Spanish governor at Carnival in 1563 dressed in motley and jester’s cap and bells. In the Renaissance, as Stephen Greenblatt contends, “theatricality is one of power’s essential modes”; so when their “antic disposition” is ripped from these revellers, it is fittingly by the consummate theatricality and power of speech of a champion gamesman and seasoned masker. “A masque is treason’s licence” in Jacobean drama, but the incremental logic of this revelry will be to strip all power, including that of rebels, of its legitimacy, exposing the face of bare ambition beneath the “veil’d look” (1.2.36) of rites and ceremonies (3.1.241).<sup>16</sup>

The Carnival at Romans in 1580 described by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie provides a paradigm of Renaissance festival as a “psychological drama or ballet” whose players danced or acted out class struggle through the “symbolic grammar” of processions and masquerades. There the poor had celebrated a mock funeral of the rich whose flesh they pretended to eat on Mardi Gras, until the law and order party had organized a massacre in retaliation, arraying themselves for the ambush in carnival costume and carrying carnival torches.<sup>17</sup> The Roman carnival in *Julius Caesar* follows a similar timetable and pattern through the cannibalistic feast of Caesar’s assassination and the mock-trial of the conspirators at the funeral, to the counterrevolution of a revanchist repression. In Shakespearean Rome, as in actual Romans, the symbolic discourse of public festival is a system whose social significance will be dictated by the strongest. Likewise, poems, plays, letters, music, names, dreams, prophecies, clouds, storms, stars, entrails and flights of birds are all discredited as “idle ceremonies” (2.1.197) in

*Julius Caesar*, the random signifiers on which praxis enforces meaning. This is a deconstructive carnival that leads ineluctably to the burlesque textuality of Caesar's bloodstained "vesture" as interpreted by Antony in the Forum through its gaps and "wounded" tears, and finally, when the corpse is divested of even that last tattered shred of discursivity, to the exposure of Caesar's naked "will": the "bleeding piece of earth" which is metonymic of all desire and power (3.2.130–160). 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, to substantiate in a riot of polysemy that at the point where text and body fuse, discourse and power are one. Caesar had offered his murderers wine on the Ides of March. Now his carved meat becomes with cannibalistic literalism the carnival sacrament of a festive fraternity of blood.

Power constructs its own discursivity in Shakespearean tragedy by appropriating the radical subversiveness of carnival, and a text such as *Julius Caesar* seems knowingly to meditate upon its participation in this process of sublimation and control. 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 and abortive reign is regenerated from his posthumous stimulation of the desires of the crowd he makes his heir. Where there's a will, in the modern state, there is also a way for power to make its own, and Caesarism works here through a system of license and surveillance that exactly parallels the real dividing practices of Shakespearean London. Sequestered in the suburb of the city, desire can henceforth be partitioned and canalized in the interests of the governing group:

Antony:	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?
Plebeian:	Never, never! Come away, away! We'll burn his body in the holy place, And with the brands fire the traitors' houses. Take up the body.

(3.2.249–58)

So the incendiary brands of carnival are transformed into instruments of counterrevolution (as in London the Corpus Christi and Midsummer cressets became the flambeaux for the Lord Mayor's Show and the stolen fire of Halloween illuminated the thanksgiving for Stuart deliverance from the Gunpowder Plot). Caesar's authoritarian paternalism deflects the *vox populi* towards the institution of the monarchy by the invigilation of the people's private desires. Likewise, the sexual license of the Bankside funfair would prove the conduit through which power would recreate itself by the regulation of the public's common pleasures in the impending bourgeois age. The corpse exhibited by Antony stands in something of the same relation to the organization of modern subjectivity, therefore, as the exemplary cadaver in Rembrandt's picture of *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* discussed by Francis Barker. It is the material ground, the "earth" (3.1.254), on which bourgeois ideology will proceed to write its own interpretation of society and human life, inscribing a discourse of reason and morality on a scene of lust and blood that "else were a savage spectacle" (3.1.223). This is quite literally how Antony uses the body for demonstration, when he effaces his own discursive practice in the interpellation of the members of the crowd as obedient subjects of the revived monarchic state:

For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,  
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech  
 To stir men's blood; I only speak right on.  
 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.

(3.2.223–28)

Like Tulp's dissection, Antony's anatomy lesson—to be repeated with the body of Brutus—reproduces the spectacular corporeality of the carnivalesque in the service of the new power of the disciplinary society, forcing the corpse to signify "that which you yourselves do know" about what it is to say "This was a man!" (5.5.75). And as Antony turns desire in the mob to authoritarian ends, this is also the manoeuvre of the Shakespearean text, which reworks the ceremonies of an older kind of ritual—"to execute, to dismember, to eat"—not simply to erase them but, as Barker notes of Rembrandt's painting, "to take them over, to appropriate the ancient vengeful motifs and to rearticulate them for its own

new purposes.” Text and picture belong to a moment, that is to say, when the bourgeoisie still has need of the energies of “the earlier pageant of sacramental violence,” and when its “image fashions an aesthetic which is rationalistic, classical, realistic, but one to which the iconography of a previous mode of representation is not completely alien.” As Barker goes on to explain, “if it continues to evoke the signs of a punitive corporeality,” bourgeois representation “also aims to draw off and reorganise the charge of these potent residues, and to invest them, transformed,” in the name of the rational spirit of capitalism, “which will soon free itself entirely from the old body, even if it trades at first on the mystique and the terror of that abandoned materiality.”<sup>18</sup> So Antony must yoke “mischief” to his politics and “let it work” for the restoration of the social status quo (3.2.262). By syphoning the subversiveness of popular festivity in the representation of a deflected and contained rebellion, the Shakespearean text anticipates the counter-revolution of the Cromwellian Commonwealth and faithfully enacts the coercive strategy of those subtle London masters who “stir up servants at an act of rage” (2.1.176) the better to control them. Located on the threshold of revolutionary upheaval, *Julius Caesar* is the image of bourgeois ascendancy as “necessary, and not envious,” (2.1.178) separated from popular or sectarian movements, and the natural issue of “a general honest thought”—as Antony claims over the body of Brutus—“and common good to all” (5.5.71–72).

*Julius Caesar* is the representation of a world turned upside-down to be restored, where citizens’ houses are set alight by the mob in order that property values should be upheld. The question that it seems to address in this paradoxical operation is the one which would become, according to Christopher Hill, the critical dilemma of the Commonwealth, posed eventually by a pamphleteer of 1660: “Can you at once suppress the sectaries and keep out the King?”<sup>19</sup> Because it arises from a historical juncture when the English bourgeoisie was engaged in a reorganization of the absolutist state to effect this end, it is a text that discloses the materiality of power with self-important openness. In particular, this early Globe play reflects candidly on the process whereby hegemony is obtained through the control of discourse, a process in which the inauguration of the playhouse was itself a major intervention. Victory in *Julius Caesar* goes to those who administer and distribute the access to discourse, and the conspirators lose possession of the

initiative in the action the moment that they concede Antony permission to “speak in the order of [the] funeral” (3.1.230–50). Inserting his own demagogic rhetoric into Brutus’s idealistic scenario, Antony disrupts that order of discourse, rearranges the “true rites and lawful ceremonies” (3.1.241) of the republic to facilitate his counter coup, and imposes his domination through the populist device of Caesar’s will. Censorship, Barker insists, was “a constitutive experience” in the seventeenth-century construction of both the bourgeois subject and the modern state, and one which predicated the very possibility of bourgeois enunciation.<sup>20</sup> This text proclaims that fact when Antony revises the clauses of the will to finance his army, cuts off Cicero’s Greek irony with the orator’s “silver hairs” (2.1.144), and “damns” his enemies “with a spot” when “their names are prick’d out” on his proscription list (4.1.1–10). The murder by the mob of the poet Cinna for his “bad verses” (3.3.30) and mistaken name merely confirms what Cassius and Brutus learn to their cost, that power goes with those who command the materiality of signs (3.3.30–35). Tzvetan Todorov proposes that the Incas and Aztecs fell victim to the Spanish Conquistadors because of their inferior system of signification, defeated, he believes, by Cortez’s capacity to decipher their semiotic conduct whilst baffling them with his own.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the republicans fail in *Julius Caesar* when they lose control of signs. Quarrelling over the meaning of their correspondence and at cross-purposes in their reading of the “signs of battle” (5.1.14–24), Brutus and Cassius become deaf even to Homer’s textual warning when they hear *The Iliad* read (4.3.129–37), while the words of Caesar that the Romans record when they “mark him and write his speeches in their books” (1.2.125) come back to haunt the assassins at the end in the form of the Ghost, which appears the instant Brutus finds “the leaf turn’d down” in his book and opens it to read, presumably, the avenging text: “*Veni, vidi, vici*” (4.3.251–75). “Words before blows” (5.1.27) is the battle-order in this play, which rehearses the English Revolution by enacting the Gramscian doctrine that the iron fist is preceded by the velvet glove, and that power is first enthroned in pulpits, poetry and plays.

Carnival, *Julius Caesar* reminds us, was never a single, unitary discourse in the Renaissance, but a symbolic system over which continuous struggle to wrest its meaning was waged by competing ideologies. It is the pretense of the Shakespearean text, however,

that the masquerade of false appearances comes to its end in bourgeois realism, as Antony closes the action and announces his domination when he discounts all “objects, arts, and imitations” as “out of use and stal’d by other men” (4.1.37–38), learning to separate the idleness of drama from the business of politics. Thus the rupture forced by holiday in history would be sealed during the course of the seventeenth century as the English bourgeoisie elided its own revolutionary past. To make this representation of tragic acquiescence possible, nonetheless, the playhouse had been made the bloody site of contestation between social groups. “The Triumph of Lent” is what Peter Burke calls the seventeenth-century suppression of the carnivalesque “World Turned Upside Down.” It was a triumph achieved only after many eruptions into the Shakespearean space of festive rout, and to grasp the operation of the new theatre as an institution of division it is only necessary to recall those intrusions from outside the enclosure of the “Wooden O”: interruptions like the episode at Shrewsbury in 1627 when the actors of the Globe were driven out of town in the middle of a performance by fairground revellers with flaming brands, or the one that recurred on Shrove Tuesday in the capital itself, according to reports, when players half-way through an “excellent tragedy” were “forc’d to undress and put off their tragic habits” by the holiday crowd, and made to “conclude the day with *The Merry Milkmaids*. And unless this were done, and the popular humour satisfied (as sometimes it so fortun’d that the players were refractory), the benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, oranges, apples, nuts, flew about most liberally; and as there were mechanics of all professions there upon these festivals, every one fell to his trade and dissolved the house in an instant, and that made the ruin of a stately fabric.”<sup>22</sup> The floor of the new playhouse was not yet quite an arena which the dominant ideology could call its own, and excluded or enclosed the festive melee still found the means on occasion to deconstruct—or transvalue—the sign system of the imposing “house with the thatched roof”.

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#### NOTES

A version of this paper was given to the 1986 Higher Education Teachers of English Conference at the University of Sussex.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in T. S. Dorsch, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar* (London:

Methuen, 1955), vii. All citations of *Julius Caesar* are to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), 4:340–41 (Order of the Middlesex Sessions, October 1, 1612).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), 18; The Arden Shakespeare: *Hanlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 163.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless in The Unfortunate Traveller and other Works*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 114–15; Chambers, 4:307 (Privy Council Minute, July 25, 1591); L. A. Govett, ed., *The King's Book of Sports* (London, 1890), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 203.

<sup>7</sup> Chambers, 1:264–65.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Clark, *The European Crisis of the 1590s: essays in comparative history* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 54.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," trans. I. McLeod, in Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), 52–53.

<sup>10</sup> R. E. McGraw, *Encyclopaedia of Medical History* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 138.

<sup>11</sup> A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The vagrancy problem in England, 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985). For Platter's comment, see 164.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 221; Umberto Eco, "The Frames of Comic Freedom," in Thomas Sebeok, ed., *Carnival!* (New York: Mouton, 1984), 3. Mikhail Bakhtin's influential account of carnival is in *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984). See also Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1985); Chambers, 1:265.

<sup>13</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Herrick, *The Poems of Robert Herrick*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 5. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 353–54.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Barton, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 141.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984); Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*," in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press, 1985), 33; Cyril Tourneur, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London, 1966), 5.1.181.

<sup>17</sup> E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising in Romans, 1579–1580* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 192–215; for cannibalistic symbolism see 173, 198.

<sup>18</sup> Barker, 76.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 347.

<sup>20</sup> Barker, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of The Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> E. Gayton, "Festivous Notes Upon Don Quixote" (1654), in Chambers, 1:265.

In London, the Notting Hill Carnival is very popular. The carnival is held each year on the weekend of the August Bank holiday and is considered one of the largest street parties. There are individuals of all ages, sizes and cultures that attend this loud, colorful and vibrant affair. Each year, during the run-up to the carnival, there is an air of enthusiasm and anticipation, as individuals suit-up in colorful, creative, flamboyant and unique costumes and floats and prepare for this mega event. The atmosphere that presents itself during the weekend of the carnival is "awe"™ inspiring for local