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Embodied Masculinity in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

Amid the famous historical figures and events of *Julius Caesar* a complex question about gender identity recurs—what is masculinity's perfect form? Antony's famous eulogy on Brutus invokes ideal manhood: "This was the noblest Roman of them all… nature might stand up / And say to all the world 'This was a man' " (5.5.67-74).[1] He says that Brutus acted not out of envy but out of honest conviction for the good of all. His ally, Octavius sums up these noble principles by the important word, "virtue" (5.5.75), which, from the Latin *virtus*, signified "an ideal of manhood" for many English Renaissance writers.[2] The final speeches receive the imprimatur of dramatic closure; yet traces of certain ambiguity are not entirely effaced by the climactic tone. For those who celebrate Brutus are those who have defeated him; simply put, they can afford to be generous. Their praise is earnest and expedient, and it is also carefully qualified—confining Brutus's nobility to the past, while suggesting that for all his valour Brutus was not as great a figure as the victors. The tribute uses Brutus to celebrate true masculinity but subtly directs it away from him. The closing scene thus captures the way that masculinity is idealised in conflicting terms throughout the play. It remains a singular virtue, prized by men of all social ranks. It is also competed for, since its social and political value is sharply appreciated. Everyone (that is, every man), regardless of

rank, thinks he might be able to claim it, either for himself or to attribute it to another—the tribunes lionise Pompey, the populace Caesar, Brutus and Cassius try to claim it for themselves. There are many men but one ideal. Whose version of masculinity is the real thing? How is the distinction to be made? Which criterion is right?

Antony claims that nature ultimately states who man is. It is a powerful way to put things, since it appears not only to support what is said (Brutus is a man) and how (Antony quotes nature), but also to guarantee the speech's premise—man is the pre-eminent natural ideal. The proof of man's perfection is the body—"the elements / So mixed in him" (5.5.72-73)—a seemingly unique attribute, given at birth yet also a man's own to mould and use. No matter that, as happens constantly through the play, men's bodies are always being re-formed verbally, visually, and physically by people and events around them. This ongoing process can be ignored as long as the elemental man-body-nature complex seems to hold together in the eyes of others. Repeatedly in *Julius Caesar*, the naturalness of the body and the perfection of man are shown to depend on their representational impact.

Shakespeare's drama at once unveils and conceals the dominance of the aristocratic male body. In staging the production of the masculine ideal, the play suggests that it is never natural. Yet true to the historical tradition it invokes, the action does not move towards depicting a world not defined in terms of the aristocratic male body. This perspective is affirmed even though the play's title figure is not pre-eminent, and hence, for some commentators, the play fails to conform to a "great man" approach to history. In 1712 John Dennis criticised the playwright's ignorance of ancient works, which led him to portray Caesar as "but a Fourth-rate Actor in his own Tragedy."[3] Twenty years earlier, Thomas Rymer had maintained that Shakespeare misrepresented not simply the protagonist but all the major characters: he "sins… against the most known History and the memory of the noblest

Romans."[4] Rymer specially condemned the depiction of Brutus, picking his speech as entirely inappropriate, "unless from some son of the Shambles, or some natural offspring of the Butchery."[5] He alludes to Shakespeare's connection to the cattle industry through his father's early work as a glover, which John Aubrey embellished as follows: "his father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours, that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade, but when he kill'd a calf, he would do it in high style, and make a speech."[6] In contrast to the biographical panegyric that is soon to begin with Nicholas Rowe's *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709), and notwithstanding Aubrey's image of the proto-tragedian, Rymer insinuates that Shakespeare's yeoman background prevents him from characterising heroic masculinity. Despite their different tones, from sarcasm to panegyric, the writers readily assume more or less direct connections between Shakespeare as a man, his lineage, and the kind of plays he can write.

For Rymer and Dennis, the gap between history, genre, and Shakespeare's characterisation threatens to expose and undermine if not historical tradition, then certainly traditional masculinity: if the near-legendary Caesar and Brutus come across as ordinary or inferior, where does that leave all other male figures? Some other early commentators did, however, take a different view. It is in his departures from the sources that Margaret Cavendish locates the success of Shakespeare's characters: "certainly *Julius Caesar*, *Augustus Caesar*, and *Antonius*, did never Really Act their parts Better, if so Well, as he hath Described them, and I believe that *Antonius* and *Brutus* did not Speak Better to the People, than he hath Feign'd them."[7] She praises an imaginative response that improves on historical accounts. Antony's eulogy to Brutus exemplifies this enhancing effect. It reaffirms a masculine order of things that has been disturbed not overturned, tested but reinforced. *Julius Caesar* reveals the capacity that masculinity, like all ideologically compelling concepts, has

to be reinvented and reasserted: "let's away / To part the glories of this happy day" (5.5.79-80), the new man concludes. Though civil order seems on the verge of implosion and the public imagination is flooded with irreconcilable ideals, the play does not develop a radical or critical perspective on masculine mythology. Rather, the effects it dramatises run parallel to those traditionally played in western discourse by an idealised masculine body: "a corporeal 'universal' [that] has in fact functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm, the ideal representative without any idea of the violence that this representational positioning does to its others."[8] Despite the emulous rivalries played out between characters, and the potential demystification of heroic male figures that offended Rymer and Dennis, an embodied masculine norm remains intact. In a sense, it needs to be threatened to be able to re-emerge and be celebrated. Ultimately *Julius Caesar* maintains, in Elizabeth Montagu's words, "Roman character and sentiments,"[9] by staging the potent capacity of culturally dominant masculinity to recreate and perpetuate itself.

The weaknesses and contradictions of man's body often figure as a sobering trope for moral discourse in the period when Shakespeare was writing. In Caesar's disabilities and Brutus's self-doubts, at times *Julius Caesar* echoes the ambivalent tone of such writers as Thomas Wilson: "Let us see him what he is: Is his bodie any thing els, but a lumpe of earth, made together in such forme as we doe see? A fraile vessel, a weake carion subiect to miserie, cast downe with euery light disease, a man to day, to morowe none." Wilson grounds man's identity in a mortal, material body.[10] Perhaps because of these overt failings, man is preoccupied with his physical state: "Trueth it is," Wilson claims, "we are more fleshly then spirituall, soner feeling the ache of our body, then the greefe of our soule: more studious with care to be healthful in carkasse, then seeking with praier, to bee pure in spirite."[11] The

emotions too appear most significant on account of their physical consequence, the "diuers effectes" on the body of the "passions of the minde:" "like as ioye comforteth the heart, nourisheth bloud, and quickeneth the whole bodie: So heauinesse and care hinder digestion, ingender euill humours, waste the principal partes, and with time consume the whole bodie."[12] Wilson's moralising shares the anatomical premise that recurs through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: examining man's body reveals his true nature. Yet it is not only corporeal detail that is uncovered on early modern dissecting tables. Various notions of man's identity are supported through anatomical discourse, be they in terms of the Christian ethic that Wilson offers, or of a solidly individualised and gendered selfhood, or of a more sceptical and equivocal sense of masculine ethos, as has been recently suggested.[13]

For Wilson, the body starkly denotes man's origin, emotions, and death. Its vivid meanings exemplify the body's potential to act as a paradigmatic personal and cultural sign; as Mary Douglas has influentially put it, "Just as it is true that everything symbolises the body, so it is true ... that the body symbolises everything else."[14] Hence those who can define and interpret its meaning and stage its appearance are likely to influence and control others. In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare dramatises these issues through a series of confrontations between characters over the meanings of the male body as an idea and symbol, as a site where identity is asserted and imposed, and as a means of achieving social goals. Where Wilson uses man's body to underscore physical and spiritual dilemmas, Shakespeare uses it to explore the ethics and politics of masculine identity. Douglas notes generally that the body can "stand for any bounded system"—a nation, a class, a faction, a gender, even that of individuality itself. But she adds that the body is especially suitable to represent "threatened or precarious" boundaries.[15] *Julius Caesar* is set at a time of huge transition in Roman politics and society, and it contributes to an analogously liminal phase in early modern

England, as Elizabeth I's reign drew to a close.[16] In these terms, the play participates in an "unmasking of the politics of representation per se, in a detailed anatomy of the body politic," by staging critical episodes, past and present.[17] More specific to my concerns, as part of its wide-ranging political interest, the play represents an ideological struggle over the way the male body looks and is looked at, acts and is acted upon, and speaks and is spoken about.

Hence in addition to its relevance to early modern notions of power, representation, and discourse, *Julius Caesar* offers a view of some of the important conceptions of masculinity and male relations in Shakespeare's time and after. The play presents a society publicly dominated by and symbolically fixated on men. Commentators often note that both female characters, Portia and Calpurnia, are confined to a private domain, their concerns brushed aside (as in Calpurnia's case) unless they try to assume a conspicuous masculine persona, as does Portia through repeated self-wounding.[18] Sidelining the female characters to this degree leaves what is basically a one-gender world where homosocial bonds are acted out through fervent comradeship and enmity in politics and war. Even among allies there exists a "routine intensity of competition central to the definition of Romans as men."[19] Shakespeare depicts a somewhat similar world in *Coriolanus*, but both there and to a still greater extent in *Antony and Cleopatra* he develops the psychological, erotic, social, and political impacts that women can have, notwithstanding (perhaps more on account of) the limitations and pressures brought to bear upon them. With an unwavering focus on men, *Julius Caesar* contrasts to both of these plays, and to Shakespeare's other works with classical settings, including *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *Titus Andronicus*, where female figures are objects of, but also influential, perhaps uncontrolled, factors in relations between men. (Nonetheless, there remains little sense through most of these works that women are able to relate to themselves or each other outside patriarchal codes. Female characters such as

Lavinia and Tamora, Lucrece, Cressida and Helen are forcibly isolated among males). Mario DiGangi has noted that it might be critically and historically unsound to consider Shakespeare's depictions of men's relationships as "culturally 'representative'" on any broad scale.[20] Acknowledging his point, we can think of *Julius Caesar* as offering a sharp perspective on one particular code of aristocratic male conduct, shaped by Shakespeare's reading of both Plutarch and the society around him. While the play includes many different types of men and relationships, it does assume that, despite some crucial contradictions, the aristocratic code with its specific kinds of male figures and notions of masculinity is extremely influential in determining the course of wider social events and people's lives.

The action opens in the midst of a political conflict being waged through many kinds of male conduct, from out-and-out warfare to orchestrated public appearances. The tribunes, Flavius and Murellus, attack the plebeians for celebrating Caesar's recent victory over Roman rivals. They criticise "poor men of your sort" (1.1.56) for wearing their "best apparel" and celebrating one who "comes in triumph over Pompey's blood" (1.1.1-50). The workers are commanded to return home and "fall upon your knees." They "vanish tongue-tied," and the tribunes separate to "Disrobe the images" of Caesar and to curb his ambition (1.1.51-74). It is immediately apparent that men's bodies are being constantly observed and talked about. They are treated as visual and rhetorical signs whose meanings are judged and fought over. The way they dress signifies political allegiance and social rank; their bearing connotes submission or resistance. (As has been observed, disputed Elizabethan sumptuary codes and puritan-led debates over attitudes to self-discipline increase these stakes).[21] The drive to monitor and regulate men's costume and posture locates their bodies in a "politics of visibility,"[22] all the more urgent because amid escalating political tension, the codes and

meanings of body language have become equivocal and could intimate existing and perhaps potential support, conflict, or rivalry.

Various kinds of uncertainty immediately come into play. Caesar's retinue enters to participate in the celebration of Lupercalia, through which Calphurnia might "shake off [her] sterile curse" (1.2.11). The link between Caesar and sterility, despite being ascribed to his wife, unsettles the pomp of the "titular hero's" entrance.[23] It intimates other physical and personal failings soon to be revealed. Foreboding is reinforced by the soothsayer's warning of the Ides of March. Ever the theatre professional, Shakespeare plays upon the audience's knowledge of Caesar's end. The well-known outcome increases rather than reduces suspense—every gesture seems a possible index to when the killing will occur. Like many of the characters, who sense that something is going to happen in light of constant omens, military and political manoeuvring, the audience is encouraged to fasten on any portent. Cassius's ensuing dialogue with Brutus exemplifies the continually motivated and ambivalent gaze that all the characters practise, modelling audience scrutiny. Every man is looking at each other but tries to hide the fact or conceal his response. Cassius claims that Brutus has been looking at but not seeing him: "Brutus, I do observe you now of late: / I have not from your eyes that gentleness / And show of love as I was wont to have" (1.2.34-36). In reply, Brutus admits that his attention has been turned in rather than out: "If I have veil'd my look, / I turn the trouble of my countenance / Merely upon myself" (1.2.39-41). The reflexivity of sight is underlined. Though looking at and being perceived by the other, one regards the self. It sounds as though the gaze is rendered harmless to others, since it is always self-referential. But such reflexivity might allow greater scrutiny of the other: what I may discern in him is already within. This double vision is at work in Caesar's view of Cassius later in the scene. He is troubled by the other's appearance because he knows what it means when a man looks

that way: "Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look.... Such men as he be never at heart's ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves, / And therefore are they very dangerous" (1.2.195, 209-10).[24] Emulous rivalry and knowledge make the aristocrats' versions of one another, "fashioned through violent competition" and seeking the goals of power and identity through superior insight and at the expense of others.[25] Yet if each man is a version of the self, his demise is incipiently one's own. In viewing the other the self foresees, without necessarily recognizing, its own grim prospects.

Hence the reflexivity of the gaze is repressed as it is exercised. The aristocrats try to deny or foreclose the self-interest and -reference of male vision, and instead presuppose its objective truthfulness. In this way, focusing on others might work to confirm and insulate rather than threaten the observer's identity. After he surveys Cassius, Caesar disavows any personal concern and asserts an eternal presence: "I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd / Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar" (1.2.212-13). Cassius's critical account of Caesar would affirm his own probity through narrative: "honour is the subject of my story.... He had a fever when he was in Spain / ... I did mark / How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake" (1.2.94, 1.2.121-23). Having had his self-perceptions mirrored and endorsed by Cassius (1.2.69-72), Brutus can concede that Caesar's probable ascent justifies his decision to strike for "no personal cause... But for the general... So Caesar may. / Then lest he may, prevent" (2.1.11-12, 27-28). Only Cicero willingly admits to men's personal investment in what they perceive: "men may construe things, after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves" (1.3.34-35). This admission of subjective understanding is later undercut by the blunt literalness with which Cicero's own death is imposed and confirmed: "Ay, Cicero is dead, / And by that order of proscription" (4.2.231-32). The performative violence of the Latinate "proscription" obliterates Cicero's relativism and rhetorical subtlety. The

death of the poet Cinna in Act Three scene three offers a similarly forbidding version of the capacity of language and reason to withstand sheer aggression. Like the proscription that condemns Cicero, the plebeians' words are marked by destructive performativity: "Pluck but his name out of his heart.… Tear him, tear him!" (3.2.32-34). They enact a kind of violent anatomy that annihilates language and identity.

Relentlessly scrutinising one another, the men compel themselves to follow a course of crafty self-presentation that will, in turn, be more and more closely dissected and defined. These practices are exemplified in Act Two, scene two when various characters try to display and interpret a series of bodily images. Each man reads others and is read by them; each tries to impose his version of self-realisation on others, while adjusting his identity in response to theirs. The affirmation which they all seek often blinds them to risks of their own misreading and to the motivated readings of others. Before he ventures to the Senate, Caesar calls for an augury over sacrificial entrails to confirm his course of action (2.2.5-6). The custom implies a belief in definite physical meaning and interpretation. The previous night Calpurnia had dreamt of danger, with Caesar's statue running "pure blood" from a hundred spouts (2.2.77-78). In contrast to Calpurnia, Caesar and the conspirator Decius Brutus interpret her dream positively, as urging him to bravery and patronage, but each does so for entirely different reasons (2.2.83-91). In the next act, when things proceed from dreams to action, Caesar's body and blood are graphically objectified. Yet even their manifestly physical presence cannot restrict differently motivated meanings and conflicting interpretations. After the stabbing, Brutus insists that the killers "bathe" and "besmear" their arms and knives in the blood to proclaim peace, freedom, and liberty visually (3.1.106-11). When Antony grasps the bloody hands of the killers, declaring "Friends, I am with you all, and love you all" (3.1.222), Brutus accepts the gesture at face value, though as Cassius suspects and we soon hear, the

moment seals Antony's antagonism, "Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!" (3.1.261).[26]

The ambiguous handshaking near the end of Act Three suggests that characters' reading and misreading of the male body focus sharply on its actions and gestures. The men play important physical roles in various political rituals. The male body is often the object of ceremonies and attention, but it also acts to score political and social points. The key example of the latter occurs, suspensefully offstage, when Caesar thrice rejects a crown presented to him by Antony before a vast public audience. Casca contemptuously reports the manipulated emotions of the crowd, which equally celebrates the offering and refusal of sovereignty (1.2.235-70). The episode underscores the importance of public performance in winning and maintaining political power and provides "a model of authoritarian populism" that both Brutus and Antony later vie to effect.[27] However, Caesar's actions also reveal the risks that can be involved in this kind of display. The power of performance is always potentially double-edged: "a formal occasion cannot ignore or terminate what it is that is designated the official focus of attention. It follows that every celebration of a person gives power to that person to misbehave unmanageably."[28] In succumbing to "the falling sickness" (1.2.252), Caesar loses control of his body; it takes over and conveys mixed signals about his fitness to rule. Indeed, throughout the first half of the play, Caesar's body is an equivocal political factor, liability and asset. Its lameness and deafness undercut his imperial claims, while its colossal status riles as much as it over-shadows his peers, who are ready to conceive it as "monstrously grotesque and structurally disruptive."[29] He is trapped, to his benefit and loss, by the power his body signifies. Although conditions such as epilepsy, deafness, and sterility may bolster Caesar's position with some—charismatically revealing a person beneath the role, one whose apparent weaknesses do not undermine his status—they also expose him to

attack for aspiring to a power beyond his capacity.[30] Cassius images this power as the imposition of physical submission: "And this man / Is now become a god, and Cassius is / A wretched creature, and must bend his body / If Caesar carelessly but nod on him" (1.2.116-20). Ironically, the conspirators use such bowing and scraping to distract Caesar before the stabbing (3.1.34-76); Antony later charges them with doing just so (5.1.42-45). Caesar's fall is thus ironically preceded by physical expressions that seem to verify his dominance, just as his offstage *coup de théâtre* is simultaneously being framed by the beginnings of conspiracy.

Cassius's words angrily exaggerate the process of submission, but the image he uses registers sharp sensitivity to the two bodies' relative status, bearing, and control. The apparent absence of intention and minimal movement in Caesar's careless nod magnify his mastery. Such bodily power is a scarce commodity: not everyone can have it, and it seems to concentrate in one man at the expense of others. Physical power tends to be exclusive. In this same society, however, there is one type of bodily agency that cannot be taken away from any individual. It remains a fundamental prerogative: the potential to wound or kill oneself. In such a case the body acts and is acted upon; it is both agent and object. Cassius dwells obsessively on this trope of identity, which preserves selfhood by destroying or damaging it: "I had as lief not be, as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself" (1.2.97-98); "I know where I will wear this dagger then; I Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius... That part of tyranny that I do bear / I can shake off at pleasure" (1.3.88-89, 1.3.98-99); "Cassius or Caesar never shall turn back, / For I will slay myself" (3.1.21-22). Brutus invokes suicide as the supreme sign of patriotism at the end of his oration to the people (3.2.42-43). Portia declares that her self-wounding testifies to a "constancy" beyond female measure (2.1.290-301), and embraces it as her own "honorifically gendered, purgative, voluntary wound."[31] The contrast between Portia's idea of suicide and Lucrece, who retains a sense of female agency despite

her rape—"I am the mistress of my fate," she avers[32]—is another mark of the thoroughly masculinised society that is staged in *Julius Caesar*.

The ways in which links between self-wounding and masculine identity can be read as destructive rather than constructive are reinforced in the play's closing scenes. The men want to believe that suicide defines a final control over selfhood, or at least deprives others of the renown of killing them: "For Brutus only overcame himself, / And no man else hath honour by his death" (5.5.56-57). Killing oneself and others earns honour which, like other social values, seems to be conceived quantitatively, or perhaps economically, as something that adds up or diminishes ("Ambition's debt is paid," Brutus remarks after Caesar's death [3.1.82]). Yet the circumstances of death in the last scenes challenge the image of quantifiable control and honour. While Titinius actually does kill himself, Cassius and Brutus have to persuade others to assist them. The extra involvement diminishes the gesture of absolute agency: Cassius orders a servant to help and thereby win his freedom; Brutus must ask four soldiers before finding one who will hold the sword. These situations suggest that not everyone holds the same view of suicide; Clitus replies earnestly to Brutus's request but his words border on grotesque humour, "I'll rather kill myself" (5.5.7). Cassius dies having confused Titinius's reception by friends as capture: "O coward that I am, to live so long, / To see my best friend ta'en before my face!" (5.3.34-35). His mistake later moves Titinius to kill himself anyway, with Cassius's own sword. Brutus dies having earlier suggested that he considers suicide "cowardly and vile, / For fear of what might fall so to prevent / The time of life" (5.1.103-5). Finally, Cassius and Brutus both expire with Caesar's name on their lips, forced to acknowledge his victory over themselves, as they die by the same blades used to kill him.

The pattern of suicides verges on the mock-heroic, suggesting contradictions in the aristocratic code of valour and honour (a possibility Shakespeare again raises in Antony's unsuccessful suicide attempt in *Antony and Cleopatra*—a final act of self-mastery which ends up leaving him all the more dependent on others: "I have done my work ill, friends. O, make an end / Of what I have begun!" [4.15.105-6]). Total physical control over the body seems to be the same as loss of control. The paradox of the suicides is that they render the male body its own self-defeating site. The attempt to reify identity seems to undermine the ethical system that promotes selfhood in these terms. For integrity, at once a moral and bodily principle, is of the highest value for the males, as exemplified in the dispute between Brutus and Cassius over money and honour. Each is willing to sacrifice his heart to verify his character: Brutus would "rather coin my heart, / And drop my blood for drachmas" than "wring" money from peasants (4.2.127-29); Cassius offers Brutus his dagger, "I, that denied thee gold, will give my heart" (4.2.158). Ironically, the acts they would undertake to prove their integrity would rupture masculine wholeness, reproducing the wounds fatal to Caesar's majesty on themselves.

The belligerence of Brutus and Cassius's words is soon balanced by their reconciliation. The scene concentrates the play's threats to masculine identity and relationships, both of which are for the moment restored. Eighteenth-century critics often distinguished the duo's reunion as having a special poignancy. Richard Steele praised the scene in *The Tatler*: it was "an Incident which moves the Soul in all its Sentiments." Characters and audience share the experience, as "something of a plain and simple Nature… breaks in upon our Souls by that Sympathy."[33] Writing in 1743, William Smith, classical scholar and translator of Longinus, saw the encounter as exemplifying Shakespearean sublimity: "The Heart is melted in an instant, and Tears will start at once in any Audience

that has Generosity to be moved or is capable of Sorrow and Pity."[34] Lewis Theobald found much "Beauty" in the scene. He contrasts John Fletcher's inability to equal it in the exchanges between Melantius and Amintor in *The Maid's Tragedy*: "Honour and Friendship, the Violation of each and the Desire of recementing them are the Topicks of this Action. The Passions are strong and vehement, but conducted more according to the luxuriant Fancy of the Poet than any Standard in Nature."[35] For these commentators, the scene reflects Shakespeare's insight into brave, passionate manhood and his ability to induce a similar ethos in spectators and readers. It registers an enduring bond between Roman, Shakespearean, and eighteenth-century masculinity. Steele also singled out Act Two, scene one—the meeting in Brutus's orchard—as presenting "that great Soul debating upon the Subject of Life and Death with his intimate Friends."[36] The later scene expands the circle of male intimates to include the audience. Where Fletcher's version is idiosyncratic and excessive, Shakespeare's captures the capacity of manliness to be fortified by a preceding breach.

Just as man's individual integrity is ambivalently symbolised by threats and acts of bodily violence, so is the broader system of aristocratic unity and equality. In this code, physical violence works to destroy the bonds it celebrates; yet as in the individual case, destruction is central to the ultimate celebration. Emulous rivalry "makes for class disintegration as well as class cohesion."[37] The dead body is a synecdochic ideal, the central trope in a rhetoric of masculinity envoiced solemnly by all characters (there is no Thersites as in *Troilus and Cressida* to parody the trope). The sequence of eulogies through the play most clearly reveals the way this rhetoric works. While the appearance and actions of the body are significant, the manner in which corpses are spoken about, and in a sense speak, most vividly depicts the body's social value and function. The play is structured around a series of eulogies, beginning with Murellus's words on Pompey and ending with Antony and

Octavius's comments on Brutus. In between come the well-known orations on Caesar by Brutus and Antony, as well as Brutus's and Cassius's remarks on Portia, and Brutus's on Cassius and Titinius. Each of these speeches not only commemorates the dead but also strives to establish the body's "true" meaning in order to shore up and control the intertwined system of violence and honour. The eulogists do not disagree on the worth of the system but on which faction has the right to speak for it and claim it as their own.

The key motif in Murellus's speech is Pompey's decline from the star of triumphal processions to mere matter over which a new victor rides: "do you now strew flowers in his way, / That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood" (1.1.49-50). The refusal to name Caesar, along with using the depersonalised pronoun "That," attempts to deny his position and restore Pompey's. But where bodily integrity, "the intact ideal maleness of the classical body,"[38] is considered all-important, the loss of bodily control, in battle or as a victim, reduces men's social stature in life and death; Pompey's status cannot be retrieved. The people do, however, comply with the tribune's words which, for the time being, grant him considerable power. This effect recurs through the play. A charismatic quality adheres to the eulogist, as if he alone were able to control the equivocal meanings connoted by the corpse. A similar kind of aura radiates from Brutus in his responses to news of Portia's death, strengthening his leadership over Cassius, Titinius, and Messala, "Even so great men great losses should endure," they concur (4.2.245). Unlike the unsettling reflexivity that can arise from looking at the deceased or weakened other, and which might disturb one's self-image or presage one's demise, speaking of the dead can reinforce one's status and authority.

Such is the case for Brutus with his speech to the people after Caesar's death. It is the first move in "a battle for the interpretation of Caesar's murder," waged between the two parties.[39] Despite being daubed with Caesar's blood, Brutus tries to suppress the materiality

of death. His speech uses logical analogies, Socratic-like questioning, and flattering appeals to the hearers' wisdom and speaker's honour to position the audience to agree. In contrast, Antony speaks through Caesar's body. An impression of physical and verbal fusion with the corpse charges his words and overpowers the audience. His mouth and the stab wounds supplement each other to speak: "thy wounds ... like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips, / To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue" (3.1.262-64); "I... / Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths, / And bid them speak for me" (3.2.215-17). At the same time, Antony manoeuvres the corpse like a stage prop, carrying it out but then withholding it from the crowd, gradually moving it closer to them, finally revealing it beneath the torn and stained mantle. As his own emotions fluctuate, Antony professes union with the dead body, "Bear with me. / My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar" (3.2.102-3). He adapts the orthodox rhetoric of blood and body, by overturning its emphasis on integrity and control. Through playing upon the corpse's visceral presence, he induces the people to stage a carnivalesque uprising. For a liminal period, social hierarchy is undone. The people seize Caesar's body, drive the aristocrats from the city, and subvert linguistic order. The rhetoric of the body politic is fragmented.

The end of the play sees the restoration of social and political order, with a newly dominant faction under Octavius's leadership. The final eulogies reinstate an orthodox rhetoric of the male body, suppressing its materiality to reassert the body politic's symbolic integrity. Before his death, Brutus sets the recuperative process in train with his words on Cassius and Titinius: "Are yet two Romans living such as these? / The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!" (5.3.97-98). The ethos of "Romanness" is salvaged even though he mourns its loss. The victors then celebrate that ethos and imply its persistence. Antony commemorates the fallen Brutus as proof of Roman masculinity. Octavius reinstitutes a

controlled decorum around the body, removing Brutus's corpse from sight. In contrast to the highly public function of Caesar's body—"Produce[d]...to the market place" (3.1.230), as a kind of rhetorical and political prop that continues Caesar's own politically expedient theatricality—Brutus's body is used to uphold a restricted code of aristocratic masculinity, an icon around which those values are solemnly consolidated: "According to his virtue let us use him, / With all respect and rites of burial. / Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie, / Most like a soldier, ordered honourably" (5.5.75-78). By stressing its symbolic value, the new leader erases the masculine body's physical limits. The decline that Thomas Wilson saw as intrinsic to that physical materiality is for the moment also suspended, and a future for the masculine body politic is invoked. It is at most an equivocal future, as the fate of Lepidus and Antony will show.

Cynthia Marshall has suggested that in the move from Plutarch's tales to Shakespeare's plays, "relationships to the past are theorized on textual and characterological levels."[40] In many respects, *Julius Caesar* exemplifies this sort of complex response to classical narrative. It dramatizes the problematic effects of a world controlled by aristocratic men. They experience the failures and triumphs of their own dominance, both subject to and the subjects of the power they embody. Their submission to the system they command is the paradox that allows a culture of male authority to continue even though powerful individuals fall. Shakespeare's drama unravels the costs of the system for masculine selfhood but stops short of staging in much detail its consequences for those outside the focal group, including women and men from different classes. Critical perspective is circumscribed by theatrical, historical, and contemporary attraction to the powerful, aristocratic male. Though questioning aspects of this figure's charismatic sway, *Julius Caesar* reproduces what is perhaps the chief means through which it gains and maintains power—a naturalised, bodily rhetoric of superior

masculinity whose universal acceptance is assumed. That assumption is complicated and tested by Shakespeare in other plays; yet its early modern cultural and theatrical pre-eminence provides a major pretext for critical responses to Shakespeare through the seventeenth century and beyond.

Notes

1. All references to Shakespeare's work are to the *Norton Shakespeare*, eds., Stephen Greenblatt, Jean E. Howard, Walter Cohen, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997). References are included in the text.

2. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2; cf. Coppélia Kahn's discussion of *virtus* in *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), 11-15.

3. John Dennis, *On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear* (1712), in D. Nichol Smith, ed., *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 32.

4. Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693), in Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, 6 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974-81), 2.55.

5. Ibid., 2.56.

6. John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1982), 286. Katherine Duncan-Jones' explanation of the technical differences between glovers and butchers confirms Rymer's rancorous tone; see *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: Arden, 2001), 15.

7. Letter CXXII, in *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664), in Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, eds., *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 13.

8. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994), 188.

9. Elizabeth Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (1769), in *Women Reading Shakespeare*, 26.

10. Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 83.

11. Ibid., 71.

12. Ibid., 67.

13. On anatomy and individualised selfhood, see Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays in Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), and David Hillman, "Visceral Knowledge: Shakespeare, Skepticism, and the Interior of the Early Modern Body," in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81-105; on the link between anatomy and self-knowledge, see Jonathan Sawday, "The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body," in Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn, eds., *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660* (London: Reaktion, 1990), 111-35, and Gail Kern Paster, "Nervous Tension: Networks of Blood and Spirit in the Early Modern Body," in Hillman and Mazzio, 107-25; and on the connection between anatomy and gender, see Valerie Traub, "Gendering mortality in early modern anatomies," in Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan, eds., *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44-92, and Katharine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris: French Medicine and the Tribade, 1570-1620," in Hillman and Mazzio, 171-93.

14. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 122.

15. Ibid., 115.

16. For discussions of various kinds of "boundary" threats in the play see: René Girard, "Collective Violence and Sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," *Salmagundi* 88/89 (1990-91), 399-419, on the body politic; Wayne A. Rebhorn, "The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990), 75-111, on the aristocracy; Gail Kern Paster, " 'In the spirit of men there is no blood:' Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 284-98, on gender; Sharon O'Dair, "Social Role and the Making of Identity in *Julius Caesar*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 33 (1993), 289-307, and Gary B. Miles, "How Roman Are Shakespeare's Romans?" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 257-83, on identity. In "Conjuring Caesar: Ceremony, History, and Authority in 1599," *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989), 291-304, Mark Rose sums up the historical and cultural relevance of such issues at the end of Elizabeth I's reign.

17. John Drakakis, " 'Fashion it thus:' *Julius Caesar* and the Politics of Theatrical Representation," *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1991), 72. The notion of a material and rhetorical "body politic" is adapted from Michel Foucault's

influential gloss of the term as "a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them:" from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 28.

18. In her introduction to the play in the *Norton Shakespeare*, Katharine Eisaman Maus helpfully sums up this position (1529-30). Portia's actions might also be related to a more critical perspective on male conduct that is considered below.

19. Kahn, 85.

20. Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

21. On these contextual Elizabethan issues, cf. Richard Wilson, " 'Is this a holiday?' Shakespeare's Roman Carnival," *English Literature History* 54 (1987), 31-44, and Rose, "Conjuring Caesar," *passim*.

22. Peter Stallybrass, "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 18 (1987), 122.

23. T. S. Dorsch, Introduction, *Julius Caesar*, Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1979), xxvii.

24. Cf. Antony's later comment on the military tactics of Brutus and Cassius: "I am in their bosoms, and I know / Wherefore they do it" (5.1.7-8). Being able to see other men in terms of one's own knowledge and emotion is conceived as crucial to dominance.

25. Rebhorn, 85; cf. Girard: "Caesar is a threat ... but whoever eliminates him, *ipso facto*, becomes another Caesar" (400).

26. Brutus is far more attuned to deceptive signs when he has something to hide, as his aside before the murder suggests: "every like is not the same, O Caesar" (2.2.128).

27. Wilson, 36.

28. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 431.

29. Paster, 291.

30. Note Goffman's remark that "a sense of the humanity of a performer is somehow generated by a discrepancy between role and character" (294); cf. the impact on the crowd of Antony's tears, which interrupt his oration over Caesar's corpse (3.2.102-14).

31. Paster, 294; cf. Kahn, 101.

32. *Rape of Lucrece*, line 1069.

33. Richard Steele, *The Tatler* 68 (14 September 1709), in *Critical Heritage*, 2.206-7.

34. William Smith, "On Shakespeare and the Sublime," in *Critical Heritage*, 3.96.

35. Lewis Theobald, *Censor* 70 (2 April 1717), in *Critical Heritage*, 2.310.

36. Steele, *The Tatler* 53 (10 August 1709), in *Critical Heritage*, 2.205.

37. Rebhorn, 95.

38. Paster, 298.

39. Girard, 413; cf. Paster, 286, 298.

40. Cynthia Marshall, "Shakespeare, Crossing the Rubicon," *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000), 74.