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# The Pathology of Rhetoric in Coriolanus

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## The Pathology of Rhetoric in *Coriolanus* by Yvonne Bruce

*Coriolanus* seems to be a play of action, a dramatized world of mutinous citizens, plotting tribunes, famine, war, and banishment. Yet what really happens in this world? The citizens never realize their mutiny, Brutus and Sicinius never realize their ill-defined plot, Coriolanus' consulship is rescinded, the mutual banishment of Coriolanus is undone by his resolve not to make "true wars" against Rome, and the defeat of Aufidius in act one becomes a meaningless victory when Coriolanus is in turn defeated in the final scene of the play. Perhaps it is more accurate to call *Coriolanus* a play of action, a drama in which action is enstated rather than enacted, in which action is described, deferred, erased, and repeated, but in which activity itself is never "finalized" as a discrete event. *Coriolanus* contains plenty of movement but no progression, debate without resolution, plots and promises that are never fulfilled, and constant effort for no realized gain.<sup>1</sup>

The shortage of corn focuses all this fruitless activity, signaling not only material shortage, but also the play's scarcity of viable peace and politics. Coriolanus is the fulcrum about which is balanced Rome's ideology (as expressed by Volumnia) and its reality (the hungry and underrepresented citizens). This Rome is the play's "world elsewhere," held in perfect stasis by the competing tensions of its component parts. The play is at heart a tautology of rhetoric, whereby corn and representation become interchangeable demands made by the plebeians, bodies and voices become substitutable states, and every action is "talked" into the performance of a competing or canceling reaction. For the dearth exists less as material scarcity than as a fortuitous opportunity for the nobles to manipulate the plebeians; if there were no dearth, that is, the nobles would have had to make one up. In fact, after scarcity is established in act one, the *fact* of dearth is largely dropped, while the language of dearth and hunger is assimilated into and shapes the dynamics of the play. By taking into account the related ambiguities present in the figure of Coriolanus and in the issues raised by the corn shortage, one can negotiate the gap between voice and body so problematic in the play, and assimilate the importance of dearth to the drama in a fuller way than merely aligning it with actual shortages in early seventeenth-century England.<sup>2</sup>

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The peculiarly systemic relationship between *Coriolanus* and its rhetoric is suggested by T. S. Eliot, who believed that even the most fundamental understanding of Elizabethan drama depended upon a grasp of the "endemic pathology" of Elizabethan rhetoric, which "pervaded the whole system; the healthy as well as the morbid tissues were built up on it."<sup>3</sup> *Coriolanus* displays Eliot's pathology in a notably organic way, and defining this organicism has been the goal of much *Coriolanus* criticism, from Nahum Tate's dedication of his 1682 adaptation of the play, to Zvi Jagendorf's 1990 essay on the failure of Rome's body politic. Even criticism not overtly political recognizes the link between political unity and individual wholeness (and thus wholesomeness). Janet Adelman, for example, explores the play's shift from its "exciting cause," the hungry multitude, to its central focus on the individual, wounded and wounding maternal body.<sup>4</sup> These and other essays, whether arguing from a dialectical understanding of the play's political processes, or from a psychoanalytic point of view or a structuralist, ultimately read the play as an essentialist conflict: between plebeians and nobles, between *Coriolanus* and the cultural forces against which he is set, between the body and speech, between the maternal and martial. I think this reading by disjunction comes about, surprisingly, because of the play's resistant, even seamless language, language so elusive that one scholar describes the play as "Shakespeare's dissection of verbal inadequacy."<sup>5</sup>

But I believe words succeed in *Coriolanus*; far from disjoining words and meanings, the play's "endemic pathology" of rhetoric suggests its own reconciliation of voice and body, members to corporation, fragments to the whole. What fails in *Coriolanus* is not words, but the uses to which its rhetoric is put, and a clear, cooperative definition of the Roman state from which its rhetoric springs. That is, *Coriolanus* is "about" the manipulative function of rhetoric—to persuade the plebeians to vote for and, immediately after, to banish *Coriolanus*, to shift *Coriolanus*' allegiance first to Rome then to the Volscian territories, to enable Volumnia to pit the agents of Rome (her son, the nobles, the tribunes) against one another all in the name of Rome. Yet the citizens remain physically and politically starved, *Coriolanus* is reduced to martial impotency, and the nobles dependent upon his voice lose the physical presence needed to instantiate their power. The language of dearth and hunger is endemic because every character in *Coriolanus* is hungry for something the play does not provide.

The first scene of the play establishes the relationship among

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these elements of hunger, citizens, tribunes and nobles, bodies and speech: *Coriolanus* does not begin, as so many have assumed, with “public violence,” but rather with the potential for violence; one’s first impression is not of violence being done but of its imminence.<sup>6</sup> The citizens may enter mutinous, according to the stage direction, but once they begin speaking, they more properly become potentially mutinous. Their very first words immediately begin the process of defusing action; even this scene’s inflammatory language defers and usurps the impetus toward revolt:

*First Cit.* Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.

*All.* Speak, speak.

*First. Cit.* You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?

*All.* Resolved, resolved.

*First Cit.* First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.

*All.* We know’t, we know’t.

*First Cit.* Let us kill him, and we’ll have corn at our own price. Is’t a verdict?

*All.* No more talking on’t; let it be done. Away, away!

*Second Cit.* One word, good citizens.<sup>7</sup>

The citizens are here stayed by the second citizen to discuss in more detail the nobles’ role in the grain shortage, and in particular, the duty of *Coriolanus* to the commonalty. Upon hearing shouts from the other side of the city, the citizens ask, “why stay we prating here? To th’ capitol!” (I. i. 47), but once again are halted, this time by the entrance of *Menenius*. The citizens remain discussing their grievances with him until the entrance of *Coriolanus* and his news that “the other troop” of citizens have been granted “Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,” and “are dissolv’d” (203, 214), prompting a further discussion that continues until nearly the end of the scene. The language of the citizens, whose intent initially seems to be to further action, repeatedly halts or postpones it. The second citizen’s interjection appears to interrupt the mutiny, but it is already a repetition of the first citizen’s introductory deferral. The citizens claim that by ridding themselves of *Coriolanus* they will have corn at their own prices: that is, by killing him they will force the nobles to recognize their economic power, but the cause and effect between the citizens’ satisfaction and *Coriolanus*’ death is never made explicit. What is clear is the citizens’ hunger per se, an easily shifted or deferred but unsatisfied desire.<sup>8</sup>

But how do the citizens come to decide on the link between

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food and Coriolanus? Until the point in the first scene at which Menenius enters (at line 50), the likeliest link between corn and Coriolanus comes from the citizens' attribution of abundance to both: "the leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise [the nobles'] abundance." Although they disagree whether to call Coriolanus "covetous," the first citizen, at least, has more than one complaint: "I need not be barren of accusations. He hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition" (29-45). This remark echoes the first citizen's earlier suggestion that the nobles' very behavior makes them suspect hoarders of grain: "What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely" (16-8).<sup>9</sup> As Coriolanus is also the plebeians' "object of misery," he too serves to "particularise" the abundance of the nobles.

Linking food and Coriolanus symbolically, Jarrett Walker describes hunger as the motive behind the revolt, while Coriolanus is the "symbol of [the citizens'] suffering and the object of their violence . . . [Their] consensus can be built only through speech, [but] it is driven by an impulse that speech cannot describe." For Walker, the citizens' motive is hunger while their act is revenge because voice and body are ontologically different. He bridges the gap between voice and body by suggesting that what really unites the people is "the specific image of Martius," and following René Girard, he describes Coriolanus as a "sacrificial victim," and his relationship to the citizens as a "silent, bodily one." Walker's observation astutely realizes Coriolanus' sometimes nebulous position, and yet his status as bodily object need not be seen as a different phenomenon from the citizens' hungry speech. Walker notes that "neither hunger nor revenge really describes the proposed act,"<sup>10</sup> but his very mention of a *proposed* act points to an alignment of both hunger and revenge in the register of speech, and of the displacement of action into proposition. What the citizens in I. i propose to do is mutiny, and they propose to mutiny because of claims of hunger, yet at the beginning of I. i their hunger is for corn; by the end of the scene it is a hunger for tribunes, and their proposed mutiny culminates in an utterance of banishment in III. iii.

It is not only the citizens who are suspicious of abundance. When a messenger interrupts this scene with news that the Volsces have taken up arms, Martius responds, "I am glad on't; then we shall ha' means to vent / Our musty superfluity" (224-25), language that calls to mind the "superfluity" of grain growing unwholesome in its storehouse. And in this image, by a

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rhetorical transformation similar to that by which the citizens feed themselves with news of the tribunes, Martius, hungry for battle, transforms news of Volscian attack into citizens-as-food, feeding them and their insurrection into the wars.<sup>11</sup>

But hunger and scarcity remain the only commodities in abundance in Rome; the tribunes do not satisfy the citizens; victory in Corioles does not satisfy Coriolanus; Coriolanus' banishment does not satisfy the tribunes. As Volumnia so eloquently states the dilemma: "Anger's my meat: I sup upon myself / And so shall starve with feeding" (IV. ii. 50-51). Coriolanus, less enigmatically, attempts to soften the impact of his banishment by prophesying, "I shall be lov'd when I am lacked" (IV. i. 15). What are the inhabitants of this Rome really hungry for? And why do the manifestations of their hunger continually shift? Why can't Rome satisfy its citizens? It may be helpful to address these questions by posing their opposites: what does Rome provide in abundance? What is the relationship between abundance and scarcity? If Rome provides excess for which its citizens are not hungry, then what is the function of its dearth?

One thing Rome appears to have in abundance is wounds: wounded and wounding citizens, the infectious conversation of the tribunes, a "diseased" Coriolanus who "must be cut away" (III. i. 292). Coriolanus in particular is abundantly wounded, a cause for celebration in II. i, as Volumnia, Virgilia, Valeria, and Menenius anticipate his arrival home from the wars in Corioles. And yet, the rhetoric of the waiting nobles values these wounds in terms of their number, rather than their physical effect on Coriolanus. Menenius (surprisingly) offers initial resistance to this "fabulation," but he is no match for Volumnia's exuberance, and together they count twenty-seven wounds, including those acquired in previous wars. Philip Brockbank notes the "discrepant arithmetic" of their calculations, but because these wounds cannot be reasonably quantified (i.e., separated from their cumulative effect of "good report"), the more the better, and Volumnia and Menenius imaginatively finger his "cicatrices" like coins.<sup>12</sup> These wounds, and their meaning in this scene and throughout the play, further vex readings that would divide *Coriolanus* thematically into factions, whether those factions are voice and body or citizens and nobles. What value do these wounds have? Menenius uses them to justify Coriolanus' pride to the tribunes; Volumnia values them for the impact they will have on the people when Coriolanus "shall stand for his place" in the market. But Coriolanus does not show his wounds, either to the nobles or to the citizens; the wounds' value remains

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explicitly dependent upon their ability to be detached from the referent of Coriolanus' body and circulated rhetorically. The citizens take up the worth of his wounds in the market scene, much as Volumnia and Menenius do in II. i: "For, if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues in those wounds and speak for them. So if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them" (II. iii. 5-9).

In this strange combination of conditionality and protocol, the body-voice distinction is again effaced. Although Sicinius warns Coriolanus the citizens will not "bate / one jot of ceremony" (II. ii. 40-41), they award him the consulship without being shown his wounds and without being told of his deeds (Coriolanus says only, "Of wounds I have two dozen odd; battles thrice six / I have seen and heard of" [II. iii. 126-27]). In fact, in a moment made significant by its absence of artifice, the first citizen tells Coriolanus the price of the consulship is simply "to ask it kindly" (75); Coriolanus, who has just claimed "I cannot bring / My tongue to such a pace" (52-53), appears so taken aback he does ask it kindly, and responds, "I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private" (76-77). Apart from this exchange (which is "something odd," the third citizen will note a few lines later), the wounds lose their ceremonial potency.<sup>13</sup> The remark that the citizens will put their tongues in Coriolanus' wound is jarring because it momentarily subverts the ritual mechanism by which speech and ceremony keep separate tongues and wounds. What the citizen implies ("So if . . .") is that if Coriolanus acts according to custom, the citizens will respond in kind. But these reiterations only highlight the instability of the tongue-wound image. This scene echoes the moment in *Julius Caesar* when Antony addresses the plebeians in front of Caesar's body:

[I] 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 . . . put a tongue  
 In every wound of Caesar.<sup>14</sup>

But *Coriolanus* cultivates an underlying perversity such that the third citizen's rhetoric does not put its tongue into Coriolanus' wounds only to speak in their place; the language of barter also drives the exchange and slants the whole scene in the marketplace (e.g., "You must think, if we give you anything, we hope to gain by you [II. iii. 72-73]). The alternative force of "speaking for

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wounds" must be figured in: the citizens are speaking to *gain* the wounds, to appropriate them and the abundance they signify.

In receiving Coriolanus' wounds, however, the citizens must be wounded: this divergence from the ceremonial script, by which wounds shown in private will lose their performative force, weakens the citizens' political strength. The confusion following Coriolanus' exit from the marketplace (confusion artfully manipulated by the tribunes) springs from just this divergence. The citizens would resolve Coriolanus' enigmatic temper—was he mocking them, wounding them with his words?—in his favor had he only shown them his wounds in public, only saved them from the play's pathological speech with a literal instance of pathology:

*Second Cit.* Amen, sir. To my poor unworthy notice  
He mock'd us when he begged our voices.  
*Third Cit.* Certainly,  
He flouted us downright.  
*First Cit.* No, 'tis his kind of speech; he did not mock us.  
*Second Cit.* Not one among us, save yourself, but says  
He us'd us scornfully: he should have show'd us  
His marks of merit, wounds receiv'd for's country.  
*Sic.* Why, so he did, I am sure.  
*All.* No, no; no man saw 'em.  
*Third Cit.* He said he had wounds which he could show  
in private;  
And with his hat, thus waving it in scorn,  
'I would be consul,' says he; 'aged custom,  
But by your voices, will not so permit me:  
Your voices therefore.' When we granted that,  
Here was, 'I thank you for your voices, thank you;  
Your most sweet voices; now you have left your voices,  
I have no further with you.' Was not this mockery?  
(II. iii. 156-71)

This scene very forcefully positions the reader as a citizen, or vice versa, struggling to interpret Coriolanus, whose wounds lose their "merit" when withheld from public view, and whose refusal to perform according to custom forces the citizens to respond to his tone. Both the first and second citizens voice a plausible response, and the same reasoned speculation will occur in Antium, as Aufidius' servingmen attempt to piece together Coriolanus' identity from clues of face, clothes, and strength; and this market scene seems to confound readings that pit the plebeians against the nobles, even readings sympathetic to the former (those of Jagendorf, Berthold Brecht, and Günter Grass, for example). These interpretations, however carefully



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they individuate the citizens or explore their political legitimacy, neglect the indeterminacy animating the relationship between Coriolanus and the citizens, the emotional dependence each has on the other, and the extent to which this relationship, so often dismissed by both parties as futile, still has the power to surprise.<sup>15</sup>

This wounding capability of words is explored at length by Geoffrey Hartman, in a "different turn" on Derridean theories of rhetoric; Hartman attempts a "restored theory of representation" that takes into account the "empirical nearness . . . the moral and mimetic impact" of signified *and* signifying practices: "Literature, I surmise, moves us beyond the fallacious hope that words can heal without also wounding. Words are homeopathic, curing like by like."<sup>16</sup> Hartman's conjecture recalls Eliot's "pathological rhetoric," upon which the "healthy as well as morbid tissues are built." But in *Coriolanus* rhetoric's health and morbidity often run parallel to or are supplanted by its usefulness or lack. "Plenty is then a function of dearth," writes Jagendorf,<sup>17</sup> and I am suggesting that what is plentiful in *Coriolanus* is the rhetoric of hunger; dearth works, in other words. Simultaneously, the rhetoric of *Coriolanus* plays a powerfully reflexive game, one from which Stanley Cavell can extrapolate the "paradox and reciprocity of hungering" exemplified by Coriolanus and Volumnia. But "The circle of cannibalism, of the eater being eaten by what he or she eats," is a phenomenon not limited to son and mother, and Cavell implies as much by pointing to "the active and passive constructions" of the play's "focal verbs" (feeding and suckling) informing the "inevitable reflexiveness of action" in Rome.<sup>18</sup> This "reflexiveness," however, is the play's central activity, of which "cannibalism" is only one instance. The subsumption of eating and being eaten in a single verb, for example, recalls the subsumption of act and motive by violent action posited by Walker.

The mutual banishment of Coriolanus and the citizens epitomizes this reflexiveness.<sup>19</sup> Their competing declaratives neatly express the play's strange narrative drive that insists positive action requires negative presence; in them one can hear Volumnia's desire to efface Coriolanus' nature in pursuit of her political goal, the conferral of tribunes in lieu of corn, and the tactical persuasions and cajolery directed toward Coriolanus once he is in Antium. The banishment, however, is rarely seen as mutual; Coriolanus is, of course, the one who leaves Rome, and criticism typically views the utterance of banishment as emanating from the different positions of political or linguistic strength

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occupied by Coriolanus and the citizens: Coriolanus' declaration is an attempt to stake out a new, alternate sociopolitical world, or it functions as critical commentary of the Rome he is leaving rather than as the constitutive authorization of a new state.<sup>20</sup> I do not deny the dramatic tension of this scene created by these different positions, but I want to point out that it is at this moment, in a drama whose forensic style is for the most part a sophisticated version of "did too, did not," and in mutual statements buried within the play's knottiest language, that Coriolanus and the citizens address one another "truly," in words that, in speaking of banishment, actually result in (at least a temporary banishment). John Plotz notes that Coriolanus can't create a "world elsewhere" by simply saying so and taking leave of the world he's lived in thus far, but at this point in the play Coriolanus doesn't yet realize this, and his ignorance gives his declaration of banishment its persuasive power.

Coriolanus reacts to Rome, just as everyone in the play reacts rather than sets in motion. What makes the banishment scene so singular is the possibility it seems to present for action rather than reaction, although this possibility remains potential, circumscribed by Rome's political solipsism and by the citizens' language of futurity. The play's tragedy resides partly in a quality of uncertainty; we sense Coriolanus struggling toward something he knows nothing about, but all we know is what Coriolanus knows—that sense of struggle, the grappling to define an alternative—because all we have is its Rome, too.

One cannot then contrast, as Plotz does, the "fraudulent" language of the citizens with the "solipsistic universe" posited by Coriolanus, in which "other human beings are . . . useful only as motives to our actions." To distinguish the "manipulative" talk of the citizens designed to keep them "comfortably numb to their own motives" from Coriolanus' stoic philosophy of "any deed bravely done is its own reward and its own proof of rightness," does not shed any light on Coriolanus' motives, nor explain to what purposes he uses others as motives for his actions.<sup>21</sup> Coriolanus and the citizens serve as mirrors of the other's discontent, in fact, but contrary to Plotz and others, the play does not uphold the truth or falsehood of either position; the play does not divide language into "persuasive" and "true" at all, but erases this division. Coriolanus, whose language of banishment differs so markedly from the citizens, is straitened by the same lexical conflation of signified and signifier. His "I banish you" has the same rhetorical force as the citizens' and tribunes' more baroque utterances of banishment; his decision to appeal to

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them, made earlier in counsel with the nobles, partakes of the same grammatical futurity as the citizens in the banishment scene, and of the same indecision that has also been typical of the citizens throughout. Coriolanus is far more aware than the citizens of the fraudulence of this language and equally guilty of the citizens' "uncertainty."<sup>22</sup>

"Action is eloquence," says the maddening Volumnia (III. ii. 76), and her equation and its Plutarchan antecedent might serve as the play's most eloquent synopsis.<sup>23</sup> But what does this equation *mean*, or perhaps I should ask *how* does she mean it? The possibilities are clearly limited if one must decide between this statement's truth value and its persuasive power. Volumnia's rhetoric conflates her statement's grammatical, logical construction with its figurative, aphoristic force; her remark has both illocutionary and perlocutionary status. As Paul de Man asserts, the problem with what seems a "perfectly clear syntactical paradigm" is not whether "we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings . . . prevails. Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration."<sup>24</sup> In Volumnia's statement one must weigh, for example, the manifestations and manipulation of the Plutarchan ethos infiltrating the play: action privileged over speech; the necessity for speech and action to exist in symbiosis (action expressed in *apt* speech); and the possibilities suggested by a reversal of the variables, to "eloquence is action."<sup>25</sup>

The syntactical paradigm de Man uses for his assertion is the rhetorical question, and not a species of statement; Coriolanus provides such a paradigmatic example, one that, as happens so often in the play when he and Volumnia speak to one another, recontextualizes her own gnomic speech. The interesting rhetorical questions occur early in the scene that also produces Volumnia's "action is eloquence" and after he has been proclaimed consul. I quote the whole of his address after Volumnia's entrance:

I muse my mother  
Does not approve me further, who was wont  
To call them woollen vassals, things created  
To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads  
In congregations, to yawn, be still, and wonder,  
When one but of my ordinance stood up  
To speak of peace or war. I talk of you.  
Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me

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False to my nature? Rather say I play  
The man I am.

(III. ii. 7-16)

Coriolanus appears to be answering his own questions, yet that answer is as rhetorical as his questions. As de Man asks of the confusion engendered by this paradigm, "what is the use of asking . . . when we cannot even authoritatively decide whether a question asks or doesn't ask?"<sup>26</sup>

The inflectional possibilities awaiting the interpreter of Coriolanus at this moment are daunting, and one might make a decision in favor of Plotz's belief that (especially in the banishment scene), "only Coriolanus says out loud what others keep under their hats."<sup>27</sup> But Coriolanus seems caught in the same linguistic labyrinth integral—not to his sense of true worth nor the citizens' knowing fraudulence—but to meaning in the play. Coriolanus may be frustrated by not being able to say just what he means, but I think to assert more than this possibility places a burden on him unsubstantiated by the text. True, he will at one point admit, "I flee from words," but when words suit his purpose, he uses them as profitably as the tribunes, the citizens, Menenius, or Volumnia: "so shall my lungs / Coin words till their decay" (III. i. 76-77).

When Coriolanus asks his rhetorical questions, he is talking of Volumnia, musing that his mother does not approve him, although what it is she does not approve remains unclear. The content of his speech seems calculated to win sympathy for his explosion against the tribunes in the previous scene, when he learned the citizens, since granting him the consulship, "are incens'd against him." Yet, so far as Volumnia knows, he is still consul, and his invective might well express shame at her disapproval of one of his "ordinance" standing for the office, despite her desire for it (and her own remarks, through line 31, hardly resolve their respective positions). He is feeling her out, testing her "true" feelings toward himself by testing those toward the "woollen vassals," and using (possibly) her own words (the antecedent of "wont" could be either Coriolanus or Volumnia) to establish a strange intimacy between them. Coriolanus' questions not only foreclose an answer from Volumnia, but also have accumulated the force of the preceding lexical twists. His own answer, if a continuation of his talk "of" Volumnia, might be a rebuke to her, as "you would rather say I play the man I am." If rebutting his own questions, however, he is as much as admitting that the man he is requires performance—that action is elo-

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quence.<sup>28</sup>

Keeping the play's relentlessly organic rhetoric in mind, then, what one must weigh in the banishment scene is not only Coriolanus' present language versus the future language of the citizens, not only whatever solipsistic philosophy escapes his lips versus the need for external proof voiced by the citizens, but also the proportions established by the play leading up to the scene. Everything between II. ii and III. iii concerns Coriolanus' consulship and its rescission. The pronouncements of banishment sound striking in isolation, especially Coriolanus' alliterative rant, beginning at line 120 in III. iii, but if one pulls back enough to view them within this larger context of political tug-of-war, they lose a great deal of their cogency and climactic impact. The mix of tenses by which the citizens banish him ("He's banish'd, and it shall be so!"), the tribunes' odd, truncated language ("we, / Ev'n from this instant, banish him our city"), and of course the citizens' reversal, at the urging of the tribunes, of voting Coriolanus into office and then casting him out of the city, provoke his cry, "And here remain with your uncertainty!" But here is Coriolanus responding in the previous scene to the urgings of the nobles that he return to the marketplace: "What must I do? . . . Must I go show them my unbarb'd sponce? . . . Well, I will do't . . . Well, I must do't . . . I will not do't . . . Mother, I am going to the marketplace . . . I'll mountebank their loves . . . I / Will answer in mine honour" (III. ii. 35, 99, 101, 110, 120, 131, 132, 143-44).

Plotz seeks to understand "who's banished" and argues for the impossibility of Coriolanus' authorizing himself sufficiently to "turn the paradigmatic tide." But Plotz also establishes a strong case for the "nonsense" of both declarations of banishment, "though the staging of the dual banishment does *create* sense within the frame of the play."<sup>29</sup> As I've pointed out, however, the banishment scene makes sense particularly as the culmination of an impetus that began in the second act, and while I don't wish to overextend the significance I have established of dearth and abundance in this, the banishment scene does work aptly as a mutual venting by which Coriolanus and the citizens not only voice their discontents but expel linguistically the irksome abundance signified by the other. Both Plotz and Cavell realize that Coriolanus cannot really leave Rome for a world elsewhere; he is too inextricably of Rome to create or function in a place not-Rome (banished, he becomes, in the parlance of the play, a limb that's cut away). But what happens as a result of this "banishment"?

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The relationship of the post-banishment Coriolanus to its pre-banishment one has vexed readers who understandably are looking for coherent and particularly tragic meaning. Linda Bamber likens *Coriolanus* to *Macbeth*, claiming "the dialectic in both plays . . . is inconclusive. . . . Macbeth and Coriolanus simply exhaust the possibilities of their mode; they repeat themselves until, like Marlowe's Tamburlaine, they are dramatically played out. Then they die." Jagendorf, eschewing the play's tragedy for its politics, and weaving in the imagery of food, comes to nearly the same nihilistic conclusion: "the body cut to pieces remains an obstinately secular final image. No nourishment can issue from these fragments, and no promise of any coherence that outlives the body is inscribed in them."<sup>30</sup>

This seems to me almost the best that can be done in terms of finding meaning in the play's final two acts without forcing signification on them, especially the kind of "transcendent loss" Bamber ascribes to the other tragedies.<sup>31</sup> I would like, however, to examine the post-banishment play as an annotation, or critical commentary of what has gone before.<sup>32</sup> Aufidius, for example, who in the first three acts remains a very peripheral figure, should provide a clue to the pathology of Rome/Coriolanus; he is usually seen as a projection of Coriolanus, either father figure or sexualized counterpart, or, for Janet Adelman, an invention: "Shakespeare takes pains to emphasize the distance between the Aufidius we see and the Aufidius of Coriolanus' imagination."<sup>33</sup> But while one can see imagination working in Coriolanus' attributing martial worthiness to an opponent he has beaten at every conflict, neither invention nor distance can account for their shared sexualized language and hatred, nor Aufidius' meditation on the nature of his foe, expressed in language that is a refracted version of the Roman citizens' in I. i (IV. vii. 37-47).

Aufidius is not Coriolanus, but he is like Coriolanus, in the same way Antium is not Rome but like Rome. Antium has conspirators rather than tribunes, cryptic servingmen rather than citizens, lords and lieutenants rather than nobles. The play ends in Antium's marketplace. One need only track the permutations of rhetoric to see how the *critical* difference between the two places is wrought. Menenius, for example, tries to explain why Coriolanus has allied himself with the Volsces by pointing out the "differency" between a grub and a butterfly: Coriolanus has metamorphosed similarly; he has "grown from a man to a dragon" (V. iv. 11-13). But the analogy to Coriolanus will not bear scrutiny: butterfly is not to grub as dragon is to man. The

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reader has become inured to the rhetorical excesses of Rome and to the mythologizing of Coriolanus by the nobles, because Rome has so successfully contained its hero and been “the world elsewhere.” If one takes him out of this world and compares him to Antony, for instance, “whose legs bestrid the world,” it becomes clear that Coriolanus is very much a local hero.<sup>34</sup>

Because he is a local hero, his carefully constructed Roman presence is out of place in Antium, hence Aufidius' refusal (or inability) to recognize and call him by name in IV. v, and the effectiveness of his taunt “boy” in V. vi. A more comprehensive depiction of difference occurs between the scene-ending Volscian conversation of IV. v and Sicinius' observation opening IV. vi. The Volscian servingmen are here anticipating the invasion of Rome:

*Second Serv.* Why, then we shall have a stirring world again.

*First Serv.* Let me have war, say I. It exceeds peace as far as day does night: it's sprightly walking, audible, and full of vent.

*Second. Serv.* 'Tis so, and as wars, in some sort, may be said to be a ravisher, so it cannot be denied but peace is a great maker of cuckolds.

*First. Serv.* Ay, and it makes men hate one another.

*Third Serv.* Reason: because they then less need one another. The wars for my money. They are rising, they are rising.

*Sic.* We hear not of him, neither need we fear him; His remedies are tame i'th' present peace And quietness of the people, which before Were in wild hurry. Here do we make his friends Blush that the world goes well; who rather had, Though they themselves did suffer by't, behold Dissentious numbers pest'ring streets, than see Our tradesmen singing in their shops and going About their functions friendly.

(IV. v. 225-40; IV. vi. 1-9)

This is an extraordinary juxtaposition, articulating what seems to be a profound difference between the Volscian and Roman ideologies of warfare. War is very much an external threat to Antium, a menace from outside that must be met by unified forces from within. Rome, on the other hand, is already a “stirring world” whose inhabitants “hate one another,” although this does not, in Rome's case, preclude their need for those they hate.

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Even if one could ignore the ironic unlikeliness of Sicinius' friendly, singing Romans, his speech is still bracketed by the servingmen's anticipation of war and the announcement in Rome that Aufidius is preparing to attack. The construction of these scenes—Rome surrounded by Volscians—makes the "quietness" of the Roman people and the calm of the state claimed by Sicinius feel more like ominous lacunae.

For the Volscies, war's ravishing destruction is preferable to cuckolding peace, but these associations are subtly opposed in Rome, as Cominius accuses the tribunes of helping to ravish their own daughters, and Menenius concludes the imminent invasion is the work of Aufidius, who "Thrusts forth his horns again into the world, / Which were inshell'd when Martius stood for Rome" (IV. vi. 44-45). Antium has inverted the circumstantial markers of war and peace associated with Rome. War is for the former "full of vent," but not a venting of citizens; instead war purges undesirable Volscian traits and makes men "need one another." This practical and as far as possible healthy attitude toward warfare is in contrast to the Roman, whose inhabitants have all they can do to mediate the city's continual state of internal siege.

Rome might be the Orwellian exemplar of a state operating under the banner "war is peace." Not only does Antium provide a different perspective on the value of war, it discriminates between the conditions prescribed by peace and war. These terms seem useless in Rome, whose stability depends upon the proper balance of fomentation. In act one Coriolanus (as yet named Martius), attempting to rouse his troops against the Corioles, insults them with the same zest and language with which he insulted the hungry citizens, going so far as to threaten that unless the soldiers "Mend and charge home," he will "leave the foe / And make my wars on you." Their response: "Foolhardiness! Not I. / Nor I" (I. iv. 38-40; 46). After singlehandedly turning the tide of battle against the Volscians, Martius then whips up the same troops with a remarkable piece of incendiary rhetoric.<sup>35</sup>

Not much critical attention is paid to this lengthy battle scene, probably because it is sandwiched between more rhetorically interesting and revealing exchanges between the nobles and citizens; the battle is business as usual, more about intra-Roman politics than battlefield fraternity. But the scene enriches the complex characterization of Coriolanus; here is yet another instance of the man both fleeing from words and coining them until his lungs' decay. It is nearly impossible to know if Coriolanus is fully in control of his rhetoric at this point; the



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tension garnered by the play is such that, although his death will come after Aufidius' refusal to let Coriolanus "purge himself with words," one remains unsure whether Coriolanus' constant verbal aperience is calculated or unconscious. Aufidius will echo him in this, ending the play a typical Roman amnesiac, whose rage evaporates immediately upon the death of his foe, thus obscuring the purgative relationship between motive and act.

In IV. vii Aufidius, in a speech Coleridge thought "the least explicable from the mood and full intention of any in the whole works of Shakespeare,"<sup>36</sup> understands the Roman people "Will be as rash in the repeal as hasty / To expel him thence." This is a key insight into the fragility of the Roman state, enabling Aufidius to prophesy that "When, Caius, Rome is thine, / Thou art poor'st of all: then shortly art thou mine" (32-33, 56-57). It does not matter to Aufidius whether Coriolanus makes Rome his through warring or peaceful means; he knows that Coriolanus and Rome are inextricably bound. Thus, the emphasis Rome had placed on the value of Coriolanus' position in the city as a register of the citizens' and nobles' discontents and on his wounds and reputation as martial and political currency begins to accumulate considerable relevance when issued from the mouths of Volsces. Coriolanus is out of place and valueless in Antium, and it is by manipulating his worth to Rome that Aufidius "devalues" him, turning him into the "kind of nothing, titleless" he becomes.

Once Coriolanus is in Antium and his course set against Rome, Volumnia too relies on her son's relative and malleable worth to save her city. Her lengthy speech in V. iii is a rhetorical *coup de maitre* intricately wedding the expectation of filial duty to the assertion of maternal authority, blurring all bounds between the political and social familial, and attacking Coriolanus' most Volumnia-entrenched beliefs for the purpose of satisfying herself. She says her request is not "To save the Romans, thereby to destroy / The Volsces . . . No, our suit / Is that you reconcile them." Volumnia sweetens her request with the projection that should Coriolanus do so both sides will "Give the all-hail to thee"—the laurel wreath of "good report" Volumnia (and thus Coriolanus) prizes more than his life (V. iii. 233-39). The drama's first three acts, in preparing for the banishment, have demonstrated just what success Coriolanus has made of reconciliation, and Volumnia, as his chief manipulator, knows how critical his role is as Rome's *tabula rasa*; her plea here is an attempt to restore the city's previous (dis)order, to close the gap his absence has opened.<sup>37</sup>

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Volumnia's suit is born of desperation, now "all the policy, strength, and defence" Rome has left to it (IV. vi. 128). In I. iii she had derided Virgilia: "If my son were my husband I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour, than in the embracements of his bed." That absence is now a certainty, and Volumnia is pressed to admit to her son her dependence on Rome's insular homogeneity:

Thou barr'st us  
Our prayers to the gods, which is a comfort  
That all but we can enjoy; for how can we,  
Alas! how can we for our country pray,  
Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory,  
Whereto we are bound?

(V. iii. 104-49)

Volumnia's anguished emphasis on her bonds to Coriolanus evokes the pain of Rome's protracted tumescence, its inability to discharge its deferrals and postponements.<sup>38</sup>

Volumnia also prophesies to Coriolanus the outcome of his continued alienation from Rome, binding him rhetorically to the citizens, "whose voices might be curses" to themselves (II. iii. 182-83), much as Coriolanus had unknowingly linked the citizens to Menenius in act one. It is certain, she says, "That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit / Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name / Whose repetition will be dogg'd with curses" (V. iii. 142-44). In these few lines Volumnia refers to the major rhetorical images in the play, or—since each of these images in some measure conjures up Rome in its pathological entirety—what Lawrence Danson calls *Coriolanus'* "numerous and striking metonymies."<sup>39</sup>

Volumnia's rhetoric of metonymies, repeating many of the bodily images of the belly fable and representing the destruction of Coriolanus' family as the destruction of Roman society, succeeds with Coriolanus, but it seems to shock him into the awareness, away from Rome, that he cannot do for Rome what it cannot do for itself: "O mother, mother! . . . Behold, the heavens do ope, / The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at" (V. iii. 182-85). The "unnatural scene" refers not simply to the specter of the women and son kneeling to Coriolanus, but to the more figurative role reversal: this is a man who has wanted "nothing of a god but eternity" (V. iv. 24), would stand "as if a man were author of himself," and who has accepted the regard of Menenius, who "godded me indeed" (V. iii. 36,11). But Coriolanus has not grown into the expansive autonomy necessary to deserve

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these epithets—just as he has refused to brook the reduction of his person into subhuman wounds. Volumnia's speech reminds him of his "place," her metonymies indicative of Rome's parochialism and Coriolanus' "unnatural" presence outside its walls. "The heavens do ope"—a subtle enjambment that fleetingly suggests a metaphorical opening up of Coriolanus' understanding—gives way to his final fragmentation, the realization that he is indebted to Rome for the creation and continuation of his identities. "I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour / At difference in thee," gloats Aufidius in an aside. "Out of that I'll work / Myself a former fortune" (V. iii. 199-202).

The distance Coriolanus achieves from Rome and the seeming objectivity he achieves as a result only hasten the process by which he is destroyed. When he had met Aufidius in battle he always emerged victorious, but when he partakes of and succumbs to the rhetoric of Rome, away from Rome, Aufidius is there to record his and its vulnerability. Coriolanus makes a valiant effort to fit into the "world elsewhere," *reminding* himself, I think, that the linguistic strategies integral to his domestic incorporation are not useful except in the domestic sphere.<sup>40</sup> But Aufidius' Antium, like Rome in so many ways, provides an alternative model of social coherence, one far less reliant on the lexical forcing of signification. When Aufidius calls Martius "traitor," he reads the latter's actions, not his words, lest Coriolanus "purge himself with words" (V. vi. 7), and Aufidius' conspirators similarly concern themselves with this difference:

Ere he express himself or move the people  
 With what he would say, let him feel your sword,  
 Which we will second. When he lies along,  
 After your way pronounc'd shall bury  
 His reasons with his body.

(55-59)

This richly involved statement expresses not only a fear of Roman linguistic infection, but potentially a fear of what Coriolanus' fragmentation represents—the very power to be representative.<sup>41</sup> Rome has, however, demonstrated its representative power in "a kind of nothing," subject to the rhetorical whims and projections of which the city is made. The Volsces are eager to eradicate this threat in much the same way Rome was eager to eradicate its internal threats. The play's final scene, while putting a stop to Rome's tiring redundancy, generates the possibility that Antium may not be significantly different; it is, after all, in many ways a repetition of the first scene of the play—with the difference that

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the people actually rather than potentially kill, in a conflict proscribing words and thus producing the meaningless spectacle of Coriolanus' body.

## The Citadel

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Cynthia Marshall succinctly summarizes both the central paradox of Coriolanus the character—"vivid physical presence existing simultaneously with an eroding sense of lack"—and recent critical response to the kind of paradox central to the play that I delineate in the opening of this essay ("Wound-man: *Coriolanus*, gender, and the theatrical construction of interiority," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, et. al [Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996], p. 95). In "*Coriolanus*: The Tragedy of Virtus," Anthony Miller writes, "Coriolanus is probably the most active of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, certainly the one least given to reflection. Yet the play's busyness is not always warlike. Much of it consists of talk, especially the contentious talk of political debate" (*Sydney Studies in English*, 9 [1983], 37-60, p. 37).

<sup>2</sup>Despite the detailed scholarship that has linked the play to the Midlands' economic crisis of 1607, I think the best approach to the play's use of historical events is also one of the first, E. C. Pettet's "*Coriolanus* and the Midlands Insurrection of 1607," *Shakespeare Survey*, 3 (1950), 34-42. Pettet simply asks, "Since the play was almost certainly written just after the 1607 revolt, and since both the problem of corn shortage and the fear of fresh disturbances persisted for some time, is it not possible that Shakespeare was adapting Plutarch's story to give it the topicality of a bearing on recent events?" (p. 37). Pettet does not attempt to draw from this observation a conclusion about Shakespeare's feelings toward the crisis, as, unfortunately, many historical arguments do. The most fruitful arguments attempt to trace Shakespeare's dramatic use of contemporary events; Janet Adelman's work (q.v.) remains among the best of these. Recent scholarship has also noted the complexities of enclosure practices in early modern England, making point-by-point correlations between contemporary documents and Shakespeare's treatment of the nobles and the plebs. See, for example, William C. Carroll, "The Nursery of Beggary': Enclosure, Vagrancy, and Sedition in the Tudor-Stuart Period," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 34-48.

Shakespeare's own manipulation of his Plutarchan sources suggests a complex interrelationship of plebs and nobles, and a rich interaction between voice and body, and thus a figurative as well as a literal use of death. In Plutarch's account, as Pettet also notes, hunger is not the primary cause of sedition, but usury, and the subsequent bondage of debtors to lenders. And in a crucial difference from the play, the people boycott the city and encamp peacefully on a hill outside the city's gate; they are persuaded to return only by the sweet-talking Menenius, who promises to grant them five representative magistrates to "defend the poore people from violence and oppression." Unfortunately, these magistrates "had only bene the causers & procurers of this sedition" (From *Plutarch's Life of Calus Martius Coriolanus*, rpt. in *Coriolanus*, ed. Philip Brockbank, *The Arden Shakespeare* [London: Methuen, 1985], p. 320).

<sup>3</sup>*The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1928).

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pp. 30-31. Eliot, of course, considered *Coriolanus*, along with *Antony and Cleopatra*, "Shakespeare's most assured artistic success." *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>For example, Tate writes: "Faction is a Monster that often makes the slaughter 'twas designed for; and as often turns its fury on those that hatcht it." From *The Ingratitude of A Common-Wealth*, quoted in "*Coriolanus*": *Critical Essays*, ed. David Wheeler, *Shakespeare Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1995), p. 4. See also Zvi Jagendorf in Wheeler, "*Coriolanus*: Body Politic and Private Parts"; Janet Adelman, "Anger's My Meat": Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*," in *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay Halio (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Univ. Presses, 1978), pp. 130, 131.

<sup>5</sup>In Carole Sicherman, "*Coriolanus*: The Failure of Words," *ELH*, 39 (1972), 189-207, p. 190. Stanley Cavell believes, "The play presents us with our need for one another's words by presenting withholding words, words that do not meet us halfway," in "'Who does the wolf love?' Reading *Coriolanus*," *Representations*, 3 (1983), 1-20, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Jarrett Walker, (echoing Brockbank) in his essay on *Coriolanus* as a conflict between voice and body, begins his analysis of the play's first scene by noting that Shakespeare launches "a frontal assault of bodies. . . . *Coriolanus* is the only play of the period to open with public violence. . . . [it] is . . . the very first thing we are meant to perceive. The stage direction insists that the armed citizens that have stormed the stage are 'mutinous,' not, as we later learn, that they are, specifically, hungry." Jarrett Walker, "Voiceless Bodies and Bodiless Voices: The Drama of Human Perception in *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43 (1992), 170-85, p. 173. See also the first paragraph of Miller's essay (n. 1 above).

<sup>7</sup>I. i. 1-13. *Coriolanus*, ed. Philip Brockbank. Further references to the play will be cited parenthetically in the essay.

<sup>8</sup>See Walker, pp. 173-74.

<sup>9</sup>In the folio this line reads, "what Authority surfets *one*, would relieve us" (my italics). Brockbank notes the folio's "one" as a common variant spelling, but it seems unusually apt in this scene given the distinctions drawn by the citizens (see p. 7 and p. 96 n.).

<sup>10</sup>Walker, p. 174.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*, whose "toasts-and-butter" soldiers are "good enough to toss, food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better." *The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), IV. ii. 21, 65-66.

<sup>12</sup>The nobles' miserly hoarding of wounds echoes their alleged hoarding of grain, particularly as the wounds will not be shared with the citizens in the marketplace. Additionally, see David Lucking, "'The price of one fair word': Negotiating Names in *Coriolanus*," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 2 (1996), 1-19. Lucking notes the attempt of Cominius to "quantify [*Coriolanus*'] merit" on the battlefield, "to measure it according to the criteria of the market place" (p. 5).

Nearly every scholar of this play understands wounds and wounding to be in some way an essential element of *Coriolanus*' worth to the people of Rome or to his own sense of identity. See especially Cavell, Walker, and Marshall, the latter of whom often closely follows Coppelia Kahn's interpretation of *virtus*, though Marshall in fact anticipates Kahn's *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, wounds, and women. Feminist Readings of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>13</sup>Shakespeare considerably abbreviates the history behind the standing-for-consul provided by Thomas North's Plutarch. According to North, at the time *Coriolanus* stood for the office, the ceremony had not yet been corrupted, but "given then by desert" (quoted in Brockbank, p. 331).

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<sup>14</sup>*The Complete Works*, III. ii. 220-24.

<sup>15</sup>In his notes on this play, Coleridge observes "The wonderful philosophic impartiality in Shakespeare's politics." *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Athlone Press, 1989), p. 177. Of the political differences between the citizens and Coriolanus, John Plotz writes, "this play is striking for its ability to reveal problems with one system without gerrymandering into place a fully formed alternative." "Coriolanus and the Failure of Performatives," *ELH*, 63 (1996), 809-32, p. 821.

<sup>16</sup>In *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 121-23.

<sup>17</sup>In Wheeler, p. 231.

<sup>18</sup>For example, Cavell cites the ambiguities of grammar attending Menenius' question in II. i: "Who does the wolf love?" Cavell wants to know whether Menenius means "whom does the wolf love," or "who loves the wolf." One's answer will depend upon "what or who you take the lamb to be, hence what the wolf." Cavell intimates that Menenius, "ever the interpretive fabulist," generates a kind of interpretive shock by his image reversal, suddenly posing the patricians, especially Coriolanus, as the lamb. But the image is not really shocking, since these citizens have already been described in the first act as scavenging dogs and rats, eaters of excess, and have, in their attribution of abundance, perhaps already figured Coriolanus as prey (pp. 6-7).

<sup>19</sup>Obviously, I use "reflexiveness" in a broader sense than does Cavell, to connote the play's fundamental mirroring of speech between the citizens and nobles. Although Cavell restricts his use of the word to mean an action directed back onto the agent or subject—the controlling grammar of Rome's "cannibalism"—his essay gestures toward my own argument that Rome feeds on words (pp. 14-15).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Stanley Fish, "How To Do Things With Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," *MLN*, 91 (1976), 983-1001; see also Plotz, p. 821.

<sup>21</sup>Plotz, pp. 821, 810.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, his response to the nobles in act three: "You have put me now to such a part which never / I shall discharge to th'life" (III. ii. 105-06).

The idea that Coriolanus and the citizens mirror one another is Plotz's; relative to my argument about their rhetorical sameness is Plotz's observation that "All the characters in *Coriolanus* [except Coriolanus] are aware, underneath, that the linguistic games they are playing are fraudulent . . . [his] criticism uncovers a *hamartia* that society would just as soon ignore—but his criticism cannot work as a cure" (p. 810). Of course his criticism cannot work as a cure, because there is no world elsewhere to which Coriolanus can go to learn the relative worth of fraudulence. Coriolanus looks inward, but since the play provides no overt opportunity for inwardness—no revealing soliloquy, no alternatives except another Latin community—his inwardness must be expressed in the same language as his outwardness. Plotz refuses Coriolanus the ability to conjure (linguistically or physically, by moving into a non-Roman space) an alternative world, yet he attributes to him the ability to imagine a world of which he can have no knowledge.

<sup>23</sup>Plutarch several times refers to the traditionally Spartan attachment to action over speech, but he also praises the act of speech when it aptly serves a purpose, particularly the purpose of war. Thus, in North's "Life of Paulus Aemilius," Paulus was "a severe captaine, and strict observer of all marshall discipline, not seeking to winne the souldiers love by flatterie, when he was generall in the field, as many dyd in that time." Of Julius Caesar, "It is reported that Caesar had an excellent naturall gift to speake well before the people, and besides that rare gift, he was excellently well studied, so that doubtless he was counted the second man for eloquence in his time, and gave place to the first . . . because he was geven rather to

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follow warres and to manage great matters . . . And therefore in a booke he wrote against that which Cicero made in the praise of Cato, he prayeth the readers not to compare the stile of a souldier, with the eloquence of an excellent Orator." *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, Englished by Sir Thomas North*. The Tudor Translations, ed. W.E. Henley (London: David Nutt, 1896), vol. 2, p. 199, vol. 5, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," *Diacritics*, 3 (1973), 27-33, pp. 29-30.

<sup>25</sup>Brockbank cites Bacon's essay "Of Boldness": "Question was asked of Demosthenes, what was the chief part of an orator? He answered, Action. What next?—Action. What next again?—Action." Bacon is in turn citing Plutarch's "Life of Demosthenes." Brockbank, p. 223n. and *Bacon's Essays*, intro. A. Spiers (New York: Carlton House, 1930), p. 103.

<sup>26</sup>De Man, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup>Plotz, p. 810.

<sup>28</sup>Janet Adelman writes that this line reveals Coriolanus' "bafflement"; he "would like to suggest that there is no distance between role and self, but he in fact suggests that he plays at being himself, that his manhood is merely a role," p. 135.

<sup>29</sup>Plotz, pp. 819-20.

<sup>30</sup>Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 96; Bamber also notes that Coriolanus (along with Macbeth) manifests "this sense of recurrence rather than forward motion," but in Bamber's Jungian reading, this "compulsion to repeat is a function of the absence of the Other" (pp. 96-97); Jagendorf in Wheeler, p. 248.

<sup>31</sup>Bamber, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup>I have taken this idea of "critical commentary" from Plotz, but while Plotz attributes this critical capacity to Coriolanus, I believe it is a function of his being away from Rome and, as I have already pointed out, I also do not believe Coriolanus does or can function in any truly critical capacity; i.e., he knows something in Rome is rotten, but not what it is.

<sup>33</sup>Adelman, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup>But note the remark of Sicinius that Caius Martius affects "one sole throne, / Without assistance," and Brockbank's observation that "the form of words here shadows the emergence of Caesar" (IV. vi. 32, n. 3). See also the remarks of the Volscian lord in the final scene: "The man is noble, and his fame folds in / This orb o'th'earth"—still a somewhat contrary aggrandizement (124-25).

<sup>35</sup>The speech with which Martius stirs his soldiers to a final attack on Corioles runs from lines 66-85. Brockbank, following the Tucker-Brooke Yale Shakespeare, attributes the line "O me alone! Make you a sword of me!" (76) to the soldiers. The folio, however, attributes the entire speech to Martius, only dividing it at line 76 with the stage direction, "They all shout and wave their swords, take him up in their Armes, and cast up their Caps." Editions which retain the folio assignment and attribute the line to Martius (F's "Oh me alone, make you a sword of me") seem marginally superior (despite the textual cues supporting Brockbank's assignment) since the sentiment, in the context of his eagerness to meet Aufidius, is pure Martius. It is also tempting to imagine that the silence of the soldiers, who perhaps still believe in his "foolhardiness," is born of self-preservation.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Brockbank, IV. vii. 28-57, n.

<sup>37</sup>Philip Brockbank makes the provocative observation that in IV. vi, as the Romans anticipate Volscian invasion, Shakespeare "exaggerates the extremity of Roman fear and panic at the return of Martius." Why should Brockbank be struck by an exaggeration of extremity here, as the play to this point is a protracted, precarious balance of extremes? Does he perhaps notice an imbalance in Rome caused by Coriolanus' absence, or symptoms of rhetorical excess unmediated by his

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presence? His assertion opens up a pleasing field of speculation for a scene which does not appear to have much more happening in it than the usual blaming, bickering nobles, tribunes, and citizens—except for Coriolanus' absence (see Brockbank's note to IV. vi. 120).

<sup>38</sup>The Freudian model of plot explored by Peter Brooks provides in many ways a wonderful paradigm for the narrative drive of *Coriolanus*, particularly his discussion of the state of repetition in which narrative exists and the problematics of psychic mastery of textual energy: "Repetition in all its literary manifestations may in fact work as a . . . binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable 'bundles,' within the energetic economy of the narrative. . . . To speak of 'binding' in a literary text is thus to speak of any of the formalizations, blatant or subtle, that force us to recognize sameness within difference. . . . (T)hese formalizations and the recognitions they provoke may in some sense be painful: they create a delay, a postponement in the discharge of energy, a turning back from immediate pleasure, to ensure that the ultimate pleasurable discharge will be more complete." In *Coriolanus*, however, the final "discharge" of energies feels alien, almost spurious because, while the text has seemed to prepare for Coriolanus' death since its first scene, its narrative impetus has been toward an endless continuation of this state of repetition and deferral. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), pp. 101-02.

<sup>39</sup>"Metonymy and *Coriolanus*," *Philological Quarterly*, 52 (1973), p. 30.

<sup>40</sup>As Coriolanus hears the disturbance offstage heralding Volumnia's arrival, he asks himself, "Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow / In the same time 'tis made? I will not" (V. iii. 20-21). His "resolution" here conveys a bittersweetness different from the oscillating answers he had given his mother in preparation for the consul ceremony. Here he seems to be abrogating the rhetorical fickleness that would be unacceptable to Aufidius. Even more poignant is his earlier dismissal of Menenius; Coriolanus *has* been wounded by the banishment but is again constrained from "showing" these figurative wounds by the play's limited forensic style: "I say to you, as I was said to, Away!" (V. ii. 105-06).

<sup>41</sup>Danson refers to Kenneth Burke's analysis of representative government as synechdochic, although Danson himself appears uneasy about the extent to which Rome exemplifies a representational ideology: "What Coriolanus denies in himself, he despises in the state and would extirpate—its fragmentary, representative nature, it's at least partial democracy of functions" (p. 34). Insofar as Coriolanus is representative of Rome, however, I think his presence is potentially threatening to the Volscas.