



January 2013

# Republicanism In Coriolanus

Anthony James Albright

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/theses>

## Recommended Citation

Albright, Anthony James, "Republicanism In Coriolanus" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1393.  
<https://commons.und.edu/theses/1393>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [zeinebyousif@library.und.edu](mailto:zeinebyousif@library.und.edu).

REPUBLICANISM IN *CORIOLANUS*

By

Anthony James Albright

Bachelor of Arts, University of Minnesota, Morris 2011

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

Of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

2013

Copyright 2013 Anthony James Albright

This thesis, submitted by Anthony J. Albright, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

---

Dr. Kathleen McLennan

---

Emily Cherry

---

Bradford Reissig

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

---

Dr. Wayne Swisher  
Dean of the Graduate School

---

Date

## PERMISSION

Title Republicanism in *Coriolanus*  
Department Theatre Arts  
Degree Master of Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in her absence, by the Chairperson of the department or the dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

---

Anthony J. Albright

May 2013

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. SCHOLARS OF THE RIGHT HAND FILE.....	4
III. REPUBLICAN SCHOLARS.....	15
IV. COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF <i>CORIOLANUS</i> TO ITS SOURCES.....	28
V.CONCLUSIONS.....	59
WORKS CITED.....	64

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Theatre Department at the University of North Dakota for accepting me into their family and taking a chance on me. Their countless hours of dedication to the furtherance of my education have given me something to strive for. I would like to specifically thank Dr. Kathleen McLennan who helped bring me down to earth when my ambition began to soar on wings of hyperbole. Without her sage guidance, I would never have crafted a project that has engrossed me as much as this one has. My family and friends are a constant source of inspiration in my daily life. Lastly, I want to thank Phillip McBride Sr., without whose challenge to make something of myself, I would never have attended college.

## ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is widely considered to be the most political of his plays. Scholarship on the subject of the politics contained within the play arrives at different conclusions. Samuel Coleridge believed the play to be politically impartial. Others believe it betrays an obvious vote of no confidence in the government of the age. Still others believe it is a resounding endorsement of the English aristocracy. This thesis will undertake to discover if more current scholarship, led by the work of Annabel Patterson, which purports that the play is actually an example of early stirrings of republican sentiment, is a viable conclusion to the discourse.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* has often ranked it among Shakespeare's most political plays. In his *Political Characters of Shakespeare*, John Palmer wrote, "Politics are the predominating interest in scene after scene of the play . . . the individual men and women are passionately concerned with their rights and wrongs as citizens in a community" (Palmer 250). Scholars differ in their interpretation of what the political content in the play means. On one hand, a whole generation of scholars have taken up Samuel Coleridge's contention from his 1836 *Notes on Shakespeare* series that, "This play illustrates the wonderfully philosophic impartiality of Shakespeare's politics," because it pokes fun at the mob and the aristocracy in equal measure (Coleridge 97). William Hazlitt likewise praises the play in his 1906 *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, writing,

The arguments for and against aristocracy or democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many, on liberty and slavery, power and the abuse of it, peace and war, are here very ably handled with the spirit of a poet and the acuteness of a philosopher. Shakespeare himself seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, perhaps from some feeling of contempt for his own origin; and to have spared no occasion of bating the rabble (Hazlitt NP).

Hazlitt, like Coleridge, sees the play as an apolitical triumph in a politically turbulent world.

On the other hand, recent scholarship, exemplified by Annabel Patterson and Mark Kishlansky suggests that Shakespeare utilized this specific moment in Roman history to set his tragedy because it led to a civil war that helped to establish greater stability within Rome as a republic. Furthermore, Patterson writes that, “In *Coriolanus*, for the first time, Shakespeare’s audience is invited to contemplate an alternative political system” (Patterson 127). Given the political movements of the early 1600s in England, toward empowerment of the House of Commons, this seems a plausible position for a playwright who was attuned to his audience’s interests.

Issues concerning the nature of democracy and its origins will always be of interest to those who attempt to implement such types of government. The examination of power relations contained in *Coriolanus* is relevant for the exact reasons that Hazlitt mentions. It distills masterfully a complex philosophical problem into a five act piece of dramatic literature. Likewise, examination of the possible meanings to be found within the text of the play can clarify its treatment of the political issues which keep it current to the present day. Certainly, when Ralph Fiennes approached his recent film production of the play, he had to decide for himself what the political language and ideas inherent in the script meant and how they altered the characters (Fiennes NP).

This thesis will approach the problem from three fronts, with an eye toward drawing conclusions that will aid in understanding of the play’s political connotations. The first front will be to approach the problem from the outlook of those scholars who

believe that the play does not represent a political agenda or represents an agenda that is in line with a conservative view of the English government at the time. The second front will be an examination of the argument that *Coriolanus* has an obvious republican bent or is at least skeptical of the powers of the English monarchy. The third front will be to examine the play closely alongside its sources, in order to determine if any conclusions about Shakespeare's political intentions can be drawn from his adaptation of the story when compared with its sources.

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOLARS OF THE RIGHT HAND FILE

Many scholars have followed Coleridge's lead in protesting that *Coriolanus* is either less political than many believe, or if political, leans toward support of the aristocracy as opposed to support of republican democracy. Allan Bloom, Gordon Zeefeld, Alexander Leggatt, James Emerson Phillips Jr., and John Palmer are just a few of these scholars. While they have different interpretations of the play, they are unified by a belief that Shakespeare was not making a political statement in favor of republican reformation within the English government when he wrote *Coriolanus*.

Allan Bloom writes, flatly, "Shakespeare is no democrat," (Bloom 80). His contention is rather that Shakespeare falls neatly into the rank and file of the prevailing political attitudes of the era. He continues, "It is not, as we shall see, that he lacks sympathy for the poor; it is rather that he is convinced that certain important virtues can be possessed by only a few and those few require special training and long tradition" (Bloom 80). Essentially, Bloom sees Coriolanus as the hero of the play. He is a sympathetic character, for whom the audience feels great pity as a result of his overthrow. He describes Coriolanus' great virtues, not pride, as his downfall within the play. Bloom believes that Coriolanus fails where Caesar, by contrast, succeeded because Caesar betrayed his class to gain the support of the people, but Coriolanus maintained his separation and lost the support of the people.

Bloom considers Shakespeare's treatment of the plebs to be unsympathetic in both plays. He writes, ". . . in *Coriolanus*. . . they are impetuous, in *Julius Caesar*, they are heartless and fickle" (Bloom 82). He believes that in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare has created a perfectly understandable character who behaves in the way a gentleman should. He writes,

Coriolanus, as a result of his public services, deserves to rule; hence, he should be given office without having to seek it or having to add to his sufficient title extraneous adornments that would please the unwise mob. In all reason. . . his refusal to flatter is justified (Bloom 83).

Bloom believes that the character is justified in his vengeance upon Rome, because Coriolanus is more fit to rule than the mob.

Bloom argues that Coriolanus is a heroic figure who falls victim to a mob. Rather than show Coriolanus as a tyrant, with the illustrated power to subjugate the mob, Bloom sees the play as an indictment of the mob's inability to make wise governing decisions. If Shakespeare has a political leaning to one side or the other, Bloom believes that this play makes it clear he prefers aristocratic leadership to mob rule. He concludes his argument with a statement of his view of the major theme of the play,

The peoples' love is necessary; a god un-worshiped is no god. The peoples' love is not won by mere heroic virtue. In other words, a man who wishes to become a god, who is conscious of the extent of his ambition, cannot behave as gods are popularly understood to behave (Bloom 86).

Bloom's argument assumes that Coriolanus is meant to be a sympathetic hero, and that Shakespeare intended the mob to be perceived as incapable of their own governance. Other scholars perceive Coriolanus as more akin to the anti-hero, much like Richard III or King John.

In his *Coriolanus and Jacobean Politics*, Gordon Zeefeld presents a similar argument. He does not believe that Shakespeare was apolitical. Rather, he writes, “. . . it would seem strange that a popular dramatist should be so far removed from one of the main interests of his audience, and stranger still that, being so far removed, he should choose to write a play so politically saturated as *Coriolanus*” (Zeefeld 321). Zeefeld believes that the play is a result of an intelligent dramatist writing about the interests of his audience.

Part of the reason for the discrepancy is the date at which Zeefeld places the authorship of the play. While Bloom believes the play to be authored during the end of the Elizabethan era, Zeefeld writes, “. . . considering the general public interest in the 1606 debates on purveyance. . . there is good reason to believe that Shakespeare, in 1606 or shortly thereafter, made dramatic capital of that interest” (Zeefeld 329). The 1606 timeline places the play's authorship firmly within the early reign of James I. The difference means that the state was a little freer to express distaste with the monarchy and that the political events contemporary with the authorship of the play provided it with immediacy.

Zeefeld next addresses the contention that Shakespeare's purpose was to write a critique, as Bloom contends, of the lower classes. He writes, “So scathing is Coriolanus'

vituperation that in our age of the common man it has often been erroneously transferred to Shakespeare himself” (Zeefeld 322). Shakespeare, according to Zeefeld, was not writing a critique of the people, but capitalizing on a popular theme within London politics. That is not to say that Zeefeld does not acknowledge the existence of a heated debate on the subject within London at the time, but much more in line with Coleridge, believes that the play itself does not betray a bias.

Zeefeld acknowledges that, “Clearly, the period of Roman history spanned by Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*. . . represented an object lesson in the hazards of popular government” (Zeefeld 324). However, he additionally acknowledges that the political powers of the time in London were experiencing turbulence. He writes, “For good or ill, in [the plebs in *Coriolanus*] is embodied a new power in the commonwealth, and a threat to its traditional balance” (Zeefeld 323). All of this information combines to form Zeefeld’s thesis. That is to say, “One need not make Shakespeare a partisan; we need only remember that he was a popular playwright” (Zeefeld 333). Essentially, Zeefeld contends that there is not enough information related in a play to safely contend that the playwright preferred one political idea over another.

In his book, *Shakespeare’s Political Drama*, Alexander Leggatt draws related conclusions. He qualifies his points however. He writes, “Shakespeare’s treatment of politics is exploratory rather than prescriptive” (Leggatt 238). Shakespeare does not explore the processes by which the tribunes overcome the patricians to gain unprecedented rights. Leggatt argues this by writing, “His interest is not in examining what political structures best serve the general good, but in watching how people behave within the structures they have” (Leggatt 238). He cites Christopher Morris’ argument

that “Tudor Englishmen found it difficult to think of politics except in terms of persons. They talked more of the monarch than of the monarchy, more of the sovereign than the sovereignty” (Leggatt 238). However, this brings up the question of date of authorship. Morris is speaking of Tudor Englishmen, which as a group, could be generalized from a pool of any male in England from 1485 until 1603. If, as Zeefeld contends, the play was written in 1606, this gross generalization invalidates Morris’ argument. The political climate under which Elizabethan playwrights labored was far stricter than that under which Jacobean artists were constrained (Albright 48-51). By the ascension of James, the Office of Revels’ power had become much more diluted, making this an important distinction (Albright 48-51). Leggatt’s point is that the play is a drama about power relationships and not an examination of political processes.

He continues by citing various examples from the history plays. “[Shakespeare’s] business,” he writes, “as a playwright is to find a pattern in the untidy events of history” (Leggatt 240). This would seem to suggest a view more in line with Zeefeld’s view of Shakespeare as a popular playwright who was simply producing works his audience would find interesting, with no political overtones intended. Leggatt continues his argument with examples from many of the political and history plays. He finds them to be pieces of drama that are driven by the characters’ pursuit of power. He concludes with the statement that,

The most impressive characters in Shakespeare’s political world are not the winners but those who have confronted and absorbed the experience of loss, whose achievement is not to order a state, but to assert themselves against inevitable ruin. This is the political thinking of a playwright. It will not help us



to control the economy, achieve social justice, win or prevent a war. But it tells us something about human power and the endless fascination it has for us in the face of our own morality (Leggatt 243).

Others, like Bloom and Zeefeld, may contend that this summation of Shakespeare's political plays constitutes an over-simplification of the works. Certainly Hazlitt, who states, "Anyone who studies [*Coriolanus*] may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's *Reflections*, or Paine's *Rights of Man*, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own," would seem to disagree (Hazlitt NP).

In his book, *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*, James Emerson Phillips Jr. dedicates chapter VIII to "Violation of Order and Degree in *Coriolanus*" (Phillips 147). Like many other scholars, Phillips makes note of the distinctively transitional period in which the play is set. He writes, "In the turbulent history of Rome in this period Tudor theorists who argued in defense of monarchy and the hierarchy of degrees found a convincing demonstration of the dangers of democratic government" (Phillips 147). He contends that at least one extant example of Tudor scholarship on the subject, William Fulbecke's *Pandectes*, uses the historical account of Coriolanus to further his argument that "democracy is contrary to natural law, and hence, to God's will" (Phillips 147). Phillips further claims, "Shakespeare approached this segment of history in essentially the same spirit, if far more critically, and with deeper insight into the underlying political and social principles involved" (Phillips 148). In this way, Phillips separates himself from the Coleridge camp to fall more in line with those, like Bloom, who believe Shakespeare's critique, is of the plebeians.

Phillips next divorces himself from that camp too however, stating, “Criticism of *Coriolanus* has suffered from attempts to read the play as a special plea for one party or class” (Phillips 148). This statement belongs more with the likes of Zeefeld. He further states, “In the legendary history of *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare discovered and held up to view the disastrous consequences of violation of those principles by which a healthy political society is maintained” (Phillips 149). This statement is clearly anti-republican. He further elucidates his interpretation of the text when he states, “. . . by presenting the tribunes as far more debased in character and motive than they are in Plutarch, Shakespeare emphasizes the evil of an attempt at democratic redress of popular grievances” (Phillips 149). Phillips is obviously confident in his reading of both *Coriolanus*, and Shakespeare’s other plays. He writes, “According to Shakespeare, and to the majority of his contemporaries, a state can prosper only when it conforms to that pattern of degrees, vocations, and authority ordained by the laws of God and nature” (Phillips 150). Phillips falls in line with a tradition of scholars who believe it is possible to determine a playwright’s intent through close analysis of his or her work.

The next major point Phillips makes is that “it seems clear that in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare was not so much concerned with the relative merits of monarchy and aristocracy as with the evils which follow disruption of the general structure of degrees and vocations” (Phillips 153). He is here referring to the same system which Menenius describes in the Fable of the Belly Politic<sup>1</sup>. Essentially, parts of the body cannot change

---

<sup>1</sup> The Fable of the Belly Politic- refers to a well-known monologue from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* in which Menenius compares the workings of government to the workings of a human body. The monologue is widely viewed as a comparison to the contemporary political concept of the body politic, which is an Authoritarian model for governance. See David George Hale’s *The Body Politic: A Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).

their functions to do another job, and if one part of the body does not do its job, the whole body falls apart. Phillips writes, “The chief offenders against the commonwealth of Rome are the plebeians, whose democratic activities constitute a violation of the natural pattern of the state” (Phillips 153). He continues, “It is not the plebeian as he lives and acts in his own degree, but the plebeian spurred by political ambitions, attempting to rise out of his degree, whom Shakespeare ridicules and condemns” (Phillips 153). Phillips concludes his argument with a re-affirmation of his beliefs. He writes,

The political atmosphere of the play throughout its course is that of an organized society disrupted and rendered chaotic by subversive democratic forces on the one hand, and on the other by an individual temperamentally unfit to function in the capacity of natural governor of the state. But the drama remains, in the final analysis, the tragedy of the title figure himself. . . the tragedy of an heroic and essentially noble character brought by an element in his own make-up into inevitable and disastrous conflict with universal laws of political and social conduct (Phillips 170).

This statement puts Phillips at the extreme conservative end of the spectrum of this discourse.

Finally, John Palmer, in his *Political Characters of Shakespeare*, writes, “*Coriolanus*, being the most exclusively political play by Shakespeare, has naturally raised in its most acute form the question whether and, if so, to what extent the author’s personal political sympathies are engaged” (Palmer 250). He continues by recounting the various opinions for and against that contention, many of which have already been

described above. However, in framing the question with regard to the author's politics, instead of the political aspects of the play itself, Palmer's argument is easier to defend. Many of the scholars written about in this chapter have argued the question in this way. It seems easier to prove that, as Bloom put it, "Shakespeare is no Democrat" than to show that *Coriolanus* is not politically biased toward one approach or another (Bloom 80).

Palmer proceeds with his argument by contending that *Coriolanus* was an aesthetic masterpiece, but that its political overtones have distracted critical discourse on it. He writes, "The politics are nevertheless in the last analysis incidental. Shakespeare is intent on persons, not on public affairs. His interest. . . is in a human character who happens to be a politician" (Palmer 309). Palmer next makes the point that if the primary objective of the playwright is to prove a political point, the play's conflict would end with one political ideal or another winning. *Coriolanus* does not. The conflict of the play ends when Coriolanus agrees to retreat and spare Rome, at the urging of his family. As Palmer puts it, "his theme, as it takes shape and moves to a climax is not essentially a political problem but the adventure of a human spirit" (Palmer 309). Structurally this argument makes sense. If, in the analysis of the play, a case cannot be made that the conflict of the piece is mainly political rather than human, then it is difficult to argue that the play's primary function has anything to do with politics.

Palmer adds, "There is no reason to suppose that he felt either more or less interest in what passes for politics in the narrow sense than in any other form of human activity" (Palmer 313). He continues in this conclusion by stating that if there was a political message to be found in *Coriolanus*, it would not, as scholars suggest, be that "Shakespeare hated the people unless we fall into the strange assumption that Caius

Marcus Coriolanus speaks for the author. Marcus certainly hated the people and that was why he came to a bad end” (Palmer 315). Here Palmer suggests what he later simply states. He writes, “Shakespeare deliberately amended Plutarch in two important particulars, on both occasions in favor of the people and to the detriment of the ‘right hand file”” (Palmer 316). His work ends with a defense of this position which essentially separates the character of Coriolanus from the author.

Each of these scholars made mention of both, Hazlitt's argument and Coleridge's in their explanations of why the play was either conservative or completely apolitical. Many of them rely on explaining that Shakespeare himself was not a political figure. They do not adequately examine the play as an entity separate from the author's political viewpoints. Some of the scholars discussed above make their claims based upon information that could today be considered outdated. The primary weaknesses inherent in these arguments are the generalized view of “Tudor Englishmen,” as in Leggatt, and their tendency to leave unsupported claims which may, to them, seem intuitive, as in Phillips. The critical discourse has tended to compare *Coriolanus* to *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, and in the process, attempt to arrive at generalizations about the author's politics. Failing the ability to prove one way or another that Shakespeare supported a partisan stance, they report that *Coriolanus* presents a balanced discussion of two opposing views. However, when scholarship has examined sources contemporary with the play's authorship, it has found that theatrical censorship under Elizabeth was harsh, as illustrated by the royal patent of Edmund Tilney, appointed by Elizabeth I as Master of Revels in July of 1579 (Albright 48).

If Zeefeld is right, and the play was written well into the early years of James' reign, it is being written at a time when new freedoms of expression are available to artists because of the dilution of the powers of the Master of Revels (Albright 48-49). Those scholars who believe *Coriolanus* was written in the Elizabethan era may have trouble validating that claim in light of current historical scholarship. Many now believe that if the two political ideologies present in *Coriolanus* had been written about or performed during Elizabeth's reign, the play would have been censored. The possibility does exist that the play was written during Elizabeth's reign and not performed or licensed before James' ascension, but that does not seem likely. After all, the events of the play, as Zeefeld points out, are eerily contemporary with the political goings-on of 1606.

### CHAPTER III

#### REPUBLICAN SCHOLARS

In 1986, Mark Kishlansky began his book, *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern England*, with a comparison of early parliamentary selection in England, to the model described by Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* (Kishlansky 3-9). He writes, “Shakespeare’s account of the candidacy of Coriolanus [for consul] is an apt starting place for a discussion of the process of parliamentary selection in early modern England” (Kishlansky 4). Kishlansky further relates,

these scenes so accurately portray the process by which officeholders were selected in the early seventeenth century that one must conclude that Shakespeare had first-hand experience, either of wardmote selections to the London Common Council or of parliamentary selections themselves (Kishlansky 5).

Right away, Kishlansky has placed the authorship of *Coriolanus* in James’ reign, not in that of Elizabeth I, by comparing it to governing procedures that were undertaken during James’ rule.

In the course of his comparison, Kishlansky identifies the problem with scholarly discourse on *Coriolanus*. He writes, “It is the peoples’ role, and Shakespeare’s attitude toward it, that has so perplexed modern commentators” (Kishlansky 6). He is here referring to the custom of candidates for consul presenting themselves to the plebs for

assent to the consul's candidacy. Kishlansky makes clear that the traditional practice requires the plebeians "gave assent rather than consent" (Kishlansky 6).

Kishlansky identifies Coriolanus' problem with the plebeians. Rather than accept their place as confirmers of honor, they attempted to usurp the senate's role as the conferrers of honor. He writes, "The rage that overcame Coriolanus was in equal parts the fury of the individual and the state" (Kishlansky 7). This people's power to reject a candidate put forward by the senate, Kishlansky contends, was the thing that Coriolanus took issue with. Kishlansky next relates his view of the political argument of the play. He writes, ". . . by elevating the episode of the consulship to the center of the action, we can see the tragedy in a different light-as that of a society whose structures and values are incapable of absorbing the tensions and conflicts within it" (Kishlansky 7). This aspect of the play seems, if not supportive of republican sentiments, at least critical of aristocratic structures in that it reflects the weaknesses of the English system by comparison.

However, Kishlansky's book is about parliamentary selection, not *Coriolanus*. While he believes that the play is "an expression of views that would render traditional practice inadequate," it is not his purpose to make a definitive argument about the politics of the play or Shakespeare at large (Kishlansky 8). Instead, he concludes, "The clash of values at which Shakespeare dimly hinted would, over the course of the seventeenth century, emerge as one of the defining characteristics of the selection process" (Kishlansky 8). It seems clear in Kishlansky's argument that Shakespeare's audience understood the comparison. This contention struck a chord with scholars on the subject.



So great is Kishlansky's influence over the discourse that each subsequent scholar this thesis will examine has cited this small section of his book.

In her 1989 book, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, Annabel Patterson lays out one of the earliest examples of complete disagreement with Coleridge's contention that the play is apolitical. She writes, "political theory is its *raison d'être*, and if we try to set it aside, nothing of interest, of plot, of character remains" (Patterson 120). Patterson suggests that the play has been appropriated for political purposes throughout its long life in scholarly discourse. She cites examples like Nahum Tate's 1681 work, *The Ingratitude of a Common-Weale*, and Bertolt Brecht's 1952 adaptation of the play entitled *Coriolan* (Patterson 121). She adds mention of both Alan Bloom's and Mark Kishlansky's arguments. Patterson draws from "this list of appropriations" a question (Patterson 121). She writes, "this list of appropriations, precisely by being such, raises an important question, the question of Shakespeare's intentions: what does the text of *Coriolanus* itself have to say about power relations, in ancient Rome and elsewhere subsequently?" (Patterson 121).

Patterson rejects the idea that Shakespeare's intent, as purported by her list of offending appropriators, was conservative in nature. She writes,

*Coriolanus* was constructed out of material already strongly grained in a certain direction. . . Shakespeare would not have chosen that particular story from Roman history to work with had he not been susceptible to its ideological import...it is possible to distinguish between impartiality. . . and the balanced and nuanced assessment of rightful and wrongful causes, of justice and injustice, that

Shakespeare had by this time trained himself to provide and that had brought him. . . to his most radical position: a belief that Jacobean England desperately needed to borrow from the strengths, as well as learn from the difficulties, of republican political theory (Patterson 122).

Patterson cites a change in the way scholarly work is conducted for her new interpretation of the text. She writes, “Fifty years ago it was widely, if not ubiquitously assumed that disputes about the ‘meaning’ of a text or its author’s intentions could be resolved by recourse to ‘history’. It is now equally widely assumed that no such recourse is possible” (Patterson 122). These two separate schools of thought separate scholars on the subject of politics in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* into two different camps, those who believe that it is possible to determine the author’s intent, and those who do not. Patterson writes, “Both positions are, of course, exaggerated, and the case of *Coriolanus* demands a peculiarly exacting poise between them” (Patterson 122).

Like Kishlansky, Patterson mentions the contemporary correlation between the Midlands Uprising of 1607 and the subject matter of the play. She mentions a “witness to the analogy from an authoritative source: several times in 1605 and 1606 James himself referred to the opposition leaders in the Commons as tribunes of the people” (Patterson 123). This contention supports her claim that the source material of the story of *Coriolanus* was already in common usage and well known as a text that was critical of monarchical power. It is operating under this deduction that she questions the validity of conclusions drawn by scholars who believe Shakespeare’s intent was conservative in nature. Patterson writes,

Both Gordon Zeefeld and C.C. Huffman who were primarily responsible for working out the play's relations between Roman and Jacobean politics, infer that Shakespeare, whom they predetermine a supporter of the crown, *must* have been working the analogy to the disadvantage of republican theory. And while much of the evidence for this position is adduced at the level of behavior. . . it also entails a redescription of the political myth behind the play (Patterson 123).

Patterson is accusing Zeefeld and Huffman of failing to arrive at conclusions based on objective scholarship. Their arguments are instead based upon presupposed dispositions and an "against the grain" interpretation of the text (Patterson 123). She additionally mentions the work of Anne Barton, whose argument on the subject concludes that Shakespeare "chose what was hopeful, communal, and progressive in the young republic" (Patterson 124). Patterson acknowledges, however, that her opinions, and those of Barton, are in the minority.

This does not constitute a defeat though. On the contrary, she continues her argument with a re-framing of the political question at hand. Patterson writes,

To choose a Roman subject at all was, first, to engage in a Jacobean cultural practice. The play would have been seen as a colleague with Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1607), and the anonymous closet play of *Claudius Tiberius Nero*, also in 1607, all of which dramatized the alternatives of republican and imperial systems (Patterson 124).

The act of choosing to write about a period of Roman history, in which alternative forms of government and systems of power were being explored, for Patterson, is suggestive of

a desire to elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of those alternative systems. She further argues that the play was being read as an example of dangerous political power as early as Thomas Hobbes' 1651 *Leviathan*. Patterson writes, "By protesting against it, Hobbes bore witness to the practice of reading ancient history for structural models of a 'popular forms of government'" (Patterson 125).

Patterson goes on to compare *Coriolanus* to various other works in Shakespeare's cannon including the other Roman plays and his *Rape of Lucrece* for their common timeframe. She examines this particular time because it "did not, despite Zeefeld's assertions, lead to civil war or any destruction other than that of Coriolanus himself; rather, it issued in four and a half centuries of republican government" (Patterson 126). She asserts that this period of Roman history "strengthened the republican constitution to the point of giving it durability" (Patterson 126).

After a thorough exploration of Shakespeare's other works in this historical time period, Patterson continues her comparison to the contemporary politics that were taking place around Shakespeare at the time. She writes,

In *Coriolanus*, for the first time, Shakespeare's audience is invited to contemplate an alternative political system; and more significantly still, to experience an entire dramatic action devoted to these questions: who shall speak for the commons; what power should the common people have in the system; to what extent is common power compatible with national safety? (Patterson 127).

She relates these questions back to the main thesis of her book, "how shall the voice of the people be heard?" (Patterson 127).

Patterson next addresses the issue first explored in this thesis with regard to dramatic structure in Palmer's argument. Palmer argued that the play's structure, with its primary dramatic focus on Coriolanus and not a political debate, suggests that the playwright is not making a political statement. Patterson, on the other hand, writes,

. . . the play's center, both in terms of plot and structure, consists of two scenes (for which neither Plutarch nor Livy provided mandate) in which Coriolanus' achievement of the consulate is made dependent upon the popular voice as a constitutional entitlement. In these two pivotal scenes the word 'voice' is repeated 28 times, almost in mockery of the dramatist's knowledge that an audience's attention is ensured by repetition. . . In *Coriolanus*, in other words, the popular has become unmistakably the identified with popular power, expressed in part through tribunal representation, but also, a much more threatening concept, through the franchise. The voices are also votes (Patterson 128).

Patterson disagrees with Palmer's assessment that the play cannot be about politics because it does not make sense structurally. Rather, she finds politics to be the central essence of the conflict. The play is about defining the role of the commoner in seventeenth century England. She supports this contention by referencing Kishlansky's argument that the process by which Coriolanus seeks election to consul mirrors the Jacobean parliamentary selection process.

Patterson next seeks to erode the position that Shakespeare wrote the plebs as a rabble which was incapable of ruling itself, and therefore displays the weaknesses of republican government. She writes,

The presence of Brutus and Sicinius as ‘the tongues o’ th’ common mouth’ is proof, rather, of Shakespeare’s continued interest in the problem of who shall speak for the people, who here, evidently, require no ventriloquizers because they are not dummies (Patterson 131).

Patterson continues her argument by reminding her reader of the spokesman in *Henry VI Part 2*, whose ventriloquism could not necessarily be trusted. She writes,

Shakespeare warns us against taking at face value the ventriloquist’s account, which is here massively reductive, reproducing only ‘shreds’ of the popular tradition of protest. . . but before we too smugly assume that by making the tribunes unacceptable Shakespeare was warning his nation against classical republicanism, we ought to perceive that modern democracies are riddled with such types. . . the point that Shakespeare apparently wished to make was that Rome’s plebeians, though they needed the tribunes as a structural device, were not the pathetic nonentities. . . that readers. . . have thought they saw (Patterson 131-132).

The thrust of this section is to explain that the plebs in *Coriolanus* display a political awareness that is on par with the commoners of seventeenth century England. Hence, the comparison of these two groups results in a likely empathetic reaction, as opposed to the judging reaction that early conservative scholars believed to be present.

Patterson concludes her argument with a summary of the aspects of the *Coriolanus* story that line up with the Midlands Rising of 1607. She suggests that the Rising made the issue of political choice and power a popular point of debate in Jacobean

England, and that, together with the popularity of Roman themes at the time, provided Shakespeare with fertile ground for a hit play (Patterson 132-135). Her argument makes several good points and benefits from the ability to address directly the larger body of scholarship on the play to produce a clear and unique argument. Like Kishlansky before her, subsequent scholars often cite her as a champion for the belief that the play has a republican bent. She is additionally credited with reviving critical discourse on the subject.

Arthur Riss, in his 1992 *The Belly Politic: Coriolanus and the Revolt of Language*, examines the significance of Shakespeare's use of the Fable of the Belly Politic in *Coriolanus*. He writes,

. . . many readers have pointed to *Coriolanus* as dramatically registering the declining ideological authority of the English elite's claims for a natural correspondence between the hierarchical unity of the human body and the feudalistic organization of the ruling political body. . . The play, I argue stages a rebellion not only by the plebs but also by literality itself; in the play neither the plebeians nor the rhetorical vehicle of the body politic analogy is willing to participate any longer in the larger structures for which they labor but in which they are given no voice (Riss 53-54).

Riss places strong emphasis on the use of language in the piece to draw attention to relations of power, especially those depicted in the fable. He cites Stanley Cavell's argument that "A political reading [of *Coriolanus*] is apt to become fairly predictable once you know whose side the reader is taking, that of the patricians or the plebeians"

(Riss 54). Riss is of the camp of scholars that believes it is impossible to determine where the playwright's sympathies rested.

His argument continues with the assertion that Coriolanus' fall was brought about by individuality more than any other factor. He writes, "Coriolanus falls because he asserts himself as a private, absolutely enclosed, literal 'body' in a society that mandates he embrace an ideology of the body politic" (Riss 54). This desire to enclose one's self was mirrored in the Midland Uprisings which many scholars have referenced as being contemporary with the authorship of the play. Riss explains that the Midland Uprisings were a dispute between farmers who wanted to sow the land with crops and enclosers, who wanted to enclose parts of the land to set up private farms for livestock (Riss 55). He writes, "In essence, just as the Midlands Revolt foregrounded the conflict between a communal and private organization of property, Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* dramatizes the conflict between communal and private notions of the body" (Riss 55).

Having mentioned the Midlands Uprisings, Riss continues with an account of a sermon condemning them that emerged around the same time. He compares the sermon to Menenius' unsuccessful delivery of the Fable of the Belly Politic. Riss once again turns to Cavell for support, writing, "Following Cavell's suggestion that Shakespeare's representation of the fable of the belly is in competition with Sir Phillip Sidney's familiar citing of the fable in his *Defence of Poetry*, one begins to appreciate that Shakespeare intended to highlight the skill-lessness of Menenius' oratorical strategy" (Riss 62). He argues that Menenius is oblivious to the weakness of his strategy. Riss writes, "His unconcern with the literal is a product of the obsolete model of rhetorical and political authority under which he operates" (Riss 63). Essentially he perceives Menenius as



incapable of seeing the folly in attempting to explain an abstract concept to a hungry crowd. Furthermore, the concept he is attempting to relate is outmoded and therefore doomed to fail even if his audience was not starving.

Riss further compares the attitude of the plebs to that of Coriolanus. He writes, Coriolanus and the plebeians share a remarkably similar understanding of the ultimate concreteness of the individual body. Both threaten the state because they assert the particularity of their bodies against the authority of the metaphysical body of the state (Riss 64).

In essence, because the plebeians and Coriolanus both desire individuality and voice, Riss believes they are both a danger to the state which values the model of the body politic.

Like Patterson, Riss concludes that the language of the play is suggestive of a “theory of political authority based upon the theory of symbolic representation” (Riss 70). He observes that this theory supplants the more outmoded and authoritarian model of the body politic, and that Shakespeare’s choice of this material was at the least an examination of new rhetorical models.

A recent article by Andrew Hadfield in the 2012 edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare* clarifies the most recent approach to republicanism in Shakespeare. Hadfield begins his article by relating the difficulties involved in attempting to discover the motives Shakespeare had for writing down specific stories in certain ways. He writes, “Shakespeare is elusive even by the standards of early modern English dramatists and it is hard to pin down his political-and religious-affiliations: that is assuming he had any”

(Hadfield 582). For the purposes of this thesis however, his specific argument surrounding *Coriolanus* is of most interest.

He begins this argument with the preparatory statement that “*Coriolanus* cannot easily be reduced to any one particular message, or easily appropriated for a political cause, as its complicated critical history indicates” (Hadfield 590). However, on the next page he advocates for a particular political reading. He writes,

Shakespeare might not have been arguing a fiercely partisan republican or democratic case in 1608, but he was certainly showing that thinking of Jacobean London in terms of Rome’s republican political structure was a valid enterprise. Furthermore, it is hard to make a case for *Coriolanus*’ behavior, which suggests a sympathy for the rights of the citizens and perhaps indicates that Shakespeare felt that his best interests lay with the cause of urban freemen (Hadfield 591).

This is not an earth-shattering endorsement of the critical stance that Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* is inherently republican in bias, but it acknowledges the intuitiveness of such an argument. He adds, “[Shakespeare’s] plays usually represent republican ideals positively, even when they do not succeed” (Hadfield 591).

Hadfield’s article does not settle the issue at hand, but it represents the growing trends in critical scholarship surrounding *Coriolanus*. It acknowledges the history that accompanies the writing of the play, namely the Midland Uprisings. It suggests that the language is generally sympathetic toward republican viewpoints. It rejects the idea that it is possible to definitively determine an over-arching bias on the part of the playwright. Finally, it acknowledges the vigorous scholarship that is ongoing on the topic. This is the

general trend to be found in all republican scholars since Kishlansky, and certainly since Patterson's eloquently stated case. The last remaining front of discussion is an examination of *Coriolanus* as compared to its sources.

## CHAPTER IV

### COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF *CORIOLANUS* TO ITS SOURCES

While many of the above cited scholars have relied upon an analysis and interpretation of the text alongside its probable sources to draw conclusions about the presence of political overtones, few of them have put their analyses in the body of their arguments. The meanings of specific passages are hotly debated among these scholars. It is certainly a worthwhile exercise to undertake a fresh analysis of the text alongside its sources. It is with an eye toward accomplishing this task, that this thesis will now conduct a close analysis of the play alongside its sources to determine what, if any, political viewpoints are inherent therein.

In the book, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough describes the probable sources used by Shakespeare for *Coriolanus*. His introduction to the play is the most thorough discussion of the play and its sources in print. Bullough uses excerpts from available sources to illuminate the likelihood of their use by the playwright. Among these sources are: *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, translated by Sir Thomas North in 1579, *The Romane Historie of Livy*, translated by Philemon Holland in 1600, *The Roman Histories of Lucius Florus*, translated by Edmund Bolton ~1621, *An Apology for Poetrie*, written by Sir Phillip Sydney in 1595, and *Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britaine*, written by William Camden in 1605 (Bullough 496-552). The work also refers to sources of political and social tensions of the time. It makes reference to these events by referring to

histories which were roughly contemporary with the play, such as: John Stow's *Annales*, and *A General Chronicle of England*, 1631 editions. Through analysis of the sources provided here, in conjunction with a thorough analysis of the play, it is the purpose of this section to compare and contrast the sources with the play to determine what, if any, changes Shakespeare made to the source text to create his play, and if possible, determine whether or not these additions or omissions constitute a credible political, social, or ideological tendency toward a republican point of view.

Most scholars agree that the likeliest primary source for the play is Plutarch (Bullough 495). North's translation of *Plutarch's Lives* was already in at least a second edition (1595) and possibly a third (1603) by the time Shakespeare wrote *Coriolanus*. Such a popular translation was widely available in London at the time. Likewise, the composition of the chapter of the book on Coriolanus closely mirrors that of the play, with minor, albeit significant changes.

Bullough writes,

Shakespeare's adaptation of Plutarch's narrative was obviously governed by three main considerations: first, to make a good play; second, to re-create the characters of the hero and his associates; third, to interpret the political situation in Rome in terms suited to early Jacobean England (Bullough 476).

The first and second goals which Bullough mentions are intuitive, but the third suggests a need to examine the complexities of Shakespeare's adaptation of the story. While Plutarch's account is a biography of Coriolanus, Shakespeare begins with a combination of several events. The play begins with riotous Roman citizens complaining about

Coriolanus. They see him as the chief cause of their deprivation from bread. Menenius Agrippa enters from the senate to negotiate the terms of the mob's dispersal (Coriolanus I.i). In Plutarch's account, the incident for which Menenius is dispatched to relate the Fable of the Belly Politic is an entirely different occasion. In that case he is dispatched to negotiate with the citizens to present themselves for enlistment into the army in order to repel an invading force, which has been the cause of a general famine. Menenius won the good will of the mob by offering to create offices for five tribunes of the people, to protect their interests in the senate. Shakespeare chose to substitute Coriolanus for Menenius here by giving him the responsibility of bearing the senate's offer of a Tribune, which he does only grudgingly, with the lines:

Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,  
Of their own choice: one's Junius Brutus,  
Sicinius Velutus, and I know not--'Sdeath!  
The rabble should have first unroof'd the city,  
Ere so prevail'd with me: it will in time  
Win upon power and throw forth greater themes  
For insurrection's arguing (I.i).

Shakespeare combined this instance with another example of the mob's civil disobedience which in Plutarch's account is found after the battle of Corioli. Plutarch writes,

The war against the Volscians was no sooner at an end, than the popular orators revived domestic troubles, and raised another sedition, without any new cause of complaint or just grievance to proceed upon, but merely turning the very mischiefs that unavoidably ensued from their former contests into a pretext against the patricians. The greatest part of their arable land had been left unsown

and without tillage, and the time of war allowing them no means or leisure to import provision from other countries, there was an extreme scarcity (Plutarch NP)

Shakespeare's choice of a beginning for the play which condensed events and substituted Coriolanus for Menenius alters the character of Coriolanus. In Plutarch's account, a town to the north of Rome, Velitrani, had requested Roman citizens come and people the area as it had experienced a recent plague, which had eradicated most of its populace. It was decided among the senate that those most violent protestors in the city limits would be sent to Velitrani to people the area, and the rest of the excess population of the city should be sent to further make war upon the Volscians. As Plutarch put it, this action was undertaken,

with the politic design of preventing intestine broils by employment abroad, and in the hope, that when rich as well as poor, plebeians and patricians, should be mingled again in the same army and the same camp, and engage in one common service for the public, it would mutually dispose them to reconciliation and friendship (Plutarch NP).

Plutarch's account cites the outcry of the tribunes for dissuading people from appearing for either duty. By way of a solution, the senate dispatched Coriolanus to lead the colonization of the town, providing for harsh penalties upon those who refused to go. On the way to their new colony, Coriolanus enlisted several in the company to make inroads into the territory of the Antiates. He sent the colonists ahead with the plunder from this short campaign and returned to Rome, where the citizens who stayed behind,

became jealous of the colonists' prosperity and good fortune. This is the first point at which, according to Plutarch, the citizens of Rome show distaste for Coriolanus. By combining the two events, Shakespeare quickly reveals the character of Coriolanus, and at the same time, focuses the outrage of the mob on a single indignity, starvation.

Bullough writes of this particular compression of events, “. . . a main object in this scene is to introduce as many principal personalities and motifs as possible. So the dearth of corn is anticipated because it is to be a decisive factor in making Coriolanus destroy himself” (Bullough 478).

Plutarch makes no mention of the conversations between the tribunes, but these are necessary exposition in the play. The tribunes become a tangible opposing force to Coriolanus, rather than allowing the idea of the mob as a universal entity to act as one. Like the office they inhabit, the tribunes become, for the play, the voice of the people. Likewise, the conversation that takes place in the Senate House at Corioli, in the next scene, between Aufidius and the leaders of the Volsci, has no basis in Plutarch but is necessary to maintain the structural integrity of the play. Plutarch's description of Volumnia and Virgilla is sparse until late in his account, but for the sake of the play, is related through a brief appearance in scene I.iii as exposition.

Act I.iv of the play takes place before Corioli, and finally allows the audience a glimpse into the colorful description of the battle of Corioli that Plutarch related. The play very closely aligns with Plutarch's account here. For the play, this provides five straight scenes at various locales throughout Corioli, with scene I.ix ending the action of the battle in the Roman camp. For this section, Coriolanus' virtue in battle is shown, if tinged with hardness toward his fellow soldiers. Likewise, in I.ix, when offered his



reward, Coriolanus responds, “I thank you, general; But cannot make my heart consent to take A bribe to pay my sword: I do refuse it; And stand upon my common part with those That have beheld the doing” (I.ix). Just as in the description by Plutarch, Coriolanus then accepts a single horse and the freedom of one kindly slave, in addition to his new moniker, as his reward (Plutarch NP). Act I of the play ends in a scene at the Volsci camp, in which Aufidius claims that Coriolanus is “bolder, yet not so subtle,” as the devil (I.x). Plutarch’s account does not contain this exchange. Hence, Shakespeare has again added detail to Plutarch. This time it seems to be in order to reveal a deeper animosity between Aufidius and Coriolanus than is made plain in Plutarch’s account. Likewise, Shakespeare shows Coriolanus to be unstable. He is verbally abusive to his fellow soldiers in the heat of battle, but when presented with spoils of war, he shows humility. As Bullough puts it,

. . . at every turn the dramatist displays two sides of the hero’s nature, his courage and harshness, his scorn of baseness which suspects even decent feelings, his contempt for common weakness and for personal gain, his arrogant distaste for other men’s good opinions (Bullough 480).

Shakespeare begins Act II with a private discussion between the tribunes, which seems to be a direct re-alignment with Plutarch, who begins the section of his narrative after the battle at Corioli with,

The war against the Volscians was no sooner at an end, than the popular orators revived domestic troubles, and raised another sedition, without any new cause of complaint or just grievance to proceed upon, but merely turning the very

mischiefs that unavoidably ensued from their former contests into a pretext against the patricians (Plutarch NP).

However, the mischief that Plutarch refers to after this statement relates to the corn shortage that Shakespeare has already compressed into the introductory scene. Since he used that incident as a hook in the beginning of the play, he is compelled to invent a plausible related complaint for the people. His choice is telling.

**BRUTUS**

He's poor in no one fault, but stored with all.

**SICINIUS**

Especially in pride.

**BRUTUS**

And topping all others in boasting.

**MENENIUS**

This is strange now: do you two know how you are censured here in the city, I mean of us o' the right-hand file? do you?

**Both**

Why, how are we censured?

**MENENIUS**

Because you talk of pride now,--will you not be angry?

**Both**

Well, well, sir, well.

**MENENIUS**

Why, 'tis no great matter; for a very little thief of occasion will rob you of a great deal of patience: give your dispositions the reins, and be angry at your pleasures; at the least if you take it as a pleasure to you in being so. You blame Marcius for being proud?

**BRUTUS**

We do it not alone, sir. (II.i)

By accusing Coriolanus of pride, Shakespeare creates an irreparable chasm between him and the Plebeians, or more specifically, the Tribunes. In the play, it then becomes impossible for some reckoning not to come. Either Coriolanus must convince the mob that he has changed his very nature, or he must fall. In Plutarch's account, the tribunes make no such claim at this juncture. As such, Coriolanus is allowed to maintain a sort of dignity that is diminished in Shakespeare's telling.

Shakespeare next grants Coriolanus a triumphant return to the city into the hands of his fellow patricians. He is publicly praised for his exploits and granted the garland for the campaign. However, while he is being praised, the Tribunes have not forgotten their grudge. Plutarch does not specifically mention Coriolanus' return to the city, but the next event in his account lines up with the last few lines of II.i of the play. Both relate that Coriolanus then stood for Consul.

What plays out in II.ii is one of the most obvious divergences from Plutarch on Shakespeare's part. Plutarch relates,

Marcius, therefore, as the fashion of candidates was showing the scars and gashes that were still visible on his body, from the many conflicts in which he had signalized himself during a service of seventeen years together they were, so to say, put out of countenance at this display of merit, and told one another that they ought in common modesty to create him consul (Plutarch NP).

Shakespeare, alternatively, chose to create yet a wider chasm between Coriolanus and the plebeians. He wrote,

#### **MENENIUS**

It then remains

That you do speak to the people.

#### **CORIOLANUS**

I do beseech you,

Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot

Put on the gown, stand naked and entreat them,  
For my wounds' sake, to give their suffrage: please you  
That I may pass this doing.

**SICINIUS**

Sir, the people  
Must have their voices; neither will they bate  
One jot of ceremony.

**MENENIUS**

Put them not to't:  
Pray you, go fit you to the custom and  
Take to you, as your predecessors have,  
Your honour with your form.

**CORIOLANUS**

It is apart  
That I shall blush in acting, and might well  
Be taken from the people.

**BRUTUS**

Mark you that?

## **CORIOLANUS**

To brag unto them, thus I did, and thus;  
Show them the unaching scars which I should hide,  
As if I had received them for the hire  
Of their breath only!

## **MENENIUS**

Do not stand upon't.  
We recommend to you, tribunes of the people,  
Our purpose to them: and to our noble consul  
Wish we all joy and honour (II.ii).

Where Plutarch's account clearly states that Coriolanus stood before the people and showed his scars, Shakespeare chose to further develop his character's loathing for the mob by his refusal to uphold the traditions upon which the republic had been based. Instead, Shakespeare created a scene in which Coriolanus grudgingly addresses a few citizens without fulfilling the duty of publicly showing his scars. This leaves the door open for the Tribunes to enter after Coriolanus is confident he will be elected and undo all the work he thought he had accomplished.

In Shakespeare's account the Tribunes then successfully convince the mob that they have been deceived and mocked. They all then head for the capital where they will deny that they ever thought well of Coriolanus. While Plutarch's account does not elucidate how the minds of the people were turned against Coriolanus, it does seem like a much slower process. Plutarch writes,

But when the day of election was now come, and Marcius appeared in the forum, with a pompous train of senators attending him; and the patricians all manifested greater concern, and seemed to be exerting greater efforts, than they had ever done before on the like occasion, the commons then fell off again from the kindness they had conceived for him, and in the place of their late benevolence, began to feel something of indignation and envy; passions assisted by the fear they entertained, that if a man of such aristocratic temper, and so influential among the patricians, should be invested with the power which that office would give him, he might employ it to deprive the people of all that liberty which was yet left them. In conclusion, they rejected Marcius (Plutarch NP).

Shakespeare simply condensed the events for use on stage and showed the tribunes as catalysts for the rejection.

For the beginning of Act III, Shakespeare again combines events from Plutarch's account to raise the stakes of a single scene. In Plutarch's account, Coriolanus comes before the senate and people at the capital, where, because they fear deprivation of their liberties at the hands of one who is so partial to the Patricians, they refuse to elect him and he retires from the proceedings in a rage. After these proceedings were over, presumably over the space of at least several days, Plutarch describes the arrival of grain from Sicily to relieve the dwindling supply in the city. The people flocked to the senate in order to discover what would become of it and ask the senate to distribute the grain as a gift to relieve the high prices in the city. However, they were surprised to hear the objection of Coriolanus. Plutarch wrote,

Marcius, standing up, sharply inveighed against those who spoke in favor of the multitude, calling them flatterers of the rabble traitors to the nobility, and alleging, that, by such gratifications, they did but cherish those ill seeds of boldness and petulance that had been sown among the people, to their own prejudice, which they should have done well to observe and stifle at their first appearance, and not have suffered the plebeians to grow so strong, by granting them magistrates of such authority as the tribunes (Plutarch NP).

In Plutarch's account, the Patricians within the senate tend to agree with Coriolanus, causing the tribunes to fear for the loss of the peoples' rights, and their own positions. They stir the mob into a riot and incite the Aediles to arrest Coriolanus. They instead, are convinced to allow Coriolanus to come before them to apologize. It is only when he comes before them with an unapologetic tone and does not humble himself that they attack the Patricians and Coriolanus, causing them to flee.

Shakespeare instead gives Coriolanus long speeches, in which he elucidates his hatred for the mob, publicly. It is in this series of speeches that Coriolanus refers back to the incident at the beginning of the play with the corn, which in Plutarch's account, was a separate event. The simple act of speech in the play takes Coriolanus directly from standing for election to Consul to being accused of attempting to subvert the authority of the people and cries for his execution. Menenius alone stays to convince the Tribunes not to cry for blood, but to instead hear Coriolanus' apology for his statements. They accede to his request, and Shakespeare moves forward to the next scene, having reinforced the notion that Coriolanus is ignobly unstable with regard to his propensity toward unrestrained rage.



In the next scene of the play, Coriolanus grudgingly accepts the necessity to apologize to the Tribunes, only after the fervent urgings of his wife, mother, and many of the senators who surrounded him as friends to defend him from the mob. He states:

**CORIO LANUS**

Must I go show them my unbarbed sponce?

Must I with base tongue give my noble heart

A lie that it must bear? Well, I will do't:

Yet, were there but this single plot to lose,

This mould of Marcius, they to dust should grind it

And throw't against the wind. To the market-place!

You have put me now to such a part which never

I shall discharge to the life. (III.ii)

In Plutarch's account the apology is to avoid public prosecution at the hands of the Tribunes, but in the play, Coriolanus is still striving both, for election to Consul and to avoid the disdain of the people at this point.

A subtle tale of subterfuge on the part of the Tribunes is left untold by Shakespeare at this juncture. Plutarch describes Coriolanus' apology as containing language that enrages the masses, causing them to call for his arrest. In this instance, Coriolanus is again rescued by his close association with the Patricians who convince the mob to try him according to their accusations, in the tradition of Roman law. The Tribunes appear before the senate to present the charges, and accuse Coriolanus of Tyranny. Coriolanus agrees to be tried for this charge and retires to prepare his defense,

after which the Tribunes conspire to try him instead for his actions in the senate. Plutarch writes,

abatement of the price of corn, and for the overthrow of the tribunician power; adding further, as a new impeachment, the distribution that was made by him of the spoil and booty he had taken from the Antiates, when he overran their country, which he had divided among those that had followed him, whereas it ought rather to have been brought into the public treasury (Plutarch NP).

In Plutarch's account, the tribunes rely on the anticipation of his outrage to throw off his defense. They assume that because he is preparing to defend against the simple charge of tyranny, these new charges, when brought to light, will so outrage him that he will be incapable of his own defense.

Shakespeare's condensation of these events into a single unified event that encompasses apology, trial, and sentencing does not allow the audience as much opportunity to empathize with Coriolanus as Plutarch's account does. It shows in him an aggressive tendency toward unbridled rage, which served him well on the battlefield, but which cannot be reconciled with his new position of leadership. Rather than expose the Tribunes' deceit and humanize Coriolanus' outrage, Shakespeare makes clear the disdain that Coriolanus harbors for the mob and shows their impassioned response. One last, more subtle, omission on Shakespeare's part further tips the scales against Coriolanus. Mentioned shortly, but not explained, in the play is the fact that the Tribunes have arranged for the people to be divided into tribes as opposed to centuries. As Plutarch explains,

the tribunes, contrary to all former practice, extorted first, that votes should be taken, not by centuries, but tribes; a change, by which the indigent and factious rabble, that had no respect for honesty and justice, would be sure to carry it against those who were rich and well known, and accustomed to serve the state in war (Plutarch NP).

The deceptions of the Tribunes might have softened the audience's view of Coriolanus' impassioned response to the charges he is presented with in the play. Neither the deceit of changing their charge, nor the explanation of what it meant to be tried by tribe rather than Century is mentioned in the play. Bullough writes that this departure from Plutarch's narrative is because "Shakespeare apparently does not realize the full significance of this trial" (Bullough 486). However, the tactics used in the text are not consistent with that assessment. The events are not sloppily condensed, as one might expect with a writer who does not understand the material with which they are working, rather, Shakespeare allows the audience to see an unbalanced view of the situation.

Act IV of the play begins with a dejected Coriolanus saying his last farewells to family and friends. For his return home to prepare for exile, Shakespeare falls in line with Plutarch's description of Coriolanus' reaction:

Marcus alone, himself, was neither stunned nor humiliated. In mien, carriage, and countenance, he bore the appearance of entire composure, and while all his friends were full of distress, seemed the only man that was not touched with his misfortune. Not that either reflection taught him, or gentleness of temper made it natural for him, to submit: he was wholly possessed, on the contrary, with a

profound and deep-seated fury, which passes with many for no pain at all. And pain, it is true, transmuted, so to say, by its own fiery heat into anger, loses every appearance of depression and feebleness; the angry man makes a show of energy, as the man in a high fever does of natural heat, while, in fact, all this action of the soul is but mere diseased palpitation, distention, and inflammation (Plutarch NP).

Coriolanus' displeasure with the indignities he has suffered at the hands of the mob is veiled in his monologues throughout the scene. Rather than continue his previous protestations against the injustice of his exile, he seems resigned to his fate. Shakespeare writes,

### **CORIOLANUS**

What, what, what!

I shall be loved when I am lack'd. Nay, mother.

Resume that spirit, when you were wont to say,

If you had been the wife of Hercules,

Six of his labours you'd have done, and saved

Your husband so much sweat. Cominius,

Droop not; adieu. Farewell, my wife, my mother:

I'll do well yet. Thou old and true Menenius,

Thy tears are salter than a younger man's,

And venomous to thine eyes. My sometime general,

I have seen thee stem, and thou hast oft beheld

Heart-hardening spectacles; tell these sad women  
'Tis fond to wail inevitable strokes,  
As 'tis to laugh at 'em. My mother, you wot well  
My hazards still have been your solace: and  
Believe't not lightly--though I go alone,  
Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen  
Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen--your son  
Will or exceed the common or be caught  
With cautelous baits and practice (IV.i)

The next scene of the play does not seem to be based upon Plutarch's account of events. Whereas Plutarch follows Coriolanus immediately into the wilderness, Shakespeare shows the treatment of Coriolanus' wife and mother following his exile. Great scholarly attention has been afforded to Volumnia, but to have explored her character, in the depth it requires, within the confines of this thesis would have distracted the focus profoundly. After a scene in which Nicanor, a Roman, tells Adrian, a Volsci of Coriolanus' banishment, Shakespeare places Coriolanus directly in front of Tullus Aufidius' house, in Antium. It is as if it was Coriolanus' intention all along to come directly there. Plutarch's account describes Coriolanus' struggle to reconcile his feelings of duty and loyalty with his desire for vengeance before he resolves to make war on Rome. Plutarch writes,

He continued solitary for a few days in a place in the country, distracted with a variety of counsels, such as rage and indignation suggested to him; and proposing to himself no honorable or useful end, but only how he might best satisfy his

revenge on the Romans, he resolved at length to raise up a heavy war against them from their nearest neighbors. He determined, first to make trial of the Volscians, whom he knew to be still vigorous and flourishing, both in men and treasure, and he imagined their force and power was not so much abated, as their spite and anger increased, by the late overthrows they had received from the Romans (Plutarch NP).

With a short scene, accounting for how Coriolanus found Aufidius' home, Shakespeare's account rejoins Plutarch's description in the dining hall of Aufidius. The play follows closely the conversation between Aufidius and Coriolanus that is contained in Plutarch's account. Even the extra dialogue after the encounter, between the servants of Aufidius, serves only to elucidate details that are mentioned in Plutarch. Again, however, Shakespeare chooses to condense his text, and the feasting and celebration that in Plutarch takes many days is shown in only a few physical moments on stage. Shakespeare chose to have the Volsci senators present at Aufidius' house, which cuts out considerable passage of time. The play does not contain a scene in which Coriolanus convinces the Volsci senators to grant him a commission. Shakespeare simply grants Aufidius the authority to divide his commission and gift half of his army to Coriolanus.

Plutarch's account next delves into the problems that persisted in Rome in the intervening time between Coriolanus' banishment and this new alliance. Rome had entered a period of great tumult, with all of the same problems it had before, but new fears compounding them. Plutarch writes,

there were great troubles and commotions at Rome, from the animosity of the senators against the people, heightened just now by the late condemnation of Marcius. Besides that, their soothsayers and priests, and even private persons, reported signs and prodigies not to be neglected (Plutarch NP).

While the play does cover some of these goings-on, it seems to paint a much more peaceful stasis until a messenger comes with news of the Volsci invasion. This messenger tells of a slave with information about the invasion. The slave in the play is representative of the sooth-sayer, Titus Latinus, in the Plutarch account.

Titus is a significant distraction to the main narrative in Plutarch's account, mainly because Plutarch goes into great detail about the nature of prophecy in Rome at the time. Plutarch's extensive scholarly description of the process of Roman pagan prophecy, along with the questions of religious propriety, is likely one of the primary reasons that Shakespeare chose to omit him almost completely. Instead the play relies on the first-hand witness of the slave and two messengers from the senate to relay the information that Coriolanus has joined forces with Aufidius and marches toward Rome. Plutarch's account goes into great detail, at this juncture, about how Coriolanus gained the trust of the Volscian government and started a conflict with the Romans through trickery. Much information about the specifics of the war and Coriolanus' tactics in it is related in Plutarch's account. The play mentions the spirit of some of this conflict in a short scene between Aufidius and his Lieutenant, but does not rejoin the main narrative of Plutarch's account until the panicked Romans are attempting to decide who will go out to meet with Coriolanus and beg for a peaceable end to the invasion.

One of the important points in Plutarch's account that is omitted by Shakespeare is the development that the citizens of Rome ask the senate to vote on whether or not Coriolanus could return to the city, pardoned. The senate denies the request and sets the precedent that the Plebeians and Tribunes no longer have the lawful right to enact legislation or decree by suffrage. It is this outrage that in Plutarch's account sends Coriolanus hurling in rage toward Rome at last. Plutarch's Coriolanus cannot believe the audacity of the senate to have banished him for the sake of the people and then to flout the people when they attempt to exercise their new powers. Shakespeare's omission of this detail provides for two results. The first is to maintain Coriolanus' characteristic propensity toward intense emotional outrage when he feels wronged. The other is to deny that the Roman senate ever had the ability to deny the Plebeians and Tribunes suffrage.

Act V of the play begins with the Tribunes sending out Menenius to negotiate with Coriolanus, who the play reveals is camped outside Rome. It is also revealed that Cominius has already gone to see him and was unceremoniously turned away. In Plutarch's account, Menenius is sent first, then priests of Jupiter, who the senate hopes will have better luck by virtue of the Roman reverence for religion. Coriolanus sees each of the ambassadors and even retreats from Roman territory while negotiations are on-going, but does not bend his demands. It is only when the priests too are turned away that the senate sends Coriolanus' wife, mother and children, at the suggestion of a noblewoman.

Shakespeare's account regards Coriolanus' negotiation as hostile. It does not mention the priests of Jupiter, probably in part because mentions of pagan religions



would have been censored by the Master of Revels, and gives the idea to send Coriolanus' family to Cominius, even before Menenius returns (Albright 49). Likewise, Coriolanus is camped just outside Rome in the play, which makes the danger of his likely invasion more immediate for the characters.

Shakespeare begins the next scene with a conversation between Aufidius and Coriolanus, only moments after they have concluded their encounter with Menenius. Coriolanus' family enters the scene as if they had walked right along beside Menenius and only waited until he was sent away to enter the camp. The scene that ensues seems lifted almost exactly from Plutarch's account. Some of the dialogue in each case is similar. Shakespeare writes,

#### **VOLUMNIA**

Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment  
And state of bodies would bewray what life  
We have led since thy exile. Think with thyself  
How more unfortunate than all living women  
Are we come hither: since that thy sight,  
which should  
Make our eyes flow with joy, hearts dance  
with comforts,  
Constrains them weep and shake with fear and sorrow;  
Making the mother, wife and child to see  
The son, the husband and the father tearing  
His country's bowels out. And to poor we

Thine enmity's most capital: thou barr'st us  
Our prayers to the gods, which is a comfort  
That all but we 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? alack, or we must lose  
The country, our dear nurse, or else thy person,  
Our comfort in the country. We must find  
An evident calamity, though we had  
Our wish, which side should win: for either thou  
Must, as a foreign recreant, be led  
With manacles thorough our streets, or else  
triumphantly tread on thy country's ruin,  
And bear the palm for having bravely shed  
Thy wife and children's blood. For myself, son,  
I purpose not to wait on fortune till  
These wars determine: if I cannot persuade thee  
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts  
Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner  
March to assault thy country than to tread--  
Trust to't, thou shalt not--on thy mother's womb,  
That brought thee to this world" (V.iii).

Plutarch's account describes Volumnia's plea in the following way:

Our dress and our very persons, my son, might tell you, though we should say nothing ourselves, in how forlorn a condition we have lived at home since your banishment and absence from us; and now consider with yourself, whether we may not pass for the most unfortunate of all women, to have that sight, which should be the sweetest that we could see, converted, through I know not what fatality, to one of all others the most formidable and dreadful, — Volumnia to behold her son, and Vergilia her husband, in arms against the walls of Rome. Even prayer itself, whence others gain comfort and relief in all manner of misfortunes, is that which most adds to our confusion and distress; since our best wishes are inconsistent with themselves, nor can we at the same time petition the gods for Rome's victory and your preservation, but what the worst of our enemies would imprecate as a curse, is the very object of our vows. Your wife and children are under the sad necessity, that they must either be deprived of you, or of their native soil. As for myself, I am resolved not to wait till war shall determine this alternative for me; but if I cannot prevail with you to prefer amity and concord to quarrel and hostility, and to be the benefactor to both parties, rather than the destroyer of one of them, be assured of this from me, and reckon steadfastly upon it, that you shall not be able to reach your country, unless you trample first upon the corpse of her that brought you into life. For it will be ill in me to wait and loiter in the world till the day come wherein I shall see a child of mine, either led in triumph by his own countrymen, or triumphing over them. Did I require you to save your country by ruining the Volscians, then, I confess, my son, the case would be hard for you to solve. It is base to bring destitution on our

fellow-citizens; it is unjust to betray those who have placed their confidence in us. But, as it is, we do but desire a deliverance equally expedient for them and us; only more glorious and honorable on the Volscian side, who, as superior in arms, will be thought freely to bestow the two greatest of blessings, peace and friendship, even when they themselves receive the same. If we obtain these, the common thanks will be chiefly due to you as the principal cause; but if they be not granted, you alone must expect to bear the blame from both nations. The chance of all war is uncertain, yet thus much is certain in the present, that you, by conquering Rome, will only get the reputation of having undone your country; but if the Volscians happen to be defeated under your conduct, then the world will say, that, to satisfy a revengeful humor, you brought misery on your friends and patrons (Plutarch NP).

In both cases, the penitential Coriolanus relents and under a dark cloud of known danger, returns with Aufidius to Antium.

Scene V.iv in the play begins with Menenius discussing the unlikelihood of the women's success. Shakespeare may be alluding here to an event in Plutarch's account in which the public turns against the Tribunes when, in the play, a messenger advises Sicinius, "Sir, if you'd save your life, fly to your house: The plebeians have got your fellow-tribune And hale him up and down, all swearing, if The Roman ladies bring not comfort home, They'll give him death by inches" (V.iv). This messenger is quickly dismissed, however, when a second messenger brings news of the women's success. A celebration ensues, much like Plutarch's description. He wrote,

the joy and transport of the whole city was chiefly remarkable in the honors and marks of affection paid to the women, as well by the senate as the people in general; every one declaring that they were, beyond all question, the instruments of the public safety. And the senate having passed a decree that whatsoever they would ask in the way of any favor or honor should be allowed and done for them by the magistrates (Plutarch NP).

This celebration continues on into the next scene where, in Shakespeare's account, the women are praised by an unnamed senator for banishing the threat of Coriolanus.

The final scene of the play is Shakespeare's last chance to show Coriolanus' tendency toward rage, and he does not miss the opportunity. Plutarch's account tells of a jealous Aufidius who fears that his title and the love of his people will be usurped by Coriolanus and devises a plan to kill him even as he wins the hearts of the people with his report of a successful campaign. In Shakespeare's account, Aufidius is indeed jealous of Coriolanus, but is reluctant to slay him. He is only persuaded to do so when Coriolanus begins to win the favor of the lords of the city. In Shakespeare's account, in order to go through with the assassination, he goads Coriolanus into a fit of rage, and only when the people cry out for his execution do the conspirators act. Shakespeare shows the untoward and ignoble rage of Coriolanus in his final moments. It is this rage that, in the play, kills him. In addition, the voice of the common people has again been heeded over the will of the lords.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare takes every opportunity to elaborate on Coriolanus as a character whose natural tendency toward violence causes him to make

irrational decisions. The constant rage that the character experiences becomes almost a caricature of an angry and primal man. The play also takes each opportunity to allow the Plebeians a voice in the government of Rome. They are very active members of a society that should, by its nature, be strictly oppressive. Shakespeare shows the power of the people to undertake and catalyze change. Plutarch's account describes a character that is much more human. As opposed to a primal blood fiend, Plutarch's Coriolanus struggles with the decisions he feels he must make, especially when they conflict with his moral code. While he does possess a deep hatred for the masses, he certainly seems to have a reason to, much more so than in Shakespeare's version.

Livy's account of the events in the play is recorded in his epic *Romane Historie*. This account lacks the depth of character development provided by Plutarch's more biographical account, but gives a clearer accounting of the events that took place around Coriolanus' life. Some of the places that Livy differs from the play are in the method of Coriolanus' fall, the lack of mention of Volumnia in Livy's account, a differing account of the incident surrounding Coriolanus' exile, and a detail not mentioned in the play, that Coriolanus was a young man at the time of the Battle of Corioli.

Livy also created a much more cryptic ending for Coriolanus' life. He wrote, "After withdrawing his legions from the Roman territory, he is said to have fallen a victim to the resentment which his action aroused, but as to the time and circumstances of his death the traditions vary. I find in Fabius, who is by far the oldest authority, that he lived to be an old man; he relates a saying of his, which

he often uttered in his later years, that it is not till a man is old that he feels the full misery of exile (Livy 2.40)

While acknowledging the general mythology that had developed surrounding Coriolanus' life, Livy removes himself from the debate, instead citing Fabius. It is this type of writing that has earned Livy's account a much more prominent place among writers of history than Plutarch's less objective account. It is equally likely, however, that the difference in accounts between Plutarch and Livy prompted Shakespeare to approach his play's resolution with maximum dramatic license.

Shakespeare's emphasis on the primacy of the mother in *Coriolanus* is firmly rooted in Plutarch's account, but Volumnia makes only one appearance in Livy's account. This fact leads to the conclusion that even if Shakespeare relied on Livy for chronology of events, which is what his account is most useful for, he would have had to rely on Plutarch for other aspects of the story.

In Livy's account of Coriolanus' trial, the hearts of the people are set against Coriolanus simply because he refuses to appear before an assembly of the mob. The much more colorful account in Plutarch is most likely the basis for Shakespeare's version of events, though use of Livy to maintain the integrity of the narrative when condensing events is probable. Livy seems to provide the backbone of a story that is later filled in by Plutarch's character development. Shakespeare combined both to create his account.

The last difference that will be discussed is the fact that the first mention of Coriolanus in Livy is at the Battle of Corioli. In that battle, Livy described Coriolanus as, "the most distinguished of the young soldiers in the camp... a young man prompt in

counsel and action, who afterwards received the epithet of Coriolanus” (Livy 2.33). The impression given in Plutarch’s account is that Coriolanus was already a successful officer in the Roman Army before the Battle at Corioli. The play seems to strike a happy medium between these two accounts. Coriolanus, in the play, reports to and serves under Lartius, who is not even the commander of the Army in the field at Corioli. Once the battle is over, however, Shakespeare accelerates his career to the point that, three scenes later, Coriolanus is given a triumph<sup>2</sup> upon his return to the city.

Livy’s account, though not nearly as detailed, with regard to character, as Plutarch’s, is a good backbone for understanding and interpreting the political events that surrounded the life of Coriolanus. It is through his account that Shakespeare is able to condense events as effectively as he does, while maintaining the gist of the narrative. Livy’s account also lends historical authenticity to much of the play because of its status as an accepted work among historians. The play benefits greatly from Shakespeare’s use of the work.

Lucius Florus was a compiler of Livy’s work. His *The Roman Histories of Lucius Florus* was translated into English by Edmund Bolton in the seventeenth century. There was an earlier translation available in Dutch by the late 1500’s. It is unclear whether or not this text was available to Shakespeare in English at the time he was writing *Coriolanus*, but the account in it bears recognition, if there is even a possibility that Shakespeare had access to it.

---

<sup>2</sup> A Triumph- A civil and religious ceremony conducted in the streets of Rome, usually reserved for Consuls in the Roman republic, and later for many of the emperors. Triumphal arches were erected within the city through which the honored individual would be pulled by chariot. See Mary Beard’s *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007).



Florus' account of Coriolanus also begins with a mention of the Battle of Corioli. The specific reference is brief, but the writer suggests that it was a great honor, akin to that of Scipio Africanus, to be named for a campaign one had undertaken. This echoes the description of occasions for the attachment of monikers described in Plutarch, which Florus may have had access to.

The next reference in Florus' account speaks of a popular rebellion against the army's generals and the consuls of Rome for failure to distribute the spoils of war. Florus wrote, "Thence it was that they punished the most honourable commanders they had, with banishment for resisting their pleasure, as Coriolanus, whom they condemned to the plough" (Florus L.I Chap. XXII). This account would seem to suggest that, as opposed to exile, the soldiers sold Coriolanus into slavery. It further states that he would have been revenged for the injury, if not for the intercession of his mother. These few brief mentions are all that is found in the work, but they corroborate, if nothing more, the stories found in Livy and Plutarch. Florus' account also contributes variety to the legend that would grow around the myth of Coriolanus.

The next source that Bullough mentioned was Sir Phillip Sydney's *An Apology for Poetrie*. This was published in 1595, making it widely available in London by the time *Coriolanus* was being written. More than anything else, this short mention of Coriolanus' story recounts the Fable of the Belly Politic. The work makes no mention of Coriolanus himself, but instead cites Menenius as the cause of a short calm in a time of tumult in Rome. William Camden also mentions the fable in his *Remaines of a greater work concerning Britaine*, but it may not have been published until after Shakespeare's

work was complete. As such it is unclear if the source was consulted prior *Coriolanus*' authorship.

Bullough last mentions the events happening in England that may have led to the apparent immediacy of the events described in the story of *Coriolanus*. The Oxfordshire rising of 1597, described in Stow's *Annales*, for example, was an event in which the poor of Oxfordshire rose up against their lord to procure corn. Likewise The Unrest of 1607-1608, whose deceptive title actually describes difficulties undergone by residents of Leicestershire, Warwickshire, and Northamptonshire and the aforementioned Midlands Uprising during the change of leadership from Elizabeth I to James I, with regard to general famine throughout the land. The theme of people rising up to prevent their lords from depriving them of basic necessities permeated Shakespearean England in a way that would likely have made *Coriolanus* resonate with English commoners.

It seems clear that Shakespeare had abundant sources of material available for the production of a play about *Coriolanus*. The immediacy of the story's relationship to the events around him made it a play that would resonate with audiences. Shakespeare carefully chose the way he used his sources to craft a coherent and clear narrative that cast *Coriolanus*, the seminal Patrician, in a relatively negative light. This would likely have had a resonating effect with his audiences, whether or not Shakespeare actually harbored disdain for the aristocracy himself. Bullough found the adaption impartial. He writes, "The final effect in us is a balance judgment, moral and intellectual rather than passionate, for the paradoxes of the hero's character are seen to cohere in a credible personality which excites admiration and dislike, disapproval and pity. . ." (Bullough 495).

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined scholarly discourse on the subject of politics found in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. The beginning of the thesis begged the questions first, whether or not the play displayed an obvious republican bent, the second, whether or not Annabel Patterson's work has created a logical conclusion to the discourse, and lastly in what directions the discourse might proceed in the future based upon a fresh comparative analysis of the text with its sources. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of these questions.

What is obvious in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is not necessarily a partisan bent toward the conservative or republican side of the political spectrum. It is possible, as has been argued above, to take either view. While it is true that the play recognizes an emerging trend in Jacobean politics, in which the voice of the common person is becoming more important in political life, the play, without appropriating its content for one side or the other, does not necessarily judge the value of either a conservative or republican viewpoint. Everyone loses in the tragedy that is the story of Coriolanus. Coriolanus, depending on the version of the story that is read or viewed, comes to any one of many terrible ends. The people, though they gain political power and eventually set up a republican government, have lost their greatest general and allowed corruption to remain a part of their political system in the office of the tribunes. The senate and patricians have lost control of the people and their ability to govern.

It remains, however, far easier to see how the play could be considered to be written in praise of republican values, rather than extolling the virtue of the status quo. The choice to dramatize this specific story from Roman history betrays, if not a political sympathy, at least a willingness to compare the contemporary English commoner with the citizens in Rome at the time, who undergo many of the same difficulties. While the subtlety of Shakespeare's deviations from his source material makes it difficult to consider a republican bent in the play obvious, ongoing critical debate on the subject seems to be leading in the direction of it being a piece that was supportive of republican viewpoints.

Patterson's work in bringing forward the case for *Coriolanus* as republican was certainly very influential in the critical discourse. She made excellent points and greatly strengthened the respective cases of those scholars who took issue with earlier interpretations of the text. She is also responsible for creating renewed interest in the topic. Her book sparked a new wave of publications both supporting her and taking issue with her conclusions. However, the work does not constitute an end to anything. It certainly did not conclude the discourse. Rather, as has been mentioned above, it stimulated further comment. While her arguments are well-written and convincing, works like Andrew Hadfield's contribution to the Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare suggest that the discourse will continue for a long time, if for no other reason, because it has a long history.

The close comparative analysis of the play revealed a tendency to compress events for the stage, giving the audience less opportunity to empathize with Coriolanus. This aspect of Shakespeare's adaptation, when combined with his choice of source

material, would seem to suggest that he was at least willing to explore republican ideas in his works. However, to suggest that the play was overtly republican because of this practice is premature. Shakespeare was not alone in this practice. Indeed it seems that the popular literature of the time, including dramatic literature, was engrossed with the idea of governmental comparison to Rome. Therefore, no obvious conclusion, with regard to the political intentions of the play can be drawn from Shakespeare's adaptation of the story.

The future of the discourse will likely include more circumstantial evidence which compares the events in the play to historical events contemporary with its authorship. The density of important political events taking place during the range of time in which it is possible that the play was written has so far defied in-depth comparative analysis. Likewise the Fable of the Belly Politic and Volumnia's character in the play will likely continue to be the subject of critical discourse.

The Fable is dense with language that explains an authoritative political model of power as understood by an Englishman living in the seventeenth century under a new monarch. Intense critical scrutiny of it is warranted by these qualities alone. Volumnia is as interesting a character as Coriolanus is, especially from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. Her ability to stand before the conqueror of two of the strongest civilizations on the Italian peninsula of the time and turn him away to face his death astounds readers to this day. It is unlikely that she will ever go ignored for long in critical discourse.

*Coriolanus* is an important work in Shakespeare's cannon. It was written at an important time in his life. Critical attention ebbs and flows for each of his plays, but with

the recent release of Ralph Fiennes' film, and the novel direction in which the discourse seems to be headed, it is likely that future scholarly attention will grow, and recognition of the importance of this piece will not be far behind.

## Works Cited

- Albright, Evelyn May. *Dramatic Publication in England, 1580-1640; a Study of Conditions Affecting Content and Form of Drama*. New York: D.C. Heath and, 1927. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*. Hathi Trust. Web. 4 Apr. 2013.  
<<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039657989;seq=7;view=1up>>.
- Beard, Mary. *The Roman Triumph*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
- Bloom, Allan David, and Harry V. Jaffa. *Shakespeare's Politics*. New York: Basic, 1964. Print.
- Bullough, Geoffrey, and William Shakespeare. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. London: Routledge and Paul, 1957. Print.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, Sara Coleridge Coleridge, and Henry Nelson Coleridge. *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare and Some of the Old Poets and Dramatists, with Other Literary Remains of S.T. Coleridge*. London: W. Pickering, 1849. Print.
- Coriolanus*. Dir. Ralph Fiennes. Perf. Ralph Fiennes and Gerard Butler. *Coriolanus*. Netflix, n.d. Web. 2 Feb. 2012.  
<<http://movies.netflix.com/WiMovie/Coriolanus/70175130?trkid=2361637>>.
- Florus, Lucius Annaeus., Simon Van De Pass, and Edmund Bolton. *The Roman Histories of Lucius Iulius Florus from the Foundation of Rome, till Cæsar Augustus, for Aboue DCC. Yeares, & from Thence to Traian near CC. Yeares, Divided by Flor[us] into IV. Ages. Translated into English*. London: By William Stansby for Tho, 1621. Print.

- Hadfield, Andrew. "Republicanism." Comp. Arthur F. Kinney. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*. Oxford [England: Oxford UP, 2012. N. pag. Print.
- Hale, David George. *The Body Politic; a Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971. Print.
- Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*. London: Dent, 1906. *Project Gutenberg*. 1 Feb. 2004. Web. 15 Feb. 2013.  
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5085>>.
- Kishlansky, Mark A. *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern England*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.
- Leggatt, Alexander. *Shakespeare's Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- Livy, Titus, and William Masfen Roberts. *The History of Rome*. London: J.M. Dent, 1912. Print.
- Palmer, John. *Political Characters of Shakespeare*. London: Macmillan and, 1945. Print.
- Patterson, Annabel M. *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*. Cambridge, MA, USA: B. Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Phillips, James Emerson. *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*,. New York: Octagon, 1972. Print.
- Plutarch. "Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans." Trans. John Dryden. (n.d.): n. pag. Rpt. in *The University of Adelaide Library*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2012. Web. 21 Jan. 2013.  
<<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plutarch/lives/index.html>>.
- Riss, Arthur. "The Belly Politic: Coriolanus and the Revolt of Language." *English Literary History* 59.1 (1992): 53-75. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873418>>.
- Shakespeare, William, and Philip Brockbank. *Coriolanus*. London: Methuen, 1976. Print.



Zeefeld, W. Gordon. "Coriolanus and Jacobean Politics." *Modern Language Review* 57.3  
(1962): 321-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Dec. 2012.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3721822>>.