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VOLUME 4

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON

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Cambridge New York Melbourne Madrid Cape Town Singapore São Paolo Delhi

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108005760

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1960
This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00576-0

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521094726

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First published 1960
Reprinted 1964
First paperback edition 1969
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-07529-9 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-09472-6 paperback

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PREFATORY NOTE

The text and glossary below are reprinted in a slightly revised form from those which appeared in the 1958 edition of the play for *The Cambridge Pocket Shakespeare*. And in all I have had the benefit of his advice and criticism from Mr. J. C. Maxwell.

Furthermore I cannot allow this play, which is the last in the canon I am solely responsible for in the present edition, to go out into the world without recording the great debt I owe to Mr C. B. Young. After the death of Harold Child in 1945 he took over all the stage-histories and from 1947 onwards has been always at my side drafting the glossaries, for me and others to work upon, checking the multifarious references and cross-references, reading through each volume, often more than once and never without cleansing it of error and inconsistency, and above all giving to everyone concerned the benefit of his wisdom and learning.

J.D.W.

March 1960

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INTRODUCTION

I. DATE

The only substantive text we possess of *Coriolanus* is the one printed in the First Folio of 1623, and since the entry of that volume in the Stationers' Register names the play as one of sixteen 'not formerly entred to other men' we may probably assume that no quarto of it, good or bad, had appeared previously. Nor is there any trace of it among the rather scanty references to theatrical performances before the Restoration. Indeed that of an adaptation by Tate referred to on the title-page of that version published in 1682 is the first record we have of stage production in any form.[1]

Its early theatrical history being thus blank we must turn to the play itself for possible clues to the date of composition. First then it was written after the beginning of 1605, which saw the publication of Camden's *Remaines concerning Britaine*,[2] since, as Malone observed, Menenius's tale of the Belly and the Members, although in the main derived from Plutarch, owes a phrase or two to Camden.[3] And second, it was written before the beginning of 1610 when *The Silent Woman* appeared, because in that play Jonson pokes fun at 'He lurched all swords of the garland' which Cominius says in praise of Coriolanus at 2. 2. 99, and Jonson would hardly have applied this description of the superlative prowess of the hero of an epical tragedy to the super-

[1] Cf. 'Stage-history', p. xli below.

[2] As it was entered in the Stationers' Register on 10 November 1604 it may actually have appeared in the booksellers' shops before 1605, the date which the title-page bears.

[3] See below § II.

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lative intrigue of the hero in his comedy, had he not expected the audience to recognize the parallel.[1] And this suggests that *Coriolanus* had held the stage many months after its first production. For by then it was probably two years old, since most critics are agreed that in style and metre it follows close upon *Antony and Cleopatra*, which belongs to 1607. Moreover, as Professor Harrison has pointed out, the perennial theme of *Coriolanus*, the struggle between the rich and the poor, would have had considerable significance for the first audiences of the play since

> in May and June 1607 the grievances of the poor and the greediness of the rich were being hotly debated in England during a series of insurrections in the counties of Northampton, Warwick and Leicester where the rioters destroyed the hedges and ditches made to enclose common lands. These disturbances were the most violent for many years and lasted for several weeks.[2]

And if the reference to 'the coal of fire upon the ice' (1. 1. 172) was suggested to Shakespeare by the great frost of 1607–8, when in January 'pans of coals' are recorded to have been burning upon the frozen Thames, we may perhaps date the composition of the play early in 1608, which is where Chambers puts it.[3] Certainly there is nothing about coals on ice in North and the phenomenon was so unusual—the Thames had last been frozen over in the year of Shakespeare's birth—that the simile must have seemed odd, even puzzling, unless it called to mind something within recent experience.

Other supposed allusions can, I think, be dismissed as far-fetched. It is idle, for example, to explain the mention of 'the ripest mulberry' as prompted by the

[1] See note 2. 2. 99.

[2] G. B. Harrison, 'A note on *Coriolanus* (*Adams Memorial Studies*, 1948), p. 239.

[3] *William Shakespeare*, I, 480.

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encouragement given by King James in 1609 to the planting of mulberry trees for the breeding of silkworms, when the fruit is twice mentioned in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*[1] and may well have come into Shakespeare's head as he sat beneath his own mulberry tree at New Place; or to associate references to the dearth in Rome with the famine in England, 1608–9, when North's *Plutarch* speaks of 'sedition at Rome, by reason of famine'.[2]

II. The Fable of the Belly and the Members

Except at one point the sole source of *Coriolanus* is what Shakespeare found in the seventh of Plutarch's *Lives*, as translated by Sir Thomas North from the French version by Jaques Amyot. The exception as already noted is the 'pretty tale' that Menenius tells the riotous citizens, which in Shakespeare's blank verse is patently a blend of the story as told by Menenius in North and an expanded version of Plutarch's story told by Pope Adrian IV to John of Salisbury given in Camden's *Remaines*, while it may owe something to the version in Livy also. And as the three versions are short they may be quoted here as an illustration of how Shakespeare often makes use of the actual words of his sources.

'*An excellent tale tolde by Menenius Agrippa to pacifie the people*' (North's *Plutarch*, II, 149)

The Senate...dyd send unto them certaine of the pleasantest olde men, and the most acceptable to the people among them. Of those, Menenius Agrippa was he who was sent for chief man of the message from the Senate. He, after

[1] 3. 1. 158; 5. 1. 147. Cf. *Venus and Adonis*, 1103.
[2] *North's Plutarch*, vol. II (Tudor Translations, vol. VIII), p. 156.

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mainy good persuasions and gentle requestes made to the people, on the behalfe of the Senate: knit up his oration in the ende with a notable tale, in this manner. That on a time all the members of mans bodie, dyd rebell against the bellie, complaining of it, that it only remained in the middest of the bodie, without doing any thing, neither dyd beare any labour to the maintenaunce of the rest: whereas all other partes and members dyd labour paynefully, and was very carefull to satisfie the appetites and desires of the bodie. And so the bellie, all this notwithstanding, laughed at their follie, and sayed: It is true, I first receyve all meates that norishe mans bodie: but afterwardes I send it againe to the norishment of other partes of the same. Even so (quoth he) O you, my masters, and cittizens of Rome: the reason is alike betweene the Senate, and you. For matters being well digested, and their counsells throughly examined, touching the benefit of the common wealth: the Senatours are cause of the common commoditie that commeth unto every one of you.

Extract from Camden's 'Remaines of a greater worke concerning Britaine' (edition 1605, pp. 198–9)

All the members of the body conspired against the stomacke, as against the swallowing gulfe of all their labors; for whereas the eies beheld, the eares heard, the handes labored, the feete traveled, the tongue spake, and all partes performed their functions, onely the stomacke lay idle and consumed all. Here uppon they ioyntly agreed al to forbeare their labors, and to pine away their lasie and publike enemy. One day passed over, the second followed very tedious, but the third day was so grievous to them all, that they called a common Counsel; the eyes waxed dimme, the feete could not support the bodie, the armes waxed lasie, the tongue faltered, and could not lay open the matter; therefore they all with one accord desired the advise of the Heart. Then Reason layd open before them that hee against whome they had proclaimed warres, was the cause of all this their misery: For he as their common steward, when his allowances were withdrawne of necessitie withdrew theirs fro them, as not

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receiving that he might allow. Therefore it were a farre better course to supply him, than that the limbs should faint with hunger. So by the perswasion of Reason, the stomacke was served, the limbes comforted, and peace re-established. Even so it fareth with the bodies of Commonweale; for albeit the Princes gather much, yet not so much for themselves, as for others: So that if they want, they cannot supply the want of others; therefore do not repine at Princes heerein, but respect the common good of the whole publike estate.

Extract from 'The Romane Historie written by Titus Livius of Padua' [Livy Bk. II, xxxii], (translated by Philemon Holland, 1600)

Whilome (quoth he) when as in mans bodie, all the parts thereof agreed not, as now they do in one, but each member had a several interest and meaning, yea, and a speech by it selfe; so it befel, that all other parts besides the belly, thought much and repined that by their carefulness, labor, and ministerie, all was gotten, and yet all little enough to serve it: and the bellie it selfe lying still in the mids of them, did nothing else but enjoy the delightsome pleasures brought unto her. Wherupon they mutinied and conspired altogether in this wise, That neither the hands should reach and convey food to the mouth, nor the mouth receive it as it came, ne yet the teeth grind and chew the same. In this mood and fit, whiles they were minded to famish the poore bellie, behold the other lims, yea and the whole bodie besides, pined, wasted, and fel into an extreme consumption. Then was it wel seen, that even the very belly also did no smal service, but fed the other parts, as it received food it selfe: seeing that by working and concocting the meat throughlie, it digesteth, and distributeth by the veines into all parts, that fresh and perfect blood whereby we live, we like, and have our full strength. Comparing herewith, and making his application, to wit, how like this intestine, and inward sedition of the bodie, was to the full stomacke of the Commons, which they had taken and borne against the Senatours, he turned quite the peoples hearts.

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Aldis Wright doubted whether Shakespeare made any use of Camden's version, asserting that its 'slight variations' from the language of North might be accidental, and that 'to account for them as Malone has done is to attribute to Shakespeare "a plentiful lack" of invention and little command of language'.[1] This ignores Shakespeare's unconscious habit of picking up from his sources and retaining in memory words that later came in useful. Evidence of this may be found in all the history plays, whether English or Roman, to say nothing of a play like *Romeo and Juliet* in which he can be shown to have remembered to a surprising degree the actual words and phrases of Brooke's rather wooden poem, or again of play after play in which Golding's vocabulary keeps cropping up. Moreover the publication of the *Remaines* by Ben Jonson's old schoolmaster was a literary event of which Shakespeare could not have been unaware and the probability is that he read it at once and quite independently of *Coriolanus*, which by that date must have been already partly in draft and North's version of Menenius's fable in his mind. Thus the discovery of a second version among Camden's 'Grave speeches and wittie apothegmes of woorthie personages of this realme in former times' may well have come as a pleasant surprise for him who always welcomed new light upon the material he was working up. In any case Aldis Wright is quite wrong in describing the difference between Camden and North as 'slight'. The framework of the story in *Coriolanus* is North's; it begins and ends as North does and like North Shakespeare makes the Belly 'laugh' and address the other members. But it is Camden who calls the 'stomacke' a 'swallowing gulfe' that lies 'ydle' while the rest labour; it is he who refers to the several mem-

[1] *Coriolanus* (Clarendon edition), p. vii.

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bers and their functions; and, most striking of all, it is only by reading him that we can solve the puzzle of

Even to the court, the heart, to th' seat o' th' brain.[1]

Further, in reporting Pope Adrian's tale Camden remarks that it 'is not unlike that of Menenius Agrippa in Livie'. And it was perhaps in response to this clue that Shakespeare turned to the third version either in the original Livy or more probably, I think, in Philemon Holland's translation of 1600. For Livy he certainly consulted also, though MacCallum[2] appears the only critic seriously to have entertained the possibility, noting that Livy alone has a passage corresponding with the following words spoken by the Belly in Shakespeare:

> True is it...
> That I receive the general food at first,
> Which you do live upon....
> But if you do remember,
> I send it through the rivers of your blood,...
> And, through the cranks and offices of man,
> The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
> From me receive that natural competency
> Whereby they live. (I. I. 129–39)

Set beside this Livy's close-wrought Latin:

Inde apparuisse ventris quoque haud segne ministerium esse, nec magis ali quam alere eum, reddentem in omnis corporis partes hunc quo vivimus vigemusque, divisum pariter in venas, maturum confecto cibo sanguinem.

and Holland's expanded translation:

Then was it wel seen, that even the very belly also did no smal service, but fed the other parts, as it received food it selfe: seeing that by working and concocting the meat

[1] See note I. I. 135.
[2] See footnote 2 on pp. 456–57 of his *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (1910).

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throughlie, it digesteth and distributeth by the veines into all parts, that fresh and perfect blood whereby we live, we like, and have our full strength.

Is not Shakespeare's debt clear and is it not likely also that the debt was to the English and not the Latin text? The passage must have struck him rather forcibly for he recurs in mind to it in a later speech by Menenius (5. 1. 50–5) which suggests that Coriolanus's rude reception of Cominius was due to the fact that he had not dined.

> The veins unfilled, our blood is cold, and then
> We pout upon the morning, are unapt
> To give or to forgive; but when we have stuffed
> These pipes and these conveyances of our blood
> With wine and feeding, we have suppler souls.

Can we not hear in these lines an echo of Holland's words 'that fresh and perfect blood whereby we live, *we like, and have our full strength*'? Moreover the physiological notion of 'concocting' (not present in Livy) which was 'part of the very marrow of contemporary medical teaching'[1] can, I think, be felt behind both passages in Shakespeare.

III. Shakespeare's Angry Young Man and Plutarch's[2]

Coriolanus, as we saw, almost certainly followed close upon *Antony and Cleopatra*. Why did Shakespeare turn from one to the other in North? Partly, I suggest,

[1] C. Sherrington, *Jean Fernel* (1906), p. 69.

[2] The argument of this section, already drafted in July 1957, but laid aside because I had then to turn to *King Lear*, has points resembling, I find, that of an interesting article by Professor S. K. Sen in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (summer 1958), pp. 331–45.

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because the two heroes were at once like and unlike. Both were soldiers, both cast in the heroic mould, both subject to fits of vehement passion which in the end brought them to disaster. But their passions were of a very different nature and their general characters even more so. One a courteous middle-aged sensualist who, though lacking no courage in the field, a skilful swordsman, the idol of his men, and the most magnanimous of leaders, could yet desert his army in the middle of a battle and throw away an empire owing to his infatuation for a woman he did not even trust. The other dour and violent-tempered, little more than a boy in years, but a giant in strength, who had eyes for two women alone, his mother and his wife; who was incapable of action that sank him below his ideal of honour or integrity; who was unconscious of fear, insensitive to wounds, and contemptuous of any life but that of the field or of any occupation but that of fighting; who understood neither himself nor anyone else so that both leadership and compromise were beyond him. Shakespeare was always trying something new and the character of Coriolanus presented problems unlike those he had ever tackled before; for if that of Henry V had some similarity it was very slight.

A second reason for his choosing yet another soldier play was, I suspect, a theatrical one. It provided more exciting battle scenes than *Antony and Cleopatra* and a tumultuous riot as well. Battle scenes, nearly always including a hand-to-hand bout between two expert fencers, which are troublesome to modern producers and often boring to modern audiences, were so constant a feature of Shakespeare's English and Roman history-plays, and at times of his tragedies also, that they must have been very popular with the audience of his day, though I think more so at the Globe, which lent itself to the movement of crowds upon its large fore-

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stage and where noise would appeal to the groundlings, than at Blackfriars for which most of what he wrote in his final period was presumably chiefly intended. *Coriolanus* is indeed the last of his plays to contain them, for the little skirmish in *Cymbeline* 5. 2 looks like an exception that proves the rule.

Yet if Plutarch's life of Coriolanus attracted Shakespeare as a sequel to Antony for these reasons, we know little of his spirit if we fail to see that what chiefly fascinated him as a dramatist, and moved him as a man, was the encounter between son and mother when she pleads for Rome. Here it is in North's lovely direct prose:

Now was Martius set then in his chayer of state, with all the honours of a generall, and when he had spied the women comming a farre of, he marveled what the matter ment: but afterwardes knowing his wife which came formest, he determined at the first to persist in his obstinate and inflexible rancker. But overcomen in the ende with naturall affection, and being altogether altered to see them: his harte would not serve him to tarie their comming to his chayer, but comming downe in hast, he went to meete them, and first he kissed his mother, and imbraced her a pretie while, then his wife and little children. And nature so wrought with him, that the teares fell from his eyes, and he coulde not keepe him selfe from making much of them, but yeelded to the affection of his bloode, as if he had bene violently caried with the furie of a most swift running streame.

There was a situation after his own heart and almost ready-made to his hand. And phrase after phrase of Volumnia's speeches that follow are taken over from North with scarcely any alteration.

With Plutarch, however, Volumnia is a majestic lay-figure who first appears in this scene, before which she is only referred to incidentally, while with Shakespeare of course she has been a leading and very living

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character from the beginning. But we can hardly doubt that it was at this point of the story Shakespeare discovered her and realized her dramatic possibilities. In other words, I suggest it was probably Plutarch's account of the interview between mother and son that originally fired his imagination to compose yet another Roman play, the central theme of which should be not politics or fighting, but Nature, or if you will human-kindness, a leit-motif of all his last plays. It was this interview too that taught him, I think, how to shape his plot.

Coriolanus falls into two distinct movements, the dividing line being the hero's departure from Rome. In the first Shakespeare takes over the principal ingredients of Plutarch: patricians and plebs at loggerheads, the former incited to unwise harshness by Caius Marcius and the latter to violent action by the tribunes. But, while the dramatist makes use of most of the chief events the historian offers, he suppresses much detail and rearranges considerably. Plutarch, for example, speaks of two economic crises at Rome, which North calls 'seditions', one due to the people being oppressed by usurers before the Volscian war and the capture of Corioli, and the other due to a famine afterwards. In Shakespeare both are combined and in operation when the play opens (the citizens in the first scene complaining of starvation and of the exactions of usurers), and are dealt with allusively rather than as occasions for dramatic action. There is in fact not even a riot on the stage. In the first scene the citizens, as has been said, seem riotous in intention; Menenius declares that 'Rome and her rats are at the point of battle'; we hear of a rising on 'the other side of the city'; and we are told immediately after that the Senate has granted the tribunes. That is all. According to Plutarch, to take another instance, as the Senate are debating a proposal

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to make a free grant of corn to the starving people Marcius delivers a long speech in which, as his habit is, he accuses them of seditious designs, a speech which Shakespeare throws into blank verse with not a great deal of change in substance, and uses as part of Coriolanus's invective in the 'mutiny' concerning the consulship. Moreover Plutarch makes Menenius relate the fable of the Belly in reply to the complaints about usury, whereas Shakespeare saw that it was far more apt to those about famine, and borrowed from Camden the word 'gulf' for the belly to make it more so. Plutarch again, though aristocratic in sympathy, cannot conceal his feeling that the plebs had much justification for their complaints, and attributes their seditious tendencies to the demagogues Sicinius and Brutus who flatter them to gain power for themselves. Shakespeare takes over the character of the tribunes and their motives practically unchanged, shows the people 'fickle' as Plutarch does, but uses their economic grievances mainly as debating points in the dialogue. On the other hand his own general standpoint is rendered sufficiently clear by the conspicuous position he gives to Menenius's 'pretty tale'. Whereas Plutarch introduces it incidentally and as one of the 'persuasions' that 'pacified the people', implying at the same time that the permission to elect tribunes weighed much more with them, Shakespeare places it at the very forefront of his play, since it expressed the point of view of all right-minded persons in his audience about the issue between populace and nobility in general, a point of view in fact that held the field in political economy down to the nineteenth century.

In the scenes at Rome in which the citizens play a prominent part (1. 1 and 2. 3) Shakespeare depicts them as he does his citizens in other plays, as muddle-headed, but kind-hearted folk; and I do not find

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anything in Plutarch which might have suggested Menenius's tribute:

> For they have pardons, being asked, as free
> As words to little purpose.[1]

On the other hand Plutarch gave him even less authority for representing them as cowards and shirkers on the field of battle. They refuse more than once to enlist at the consuls' order, but that is for political reasons. When in the ranks they generally fight most valiantly;[2] and Menenius actually urges his fellow patricians to prove themselves as valiant as the common soldiers. And though Plutarch, however, gave Shakespeare the point about the greed of the rank and file for booty, he makes the most of it. Why does Shakespeare blacken their character in this way? Partly, I suggest, to heighten the glory of Coriolanus by contrast: 'Alone I did it!' is no empty boast; partly perhaps to supply him with more matter for invective. Certainly not because he was animated by a party-political antipathy to the common people. Inasmuch as its main theme or rather its political shell or envelope bears an accidental resemblance to the political controversies that dominate the modern world, the play is often read, and sometimes produced, as if it were a political pamphlet. The fact that some interpret in fascist and others in communist terms should be enough to prove the fallacy of such anachronism. In *Coriolanus*, as in his other plays, Shakespeare is interested in dramatic art and nothing else, and particularly here in giving effective artistic form to a type of tragic hero he has not previously attempted to create. If, therefore, in reshaping his source material, he seems to tilt the balance here in favour of the patri-

[1] 3. 2. 88–9.
[2] The one exception is a portion of the army which is beaten back to the trenches before Corioli. See 1. 4. 30 n.

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cians or there in favour of the plebs, he does so for no other purpose than to keep his tragedy moving upon an even keel or to give a character an opportunity for an interesting speech.

So much, in general terms, regarding Shakespeare's treatment of Plutarch's political and military data up to the beginning of the section embracing the business of the consulship and the banishment. But throughout the whole of the first movement of the play there runs a female and domestic thread binding it together, though completely lacking in the biography; and to understand this addition to the source we must first examine how Shakespeare plotted his second movement, covering the career of his hero after banishment.

Plutarch, with much else beside Shakespeare's purpose, gave him all the events and facts he needed for this in approximately the right order, so that there was little to do by way of plot construction. Shakespeare made, however, additions which went some way towards determining the shape of the play as a whole, apart from their effect upon its spirit which was considerable. In the course of Volumnia's speech referred to above may be found, for example, the following passage:

> There's no man in the world
> More bound to 's mother, *yet here he lets me prate*
> *Like one i' th' stocks*. Thou hast never in thy life
> Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
> *When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,*
> *Has clucked thee to the wars, and safely home*
> *Loaden with honour*. (5. 3. 158–64)

The lines I have italicized are pure Shakespeare—may we not say, Shakespeare of Stratford?—the rest is derived, slightly reworded, from North. It is by such touches that the dramatist transforms Plutarch's stately lay-figure into a woman. And there is a more

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life-giving additional touch in the last half-dozen lines of her speech, which are once again pure Shakespeare:

> Come, let us go:
> This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
> His wife is in Corioli, and his child
> Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch.
> I am hushed until our city be a-fire,
> And then I'll speak a little. (5. 3. 177–182)

It is these words, as many critics have observed, that finally win him over. To quote Bradley:

> Her son's resolution has long been tottering, and now it falls at once. Throughout, it is not the substance of her appeals that moves him, but the bare fact that she appeals. And the culmination is that she ceases to appeal, and defies him.

and Bradley notes further, as MacCallum also does,[1] that

> on a lower level exactly the same thing happens where she tries to persuade him to go and deceive the people. The moment she stops, and says, in effect, 'Well, then, follow your own will', his will gives way. Deliberately to set it against hers is beyond his power.[2]

That last sentence, as we shall find, does not cover the whole facts. But the two quotations taken together reveal the dramatic pattern Shakespeare had in mind, or unconsciously followed, as he plotted the play. For it is the clash of wills between mother and son that marks the culmination of both movements. It should be observed in passing that Aufidius, another leading figure in the first movement is, like Volumnia, borrowed from the last section of Plutarch's story.

Aufidius is needed early as both military and moral

[1] MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*, p. 554.
[2] A. C. Bradley, *Miscellany*, (1929), p. 100.

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foil to Marcius as also for the fencing bout before Corioli. But Volumnia serves not only to infuse a lively human interest into what would else consist almost wholly of politics and fighting, but as an additional character that enables Shakespeare to impose dramatic shape and unity upon the rather disparate elements of Plutarch's history.

We are told in the first scene that the valorous deeds for which Marcius is famous he performed 'partly to please his mother' And though Shakespeare actually takes this point from Plutarch, he immediately enlarges upon it in the third scene after a fashion all his own, giving us the entry to the home of Marcius and introducing us to Volumnia in person. We hear her rejoicing in the blood Marcius sheds, glorying in having given birth to so fierce an offspring, and when told that her little grandson in a rage tears a butterfly to pieces with his teeth, remarking in delight 'One on's father's moods!' And all her dreams are evidently of him in battle. 'Methinks', she cries to her gentle daughter-in-law,

> I hear hither your husband's drum;
> See him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair;
> As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him.
> Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
> 'Come on, you cowards! you were got in fear,
> Though you were born in Rome.' His bloody brow
> With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes,
> Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow
> Or all or lose his hire. (1. 3. 30–8)

A veritable tigress purring over her cub!

Gentle as she is, however, the daughter-in-law neither echoes the purr nor applauds the 'mammocking' of butterflies by her little son. And she quite firmly refuses to go out visiting with Volumnia, while her husband is in constant and deadly peril. Here is a

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second woman in the hero's life, another addition to Plutarch, introduced to show us a side of Coriolanus's character that will not be fully revealed until the reconciliation scene before the walls of Rome.[1]

Plutarch, I say, has nothing of all this. Nor, as will be presently noted, does he say anything of the mother that might give occasion for proud boasts like

> Thou art my warrior;
> I holp to frame thee[2]

or the earlier

> Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me.[3]

And from the point of view of plot, making an even more vital addition to Plutarch's outline is her ambition. This comes out in a passage generally I believe overlooked by critics.[4] Just before Coriolanus, now returned crowned with victory from Corioli, passes into the Senate house to be nominated consul as both he and she know, she exclaims

> I have lived
> To see inherited my very wishes
> And the buildings of my fancy: only
> There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but
> Our Rome will cast upon thee.

and he replies

> Know, good mother,
> I had rather be their servant in my way
> Than sway with them in theirs.[5]

[1] Middleton Murry's charming essay on 'A neglected Heroine of Shakespeare' (*Countries of the Mind*, pp. 18–32) makes somewhat more of Virgilia than I feel the text warrants. Indeed he has to emend the text a little to fill out the portrait of his vision.

[2] 5. 3. 62–3. [3] 3. 2. 129.

[4] See, however, S. K. Sen in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (summer, 1958), p. 333. [5] 2. 1. 195–201.

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She tells him, in other words, that her greatest ambition is to see him consul and he in turn tells her that he has no ambition of the kind at all. Shakespeare's Marcius in fact is not an ambitious man in any sense, least of all in the ordinary sense of aspiring to political power.[1] He is a soldier man with almost superhuman bravery, though with but slight gifts of leadership; one only has to compare the abuse and threats he heaps upon his troops when they retire in battle with the encouragement Cominius gives to his in the same situation.[2] He therefore stands for the consulship with reluctance, goes through the repulsive business of begging for votes, from people he despises as cowards and hucksters, with irony and ill-concealed contempt, and gives his fiery temper rein when the tribunes tell him the votes have been revoked. After that it remains to discover whether his mother can persuade him to do something far more difficult than standing in the market-place, dressed as a citizen and exposing his wounds, which last by the bye he manages to avoid. For he must now ask pardon for the violence of his language when the tribunes and their aediles had attempted to arrest him, and humbly to promise amendment; to act a lie in fact. She argues with him for 120 lines[3] and he replies she is asking him to be false to his nature,[4] to behave like a harlot;[5] and finally he gives her this complete answer:

I will not do't;
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.[6]

[1] Cf. Alexander, *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 179.
[2] Cf. 1. 4. 30–42 with 1. 6. 1–9.
[3] 3. 2. 13–137. [4] 3. 2. 15.
[5] 3. 2. 112.
[6] 3. 2. 120–3. Overlook this crucial passage and one may misinterpret Coriolanus's character entirely, as Palmer

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Volumnia does not understand—perhaps no woman of Shakespeare's time could have understood—such an appeal to conscience; and she interprets it as pride. Yet, as Professor Alexander alone among critics seems to have realised,[1] it is not pride but his spiritual integrity, his sense of honour, his truth to himself—'mine own truth' as he calls it—that makes her counsel so abhorrent in his eyes. Pride, indeed, though commonly laid to his charge by the critics, as it constantly is by his enemies in the play, does not really hit the mark at all. True, he entertains the greatest contempt for the populace, a contempt Shakespeare often shows to be unjust, but he is like the other patricians in that, and like, one may guess, many a young nobleman of Shakespeare's acquaintance. True also, he expresses his contempt more openly than his fellows, but that merely shows him too honest to conceal his sentiments as they do from motives of political expediency. And if he expresses it in violent terms, that is because he is Shakespeare's study of the choleric man. His choler is several times insisted upon by Plutarch, but he links it with self-will and obstinacy, whereas in Shakespeare it is always found in company with indignation or contempt. And Shakespeare keeps us constantly aware of it, or looking for outbursts of it. Marcius is in a fury at his first entry, enters Corioli single-handed in a fury, twice ruins his chance of the consulship by his fury, lays siege to Rome in a fury, and in the end perishes in a fury, at the hands of Aufidius and his myrmidons. Clearly the impression we are intended to receive is that of a young Hector with an ungovernable temper. Both Plutarch and

does, who actually writes: 'There is no hint anywhere of a protest against the political dishonesty of the course to which he is invited' (*Political Characters of Shakespeare*, p. 279).

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 181. But see also S. K. Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 335–6.

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Shakespeare trace this lack of self-control to education. But while Plutarch attributes it to lack of a father who might have taught him that 'churlishe and uncivill' manners render a man 'unfit' to associate with others,[1] Shakespeare puts it down to the influence of the mother from whom he acquired it, partly by inheritance, partly by catching her habit of despising the common people,[2] but chiefly because she had deliberately encouraged him to give way to his tantrums as a child. For this, I take it, is the point of the account we are given of little Marcius running amok, and in his rage tearing a 'gilded butterfly' to pieces with his teeth, an account listened to by the grandmother with approval, and followed by the remark of the sycophantic dame who tells the story, 'Indeed, la, 'tis a *noble* child'.[3] To Shakespeare himself, we can be sure, the action was anything but 'noble'. And so when Volumnia tells Coriolanus

> Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me[4]

she is speaking within the limits of the truth inasmuch as the violence of his temper which renders him impossible as a politician, is the secret, or in part the secret, of his success in battle. Had Shakespeare known the word 'berserk' he might have used it for this hero, who cannot fight unless he hates and who whips himself up into a passion as he hurls himself against the enemy.

Yet of pride, as the Oxford Dictionary defines it, 'a high and overweening opinion of one's own qualities or attainments...which gives rise to a feeling or attitude of superiority and contempt for others', if by 'others' we mean members of his own class, he shows not the slightest trace. On the contrary, as if to counterbalance the accusation of pride which the citizens, the tribunes, and even his own mother level against him,

[1] P. 144. [2] 3. 2. 7–13.
[3] 1. 3. 60–8. [4] 3. 2. 129.

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his creator gives him a number of opportunities of displaying a sincere humility.

Granville-Barker, I feel, sadly misrepresents Shakespeare on this point. He speaks of Marcius's 'obsessing self-consciousness'; finds that 'his repeated protests against the praises lavished on him become somewhat less than genuine'; and exclaims 'Neglect to praise him; he will be the first to resent that!'—though what passage in the text he might quote to support this last astonishing judgement I am at a loss to discover.[1] Bradley is much fairer, but still I think wide of the mark, when he writes:

Though he is the proudest man in Shakespeare he seems to be unaware of his pride, and is hurt when his mother mentions it. It does not prevent him from being genuinely modest, for he never dreams that he has attained the ideal he worships; yet the sense of his own greatness is twisted round every strand of this worship. In almost all his words and deeds we are conscious of the tangle. I take a single illustration. He cannot endure to be praised. Even his mother, who has a charter to extol her blood, grieves him when she praises him. As for others:

> I had rather have one scratch my head i' the sun
> When the alarum were struck, than idly sit
> To hear my nothings monster'd.

His answer to the roar of the army hailing him 'Coriolanus' is, 'I will go wash'. His wounds are 'scratches with briars'. In Plutarch he shows them to the people without demur: in Shakespeare he would rather lose the consulship. There is a greatness in all this that makes us exult. But who can

[1] Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Fifth Series) pp. 17–18. Even Alexander, who seems to me to see Coriolanus more clearly than most who have written about him, though perhaps in seeking to redress the critical balance, he tilts Shakespeare's balance a little too far in his hero's favour, likens his 'pride' to 'such as destroyed the great archangel' (*op. cit.* p. 180).

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