

CORIOLANUS



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CORIOLANUS, OR THE ROMAN MATRON

Based on the Thomas Sheridan adaptation of
William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

Further adapted and directed by Scott Palmer
July 7-23, 2016

CAST

Cassie Greer* Caius Marcius (later Coriolanus), a Roman General
MaryAnne Glazebrook Volumnia, his mother
Lindsay Partain Virgilia, his wife
Adrienne Southard Menenius, a Roman Statesman
Signe Larsen Lartius, a Roman Soldier Volscian Soldier
Autumn Buck Cominius, a Roman General
Arianne Jacques* Valeria, a Roman Lady
Morgan Cox Sicinius, a Tribune of the people
Lindsay Valencia-Reed Brutus, a Tribune of the people
Bethany Mason Aufidius, a Volscian Soldier
Zoe Flach Roman Messengers Volscian Soldiers

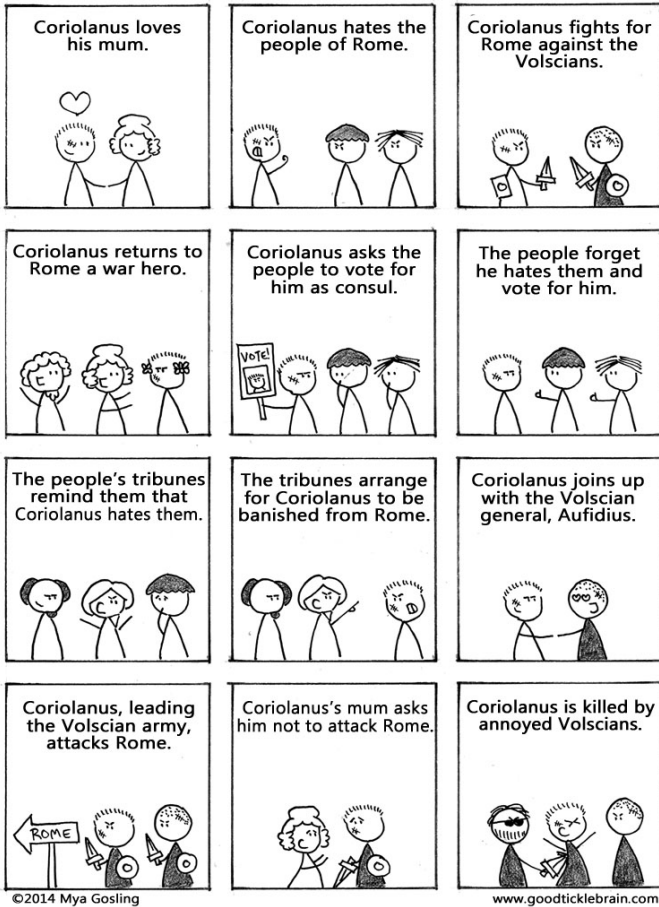
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*Member of the Bag&Baggage Resident Acting Company

I. OVERVIEW

CORIOLANUS: ONE PAGE SUMMARY



The people of Rome are starving and begin the play protesting Caius Marcius' decision to keep all of Rome's stored food for the use of the military. Marcius hates the people, holding them in contempt, but he is also Rome's greatest military hero.

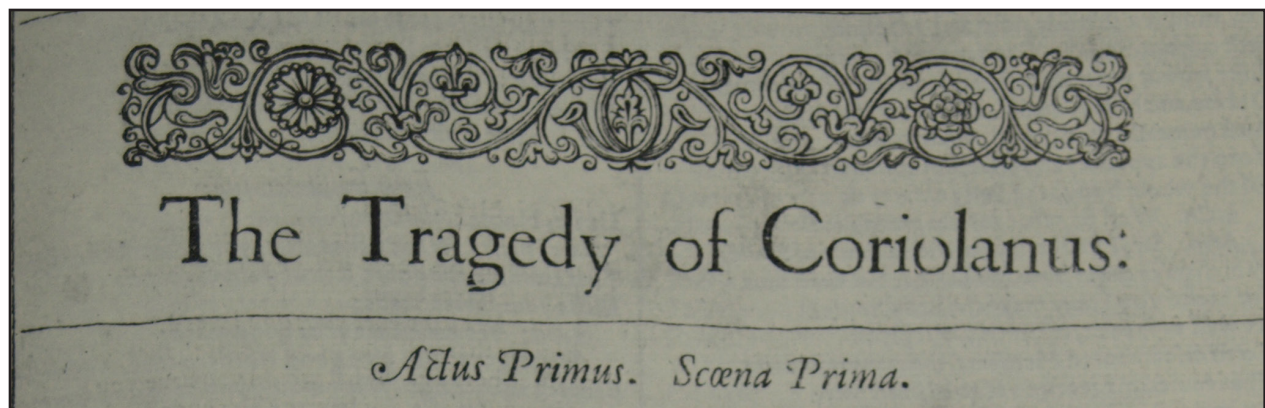
After Rome's ancient foes, the Volscians, send forth an army to destroy Rome, Marcius almost single-handedly defeats the Volscians (including their leader, the terrifying Aufidius) at the Volscian city of Corioli. To honor his remarkable victory, the Roman military grants Marcius the name of Coriolanus (after the city he captured) and the Roman Senate move to appoint him a Consul (one of Rome's most powerful political positions)—a position Coriolanus' mother Volumnia has sought for her son for years.

But, in order to be elected Consul, Coriolanus must have the support of the Roman people - the same Roman people who both hate and are hated by Coriolanus. Rather than flatter them, Coriolanus heaps scorn on the Roman people who, in turn, banish him from the city.

In disgrace, and seeking vengeance on the "dirty poor" who banished him, Coriolanus turns to his old enemy Aufidius, allying himself with the Volscian army and promising to lead them to total victory over Rome.

After laying waste to all of the cities near Rome, Coriolanus arrives at the steps of the Roman capitol, where he is confronted by his mother (Volumnia), his wife (Virgilia), and a lady of Rome (Valeria), who beg him to leave Rome alone, and spare the city and the people.

Coriolanus, or *the Roman Matron* marks Bag&Baggage's third all-female Shakespeare adaptation, based on the 1752 Thomas Sheridan version, and is performed outdoors at the Tom Hughes Civic Center Plaza in downtown Hillsboro.



from the First Folio (1623) publication of *Coriolanus*

II. WHO'S WHO & WHAT'S WHAT

Caius Marcius (Coriolanus), Cominius, and Lartius are generals in the Roman military - Cominius is the most senior, and is also a Consul of the Roman people.

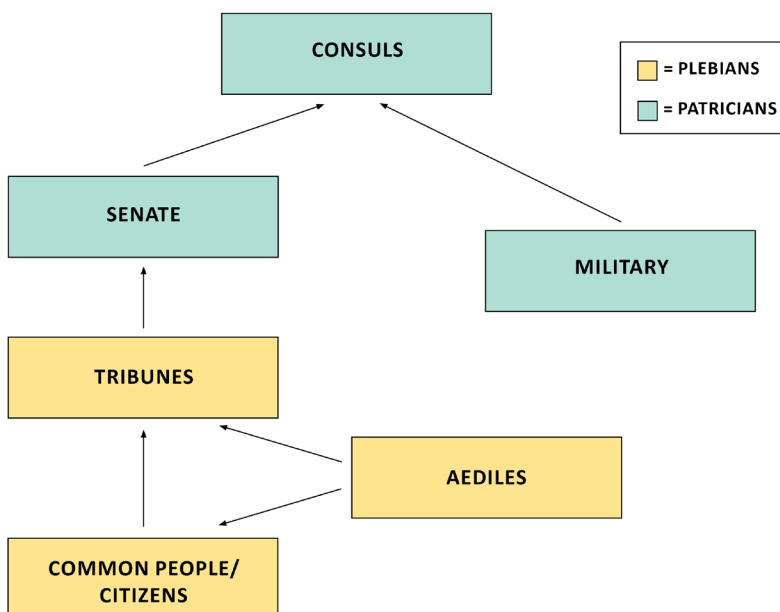
Menenius is a nobleman and land owner, a friend of Coriolanus, and a Roman Senator.

Brutus and Sicinius are the newly-elected Tribunes of the people (along with three others who remain unmentioned in the play).

Tullus Aufidius is the leader of the Volscian army, the prime enemy of the Roman state; we see Marcius and Aufidius meet each other in battle for the twelfth time in the Battle of Corioli.

Volumnia is the powerful mother of Coriolanus, who holds great persuasive power over him, along with his wife, **Virgilia**, and her friend, **Valeria**. The three "Roman Matrons" of the title each affect Coriolanus in a different way, appealing to his honor, his heart, and his familial loyalty.

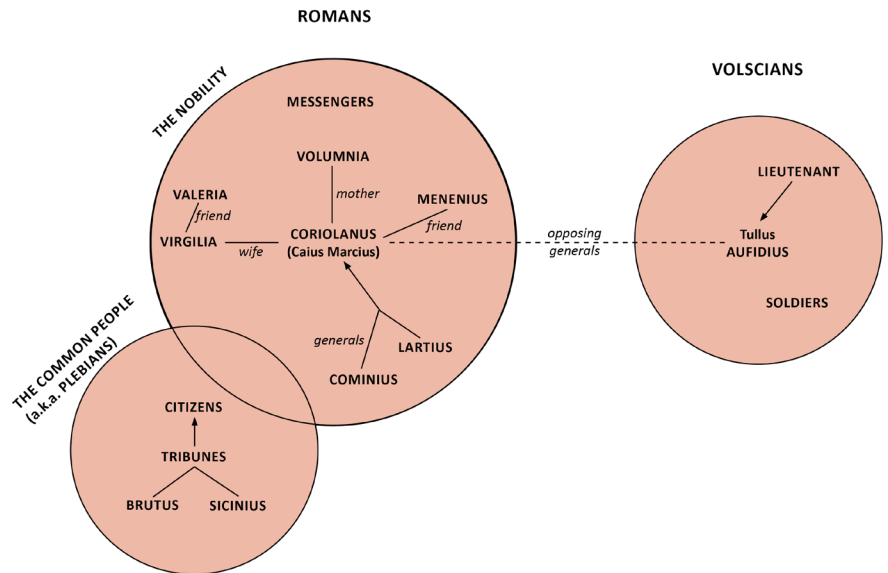
Social class is a huge deal in Ancient Rome, as well as decorum and order. Only people of the Patrician class - the nobility - can hold high government or military position. The Plebeian class is (begrudgingly, to Coriolanus) represented by Tribunes, who rank below Senators and Consuls in the Roman government. The government had recently been reorganized - in the 6th century BC - and Here are some terms to know:



Patrician: member of one of the elite Roman families, from which leading figures (senators, consuls, generals, etc) were selected. Coriolanus, Cominius, Lartius, Menenius, Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria are members of the Patrician class.

Plebeian: member of the common people. Sicinius, Brutus, and all of the messengers are members of the Plebeian class.

Consul: magistrates who oversee the government and control all military and civil authority; two Consuls were annually selected for a one-year term, and former Consuls became members of the Senate. Cominius is a current Consul, and the rest of the Patricians want to make Coriolanus Consul.





Senator: member of the governing council, overseen by the Consuls. Originally 100 Senators at the founding of the Roman Republic, this number was later increased, and the size of the Senate gradually and continually expanded. Menenius is a member of the Senate.

Tribune: government officer appointed to oversee the people's assembly and protect the rights of plebeians. The office of Tribune originated when wealthy plebeians united with the poor, early in the 5th century BC, to demand representation over government spending and decisions about war and peace. Brutus and Sicinius are Tribunes.

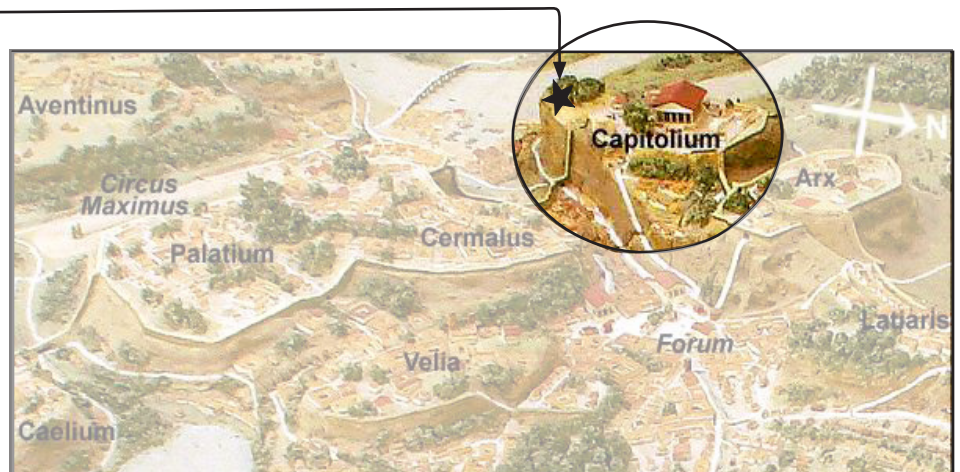
Aedile: assistant to the Tribunes, with a range of responsibilities, such as public order and marketplace oversight.

Volscians/Volsces/Volschi: an Italic tribe, well known in the history of the first century of the Roman Republic. At that time they inhabited the partly hilly, partly marshy district of the south of Latium. Rivals of Rome for several hundred years, their territories were taken over by and assimilated into the growing Republic by 300 BC.

Antiates: another name for the Volscians. The Volscian capital was Antium, and like the Roman people were defined by the name of their capital, the Volsci as a people sometimes were as well.

The Capitol: the short name for the Capitoline Hill in Rome, between the Forum and the Field of Mars, which served as the citadel for the early Romans.

The Tarpeian Rock: a steep cliff of the southern summit of the Capitoline Hill, overlooking the Roman Forum in Ancient Rome. It was used during the Roman Republic as an execution site. To be hurled off the Tarpeian Rock was, in some sense, a fate worse than death, because it carried with it a stigma of shame. (The standard method of execution in ancient Rome was by strangulation in prison.)



Jupiter/Jove: the mighty king of all the Roman gods, Jupiter (who is also sometimes called Jove) is the god of the sky, thunderstorms, lightning, weather and air, as well as the god of law, order, justice, governance, and strength. Jupiter, as the most important god of the Romans, has the highest divine authority over other gods.

Mars: the Roman god of war, Spring, and justice, and the patron of the Roman soldiers. Mars is second to Jupiter in power and importance.

Augurer: a Roman religious official who interpreted and foretold events.

Olympus: the highest mountain in Greece, and notable in Greek mythology as the home of the Greek gods.

Publicola: one of the four Roman aristocrats who led the overthrow of the monarchy, and became a Roman consul in 509 BC, which is traditionally considered the first year of the Roman Republic. Fun fact: the authors of America's The Federalist Papers used the pseudonym "Publius" in Publicola's honor.



ancient sculpture of Jupiter discovered in 1680 in Smyrna (in modern day Turkey)

III. HISTORY: CAIUS MARCIUS CORIOLANUS

The historical Caius Marcius Coriolanus was a Roman general who lived in the 5th century BC. Born into the Roman Republic's patrician class, Marcius received the cognomen (i.e. surname/third name/nickname) "Coriolanus" after displaying great valor in a battle against the neighboring Volscians in 493 BC at the city of Corioli.

The Roman historian Plutarch writes that:

...in those days Rome held in highest honour that phase of virtue which concerns itself with warlike and military achievements, and evidence of this may be found in the only Latin word for virtue, which signifies really manly valour; they made valour, a specific form of virtue, stand for virtue in general.

This being the case, Coriolanus was taught to handle weapons and engage in combat from a very early age. Having lost his father when he was a small child, he grew up under the sole care of his mother, who greatly encouraged his warlike pursuits. Coriolanus, in turn, held a strong reverence for his mother, remaining very attentive to her desires and wishes, and always seeking to honor her with his valour.



illustration from the 1830 Cowden-Clark edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works

While he was an excellent fighter, who immediately began winning honors in battle (while he was still a child), Coriolanus did not entirely fit the heroic ideal. Plutarch tells us that:

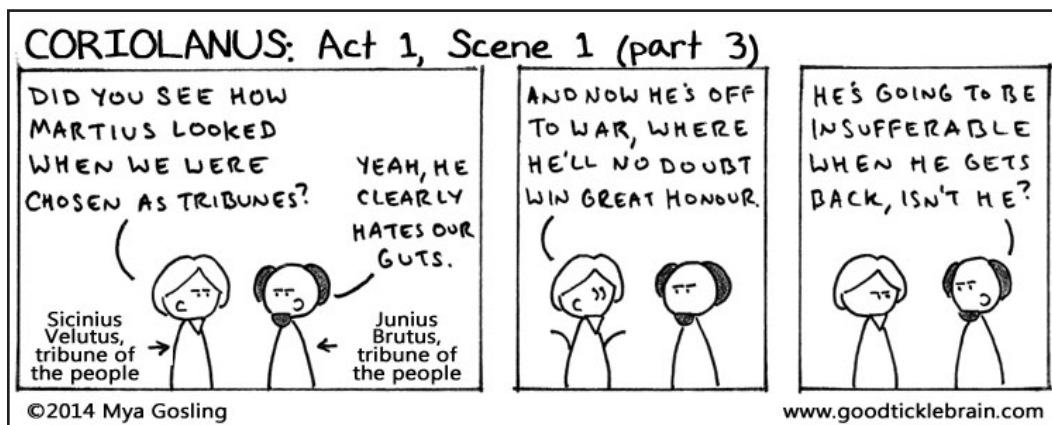
...he indulged a vehement temper and displayed an unswerving pertinacity, [which] made him a difficult and unsuitable associate for others. They did indeed look with admiration upon his insensibility to pleasures, toils, and mercenary gains, to which they gave the names of self-control, fortitude, and justice; but in their intercourse with him as a fellow-citizen they were offended by it as ungracious, burdensome, and arrogant.

Coriolanus, as a member of the upper class (and also encouraged by his mother's pride), had a strong disdain for the common people of Rome - a particular flaw which led to his ultimate downfall. Already a military leader as a young man, Coriolanus withheld grain from the Roman people during a famine in order to force the elimination of the office of tribunate, which had been established to preserve the rights of the plebeians. The tribunes responded by exiling Coriolanus, in direct opposition to the plan of the patricians to make him a Consul. In exile, Coriolanus sought sanctuary from the Volscians - the same Volscians by whose defeat he had earned his name - and turned on his country, leading the Volscian army in a march against Rome. On the brink of entering Rome's gates, Coriolanus was met by his mother and his wife, who begged him to spare them and the city. Coriolanus, always supremely dedicated to his mother, was moved by their pleas and called off the attack. He later died among the Volscians.

In later ancient times, it was generally accepted by historians that Coriolanus was a real historical individual, and a consensus narrative story of his life appeared, retold by leading historians such as Plutarch, Livy, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. More recent scholarship has cast doubt on the historicity of Coriolanus, portraying him as either a wholly legendary figure or at least disputing the accuracy of the conventional story of his life or the timing of the events.



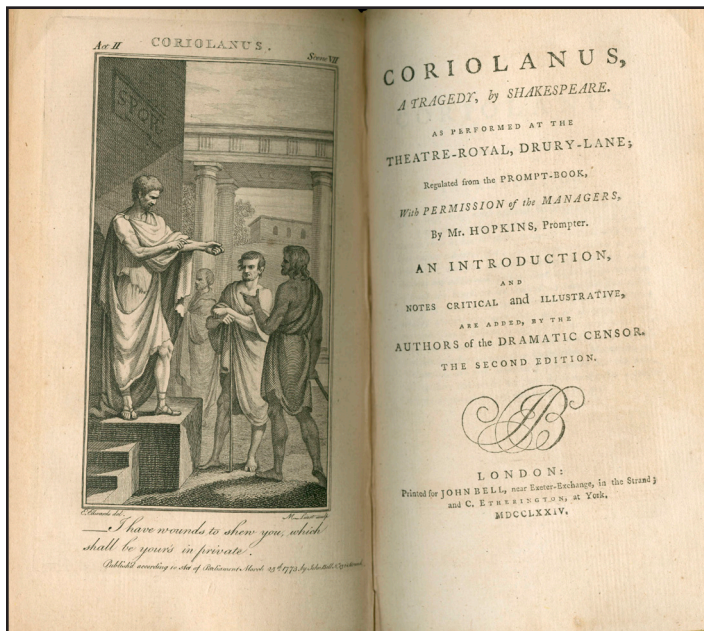
The first page of "The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus" from Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's Lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes



IV. HISTORY: SHAKESPEARE & ADAPTATIONS

William Shakespeare is believed to have written *Coriolanus* in or around 1609, based largely on the “Life of Coriolanus” in Thomas North’s 1579 translation of Plutarch’s *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. The wording of Menenius’s speech about the body politic - which is cut in Bag&Baggage’s Thomas Sheridan/Scott Palmer adaptation - is derived from William Camden’s *Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britaine* (1605). References to “the coal of fire upon the ice” (in *Coriolanus*’ opening speech) could be inspired by Thomas Dekker’s description of the freezing of the Thames in 1607–08.

Scholars have connected the play’s theme of popular discontent with government to both the Midland Revolt - a series of peasant riots in 1607 - and the debates over the charter for the City of London, which were happening constantly around that time. Both of these would have affected Shakespeare, who was the proprietor of the Blackfriars Theatre in London, which stood in an area whose legal status was in question, in addition to being a landowner in Stratford-upon-Avon. The riots in the Midlands were caused by hunger because of the enclosure of common land, and Shakespeare himself had been charged and fined several times for hoarding food stocks to sell at inflated prices.



frontispiece and title page of *Coriolanus* from John Bell’s 18th century, nine-volume set of Shakespeare’s plays

There is no recorded performance of *Coriolanus* prior to the Restoration Period. After 1660, however, its themes made it a natural choice for times of political turmoil. The first known performance was Nahum Tate’s bloody 1682 adaptation at Drury Lane. Tate’s adaptation was called *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth; or, The Fall of Caius Martius Coriolanus*, which, as the new subtitle suggests, focused on the failure of the common people to truly appreciate Coriolanus as a ruler.

A later adaptation, John Dennis’s *The Invader of His Country, or The Fatal Resentment*, again focused largely on the utter stupidity of the common people, whose resentment towards the wealthy, powerful Coriolanus ultimately ended in their wholesale destruction. It was poorly received, and was booed off the stage after three performances in 1719.

Thomas Sheridan’s 1752 production at Smock Alley (and subsequently in 1754 at Covent Garden) was entitled *Coriolanus; or, The Roman Matron*, and it is this adaptation that we are using as the basis for our own production. Sheridan, an Irish actor and producer, explored not just the implications of the haves versus the have-nots, but also the relationship between the women in *Coriolanus*’ life and their influence on his choices.

In short, initially written in the early 1600s as a work of historical tragedy, Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* spent its first 200 years flopping around from adaptor to adaptor, being rewritten and reimagined for a variety of political purposes.

V. OUR PRODUCTION: THOUGHTS FROM DIRECTOR AND ADAPTOR SCOTT PALMER

As with all things Shakespearean, the times determine the meaning of the plays - contemporary sensibilities shade and color the way we see and understand the plays, their characters, and their themes. Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *Coriolanus* seems to be among the most fluid in terms of the impact of current circumstances on our understanding of the play's meanings. Unlike *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, which are colored so carefully that there are fewer swings in interpretation, *Coriolanus* contains so much potential meaning that the play swings radically back and forth between warnings about tyranny and warnings about mob rule. Any reading of Shakespeare's play could ultimately end with either interpretation... it just depends on your mood.



In this political satire, "Coriolanus Addressing the Plebeians", the British caricature artist George Cruikshank ridicules the confrontation between George IV and the radical press between December 1819 and January 1820.

All that being said, present day readings are by far less charitable towards the character of the Roman General. In essence, we have a hard time, in the 21st Century, reading anything into *Coriolanus* other than the title character's basic existence as pompous, arrogant, egomaniacal jerk.

William Hazlitt, one of my favorite critics of Shakespeare, writes:

The moral of Coriolanus is that those who have little, shall have less. Those who have much shall take all that others have. The people are poor, therefore they ought to be starved. They are slaves, therefore they ought to be beaten. They work hard, therefore should be treated like beasts of burden. They are ignorant, therefore they ought not to be allowed to feel that they want food, or clothing, or rest, or that they are enslaved, oppressed, and miserable.

What was at one time viewed as a treatise on the dangers of democracy and the importance of having a noble born leader as the head of state to ensure just rule, is now seen by many as an exploration of the basic evils of arrogance in our rulers, a powerful statement about the justice of democratic rule, an almost fairy tale-like morality play about what happens when a ruler ignores the needs of the ruled.

And who are we to reject such a reading? In fact, what better time than now - amid all the national and global political turmoil of 2016 - to allow Shakespeare to ask us questions about what is just rule, questions about political dynasties, and about arrogance and selfish egotism in our leaders? We ask these questions, and listen to this play's answers.

VI. LANGUAGE AND SHAKESPEARE: VERBAL CONSTRUCTS AND TERMS TO KNOW

Meter: a unit of rhythm in poetry, the pattern of the beats. Each pattern of beats is also called a **foot**. Each foot contains a certain number of syllables, and the different meters are determined by which syllables are accented and unaccented.

Iamb: a type of poetic foot in which the first syllable is unaccented, and the second is accented.

Iambic Pentameter: a line of poetry containing five iambs. In other words, using ten syllables per a line of verse in unstressed and stressed pairs.

Most of Shakespeare's plays are written using iambic pentameter as the poetic meter. Here are some examples from *Coriolanus*:

CORIOANUS: It is a purposed thing and grows by plot,
to curb the will of the nobility...
and

AUFIDIUS: Dost thou not scorn me? Thou, who saw'st me bend
Beneath the half-spent thunder of our foe...
 and

VIRGILIA: Now, this no more dishonours you at all
than to take in a town with gentle words...

Deviations from the iambic pentameter pattern can be used for emotional effect:

VOLUMNIA: *Prithee now, say you will, and go about it.*

and

CORIOANUS: *Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves...*

Sometimes characters share a line of verse, this helps elevate tension and pick up pace:

BRUTUS: Go see this rumor whipp'd. It cannot be
The Volsces dare break with us.

MENENIUS: Cannot be!
We have record that very well it can.

and

CORIOLOANUS: How! **traitor!**

BRUTUS: *Aye, so spake the common voice...*

Prose: ordinary speech with no regular pattern of accentual rhythm. Lines of text do not all have the same number of syllables nor is there any discernible pattern of stresses. Shakespeare generally uses prose in more informal moments, or when characters of lower status are speaking.

Rhetoric: the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques. Here are some of the different figures of speech used in *Coriolanus*:

Alliteration: repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words.

CORIOLANUS: You common cry of curs! Whose breath I hate...

Assonance: a figure of repetition in which different words with the same or similar vowel sounds occur successively in words with different consonants; you can also think of assonance as two or more words with similar vowel sounds sandwiched between different consonants.

COMINIUS: He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
was timed with dying cries: alone he enter'd...

Asteismus: a figure of reply in which the answerer catches a certain word and throws it back to the first speaker with an unexpected twist or unlooked for meaning.

SICINIUS: ...you have not indeed loved the common people.
CORIOLANUS: You should account me the more virtuous
that I have not been common in my love...

Parallelism: a figure of balance identified by a similarity in the syntactical structure of a set of words in successive phrases, clauses, sentences; successive words, phrases, clauses with the same or very similar grammatical structure.

VALERIA: Alas, how can we for our country pray
Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory
Whereto we are bound?...

Antithesis: a rhetorical device in which two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect.

CORIOLANUS: Wouldst thou have laughed had I come coffin'd home,
that weep'st to see me triumph?...

*BONUS: can you find another example of antithesis somewhere on this page?

Anaphora: the deliberate repetition of the first part of the sentence in order to achieve an artistic effect.

CORIOLANUS: Must I go show them my unbarbed sconce?
Must I with base tongue give my noble heart
A lie that it must bear? Well, I will do't...

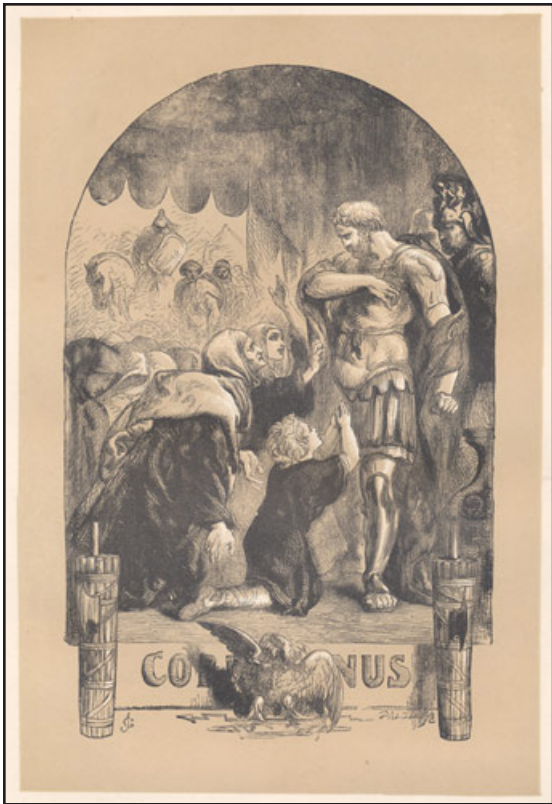
VII. THEMES IN OUR PRODUCTION

Power

Almost all of the characters in *Coriolanus* are driven by power - their need for it, their lack of it, their hunger for it, or their disdain for it. And their actions and relationships are playing out amid a society in which the patricians have all the power, while the plebeians are rioting in the street. Shakespeare uses these characters and this historical situation in the Roman Republic to raise questions like:

- *What factors should determine how power is distributed in society?*
- *Should everyone get an equal say in how a government is run?*
- *Are violent demonstrations a legitimate form of protest?*

Shakespeare shows us that those who appear to be the most powerful in this story are actually those who are the most unfit to be political leaders: they have absolutely no clue that they have a social, political, and moral obligation to care about the powerless, the poor, and the hungry. But the tribunes, the supposed representatives of the poor, are not exactly blameless themselves, seeming more interested in capitalizing on the power reluctantly given them than on actually doing good for the whole of Roman society.



an 1890s engraving imagining Coriolanus

Family

Thomas Sheridan's adaptation of this story lends more weight to the Roman women in Coriolanus' life: Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria. Whereas the men relate to each other on the planes of war and politics, these women appeal to Coriolanus' personal, familial ties. The family dynamic, however, is fraught and complicated: Volumnia alternately praises and shames her son; Virgilia is too weak to be much more than arm candy; and Valeria, as Virgilia's best friend, uses her position to help manipulate Coriolanus. There is also a broader theme of family among the members of the military, who spend the vast majority of their time with each other, and have developed familial bonds while fighting with each other. They even feel kinship with their warring enemies, as Coriolanus and Aufidius remark about each other. And the entire patrician class is insular - only willing to relate to other members of their upper-class "family".



Volumnia pleads with Coriolanus in this engraving from an 1803 collection of prints illustrating scenes from Shakespeare's plays

Loyalty and Treason

The words “traitor” gets thrown around a lot in *Coriolanus* - the tribunes repeatedly call Marcius a traitor in their attempt to get the people to despise him even more; they succeed in getting him thrown out of Rome because he is deemed a traitor; Aufidius calls Coriolanus a traitor when he yields to the pleas of the women after fighting for the Volscians; and Coriolanus himself turns on his country, allying himself with the Volscians when he is banished. Loyalty is a virtue that Roman society holds in high regard, so these accusations and acts of treason bear huge weight and have even huger implications.



an etching depicting death at the Tarpeian Rock



Lindsay Partain, Arianne Jacques, and MaryAnne Glazebrook play Virgilia, Valeria, and Volumnia in Bag&Baggage's production of Coriolanus, or the Roman Matron

Gender and Femininity

The role of women in the Roman Republic is extremely limited - women are neither fighters nor politicians; patrician women have power because of their class, but no way of exercising that power. Shakespeare adds an interesting dimension to his play by placing a trio of female voices in a military and political tragic story. Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria present three different takes on femininity in this era: Volumnia is aggressive and domineering, attempting to gender-bend and play a man's game for as much as she can get; Virgilia is soft-hearted, emotional, and submissive, the iconic “good wife”; and Valeria enjoys her wealth and status, while removing herself from any attachment to the concerns of society.

Yet even with these voices, the role of women as a whole is one of manipulation and self-service - they fill that negative female stereotype, and are just as guilty of self-love and destruction as Coriolanus.

An additional dimension of gender, in this adaptation, is added by the fact that all of the characters - male and female - are played by women.



Cassie Greer plays Coriolanus in Bag&Baggage's production of Coriolanus, or the Roman Matron

VIII. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

Before you see the show:

1. Do people today judge the worth of an individual solely on his or her personal virtues? Or are they more likely to judge a person on his or her social standing, wealth, looks, or fame?
2. In the ancient Rome of *Coriolanus*, the tribunes protected the rights of the common people against the aristocrats. What organizations or institutions today perform the same function?
3. What are the characteristics that make someone a good leader? What are characteristics that make someone a good war hero? Is it possible for one person to be both things?

After you see the show:

4. Why do the plebeians zero in on Caius Martius Coriolanus in particular as the “chief enemy to the people”?
5. What role do the tribunes (Sicinius and Brutus) play in the struggle for power between the patricians and the plebeians?
6. Does Volumnia love her son more or less than the glory that she can achieve through him?
7. Assume the role of a psychologist. Then analyze Coriolanus and write a profile explaining his strong points, his weak points, and the environmental and cultural influences that helped shape him.
8. True or False: Coriolanus experiences his downfall because he was raised to be a macho warrior instead of a thoughtful man who is capable of ruling Rome.
9. What unique things do female actors bring to these male characters? Are any parts of the story illuminated differently because of the gender of the actor playing the characters? Why or why not?
10. Imagine that you are a news reporter in ancient Rome. Write an obituary that you believe accurately sums up the life and his character of Coriolanus.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Coriolanus on livius.org (Articles on Ancient History): <http://www.livius.org/articles/person/coriolanus-gn-marcus/>?

“The Life of Coriolanus” from Plutarch’s *The Parallel Lives*: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Coriolanus*.html

Chapters on Coriolanus from Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *Roman Antiquities*: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dionysius_of_Halicarnassus/7b*.html

Coriolanus in David and Ben Crystal’s “Shakespeare’s Words” Online: <http://www.shakespeareswords.com/Play-Characters.aspx?IdPlay=3>

“Coriolanus, Camillus, and Roman Identity” by Joshua Mandell on *The Helicon: The Yale Undergraduate Journal of Classics*: <http://www.thehelicon.com/2013/roman-identity/>