

**Shakespeare's Achillean Coriolanus  
and Heraean Volumnia:  
Textual Contamination and Crossing  
of Homer's *Iliad* in *Coriolanus***

Chikako D. Kumamoto  
College of DuPage

---

When Shakespeare was a boy of fifteen in 1579, the English translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* by Sir Thomas North came out. Even if a copy of the translation was on his book list at the King's New School at Stratford, youthful Shakespeare would probably have not had a chance to read the life of Coriolanus in it because he soon would leave school, as was usual in his time.<sup>1</sup> Yet by 1598 Shakespeare appears to have read North's work. As Gordon Braden notes in his article, "Plutarch, Shakespeare and the Alpha Males," "The catalogue of Thesus' erotic conquests in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1) appears to derive from the Life of Theseus . . . [and] nine characters in *Titus Andronicus* have names found in the non-Plutarchan Life of Scipio Africanus that North includes."<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's North connection can be more firmly established in his intimate use of the Plutarch material in *Julius Caesar*, composed in 1599. One can well imagine "our bending author"<sup>3</sup> also reading the additional story of Coriolanus because he would return to it a decade later. In the meantime, in 1598 George Chapman published his translation of the first seven books of Homer's *Iliad*, as well as a partial translation of Book 18, under the title of *Achilles' Shield*. Chapman would then reissue those seven books in 1608—the year of Shakespeare's composition of *Coriolanus*—and eventually publish the whole twenty-four books of the *Iliad* in 1611.<sup>4</sup>

For my purposes, those book-printing dates form internal contact points in Shakespeare's Plutarch-North-Chapman source study, and they encourage me to conjecture, optimistically, that he imagined Coriolanus's character as a result of his circuitous yet deep acculturation to Homer's *Iliad*. We have long been persuaded

by Ben Jonson that Shakespeare had only “small Latin and less Greek”; perhaps Shakespeare was indeed cut off from Greek literature, especially Homer in the original. Yet he had a capacity for availing himself of various non-Greek-, as well as non-Latin-, transmitted texts. How keenly these texts impinged on his consciousness can be gleaned from his well-versed absorption of the Trojan War when he describes the sack of Troy and an awe- and fear-inspiring Achilles as a shape on a tapestry in *The Rape of Lucrece*, composed in 1593-94 (1366-1533, 1422-28); Titus’s awareness of Rome’s genealogical connections to Troy in *Titus Andronicus*, published in 1592 (1.1); and the killing of King Priam and the grief of Queen Hecuba of Troy in *Hamlet*, composed in 1600-1601 (2.2). Further, Shakespeare’s critical reading of Homer, albeit through translation, is reassuringly translated in his re-creation of the characters in *Troilus and Cressida*, its composition dated 1602: his Greek heroes are more like the Homeric Greeks inasmuch as they are endowed with Homer’s competitive outlook and raw physicality.

More immediately to the point for my thesis are the challenging juxtapositions with Homer that Shakespeare quietly plants throughout *Coriolanus*. Volumnia’s comparison of herself to Hecuba in act 1, scene 3, is a prominent example (more on this later). Among critics, A. D. Nuttall sees Shakespeare as “a penetrative rather than a docile reader of Chapman” and asks, “If Shakespeare knew no Greek, how did he bring off this feat, this accurate identification of shape of thought, modes of drama, other than his own?”<sup>25</sup> Building on Shakespeare’s Plutarch-North-Chapman assimilations, I like to propose that such assimilative acts result in his textual contamination and crossing of Chapman’s Homer through preeminently recasting Roman Coriolanus and Volumnia in the heroic ethos of anger-driven Achilles and Hera. Conceiving Coriolanus to be the victim of his own anger affords Shakespeare accurately to read the key problematic of Homer’s heroic ethos; it ultimately allows him to retell Plutarch’s “The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus” as a story of wrath, error, and tragic learning.

Shakespeare’s “feat” can be first measured against a larger cultural impulse that sought to justify an aesthetics of poetic pleasure in a society still largely dominated by religion and its primary imperative of the salvation of the individual soul. Moralizing attacks on poetry found an authority in Plato, who banished poetry from his republic because poets imitated the truth, but at such a distance that their imitations were mere copies: “Poetry

feeds and waters the passions" and "lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind is ever to increase in happiness and virtue."<sup>6</sup> Plato argued that poetry, therefore, was immoral, untruthful, and unpractical. While Plato admitted Homer to be "the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers," he censured Homer because he "represents some pitiful hero" stirred by and reveling in unmanly passions and undignified conduct.<sup>7</sup>

The Renaissance epic tradition developed as concerned with Plato as with the need to justify poetry on ethical grounds. Plato's implicit demand that a work of literature have a hero who at all times will be an exemplum worthy of emulation was transmitted through Virgil and then through Renaissance epic theory.<sup>8</sup> Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* sums it up. Sidney ranks epic poetry the most idealized of all literary genres because it provides morally superior models of behavior by moving men with exemplars: "the image of each action" of the epic hero "stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy."<sup>9</sup> Epic heroes like Achilles and Aeneas, therefore, "doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth . . . [and] maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires."<sup>10</sup>

I wish Sidney had elaborated on Achilles further because, while the *Iliad* is a heroic epic, Homer does not simply praise heroes (and this is the primary cause for Plato's Homeric censure). Instead, he chooses for his central theme the altogether unexemplary, unheroic, and inimitable wrath of Achilles. In order to emphasize the commendable nature of Achilles, however, Chapman, the translator, tempers gaps between his time's didactic aim and Homer's epic decision. While depicting "Achilles' banefull wrath resound[ing]" (book 1, 1),<sup>11</sup> Chapman modifies Achilles into a less culpable but rational hero whose anger erupts only after due provocation.

Chapman sets up this rationalist Achilles in book 1, wherein how Achilles handles his wrath is presented. Achilles quarrels with Agamemnon over the rewarding of war prizes that will mark off Achilles' heroic status. A Homeric hero is anchored in the competitive, masculine values of *time* (glory, honor, status), *geras* (a mark of status), and *kleos* (fame), which he earns by winning in battle and which his community approves and confers on heroes; defeat brings dishonor and shame. Achilles, as all the Greeks know, is the greatest warrior. But Agamemnon robs him of his mark of status by demanding Achilles' favorite war prize, beautiful Briseis.

Achilles is stunned by public disgrace in full view of his warrior peers, and angrily draws his sword in an attempt to kill Agamemnon.

At this moment, the supernatural intervenes, and Athena, sent by Hera, descends and checks Achilles' murderous hand. Athena says to Achilles, "And cease contention. Draw no sword. Use words, and such as may / Be bitter to his pride, but just . . . Therefore throw / Reines on thy passions and serve us" (211-15). Achilles obeys at once saying, "Though my heart / Burne in just anger, yet my soule must conquer th'angrie part / And yield you conquest" (215-17). Achilles here is established as a man already possessed of the ability to listen to reason (Chapman identifies Athena as *ratio*, "reason," in the margin),<sup>12</sup> to master his unruly passion, and to know his anger as "just," the adjective missing from the original Homer. In this way, Chapman imposes his distinctly nonpoetical inclinations upon the Homeric text throughout the epic and re-imagines Achilles' obsessive, least ideal wrath (observed again in Books 9, 18, 19-22) in a "rational, Stoicized, and Christianized universe, presided over by the Almighty."<sup>13</sup>

When I say that Shakespeare re-inscribes Achilles' wrath upon the key trait of Coriolanus, I do not mean the "just" wrath of Chapman's invention, but what Pope describes as "his Rage awaken'd by that Injury . . . like a Fire blown by a Wind" that Shakespeare intuits and absorbs from Homer.<sup>14</sup> It is the kind of naked rage with which Homer equips "those ungodly man-killers, whom we poets, when we flatter them, call heroes," as Dryden characterizes the heroes of the Homeric epic.<sup>15</sup> By Shakespeare's innovative textual reappraisals of Chapman's Homer, then, the story of Coriolanus, the heroic warrior, in fact, is not far from the heroic pattern of Achilles' wrath, but a Roman replication of that pattern. Throughout the play, Coriolanus is a man who responds to other people (namely his community) and to events, while his actions are dictated by his character, of which his own imperious rage is a large part.

In Shakespeare's insight of the fundamental problem inherent in the warrior ethic, Homer and Plutarch converge, particularly when Plutarch writes of Coriolanus's crux, "He is a man whose claim to a warrior's honor is founded in the heroic virtue, 'manly valour'. . . which concerns itself with warlike and military achievements."<sup>16</sup> Like Achilles, he has "the force and vigor of intelligence, which. . . led him into great undertakings . . . productive of the highest results"; "on the other hand, since he indulged a vehement temper and displayed an unswerving pertinacity, it made him a difficult and unsuitable associate for others."<sup>17</sup> Plutarch here

presents the colliding images of a public hero and a private "fellow-citizen." In his *Coriolanus*, as Homer does with Achilles and Plutarch with his story of Coriolanus, Shakespeare invites us to consider the implications of the contradictory truth about Coriolanus's "vehement temper," which is both necessary for and destructive of his community.

In act 1, this contradiction is established. In the fiercely martial community of Rome, Coriolanus is a man constructed by the society's view of an ideal man of valor: "soldierly, severe... self-disciplined."<sup>18</sup> When later Cominius nominates Coriolanus for consul, he does so on the ground of Coriolanus fulfilling this societal norm: "It is held / That valour is the chiefest virtue and / Most dignifies the haver" (2.2.81-83).<sup>19</sup> But Shakespeare has heroic Coriolanus and his community standing as problems to each other since he identifies "valor with an access to one's anger."<sup>20</sup>

While Coriolanus behaves in a way he has been told is admirable, he then is angered to find that, in meeting the declared expectations of his community, he comes into conflict with it. Even before Coriolanus appears, his irascible temper (stemming from his perceived pride) is remarked by the First Citizen (1.1.30), and at his first entrance Coriolanus confirms it in a burst of anger toward others: "What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, / That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, / Make yourselves scabs?" (1.1.161-63). When the community questions his authority, he is simply offended. His angry response is to suggest a massacre of the community: "Hang 'em! . . . I'd make a quarry / With thousands of these quarter'd slaves" (1.1.188-96). Even though the Second Citizen acknowledges Coriolanus's contributions to Rome ("what services he has done for his country" [1.1.27]), Brutus, tribune of Rome, characterizes Coriolanus's heroic anger as hubristic ("Being moved, he will not spare to gird the gods" [1.1.254]).

This initial angry outburst pursues his subsequent heroic stance: his anger-fueled rally of his troops against Volscians (1.5.1-11), his declaration of the community's unworthiness in the selection of a consul (3.1), his wrathful rejection of the authority of the community and angry self-banishment (3.4), and his final anger at Aufidius's taunt that he is a "boy of tears" (5.6.101). His rage erupts because it is a settled form of his inner identity. "Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me / False to my nature?" (3.2.14-15), he says when Volumnia tells him to temper his anger in dealing with the tribunes. During battle against Volscians, Coriolanus says he "sweat[s] with wrath" (1.4.26); his anger at Aufidius also "o'erwhelmed my pity" (1.10.86). That is why he has

difficulty restraining it despite Menenius's advice to "put not your worthy rage into your tongue" (3.1.241).

But while Coriolanus's anger-impelled reactions prompt the plot forward, Shakespeare sets his anger in motion as the tragic error through other people's reactions to, insight into, and exploitation of his anger. Sicinius and Brutus, for instance, know how to provoke Coriolanus to anger, thereby inciting the citizens against him and so undermining his claim to a warrior's honor:

*Sicinius:*                    So putting him to rage,  
You should have ta'en th'advantage of his cholera  
And passed him unelected. (2.3.193-94)

*Brutus:*                    If, as his nature is, he fall in rage  
With their refusal, both observe and answer  
The vantage of his anger. (2.3.254-56)

*Sicinius:*                    'Twere well we let the people know't.

*Menenius:*                What, what? His cholera?

*Coriolanus:*               Cholera! Were I as the midnight sleep,  
By Jove, 'twould be my mind. (3.1.85-89)

*Brutus:*                    Put him to cholera straight. (3.3.25)

Even Aufidius knows how to get at Coriolanus: "I'll potch at him some way, / Or wrath or craft may get him" (1.11.15-16). The term "cholera" here—a sudden or irresistible breaking out of the passion of anger—carries a trans-epochal register as well, highlighting such heroic anger to be the fundamental cause of the fall of Achilles and Coriolanus.<sup>21</sup>

Coriolanus's community, in the interest of its own needs, produces a hero like him with whom it cannot live and who cannot live with it, as the Second Citizen has acknowledged; and the community is forced to seek his warrior skills in repelling the Volscian invaders. His angry conduct, therefore, is largely his response to the communal forces that inadequately play upon him (as summed up in the tribunes' refusal to elect him the consul despite what Volumnia describes his "deed-achieving honour" [2.1.169]), and it widens the gulf between him and his community. Like Achilles, Coriolanus asserts that he is acting only as he has been taught to act. Thus, just as Achilles abandons the Greek allies and withdraws from fighting to avenge his dishonor, so Coriolanus withdraws from his community and changes his allegiance. Facing the tribunes' opposition, he convinces himself that not he himself but his community has been faithless to what he follows as the communal norm:

- Coriolanus:* What must I say?  
 "I pray, sir"? Plague upon't, I cannot bring  
 My tongue to such a pace. 'Look, sir, my wounds.  
 I got them in my country's service, when  
 Some certain of your brethren roared and ran  
 From th' noise of our own drums?
- Menenius:* O me, the gods!  
 You must not speak of that, you must desire them  
 To think upon you.
- Coriolanus:* Think upon me? Hang 'em!  
 I would they would forget me like the virtues  
 Which our divines lose by 'em. (2.3.48-56)

When the tribunes convict him of treason against the people's justice and declare him banished from the Roman community, Coriolanus replies angrily that he shall be glad to leave such a community. His climactic response—"I banish you! / . . . Despising / For you the city, thus I turn my back. / There is a world elsewhere" (3.3.124, 134-36)—implicitly asserts that it is not he who abandons the community, but the community that abandons him. He must suffer, he says, by the error in his community's culture, not by his own error.

This Achillean view of Coriolanus, together with the vantage view of act 5, scene 3, helps me to see Volumnia also epically, in whose makeup Shakespeare sees a conjunction of a wrathfully heroic Hera and a compassionately humanizing Priam. She is not simply "a castrating virago or 'a symbol of antique virtue,'"<sup>22</sup> nor is she simply a mirror image of her son unreflectively speaking his angry tongue. Rather, she is his moral foil and becomes an agent of a fateful insight that comes to him with the tragic recognition of what lies behind the outer signs of heroic, yet vengeful anger. Shakespeare alerts us early to his epic characterization by way of Volumnia's identification of herself first with Hecuba, Hector's mother. In act 1, scene 3, Volumnia rebukes her son's wife, Virgilia, because Virgilia would rather endure the war through suffering than have her husband go to war. She exasperatedly dismisses Virgilia's passive heroism:

Away, you fool! . . . The breasts of Hecuba,  
 When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier  
 Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood  
 At Grecian sword contemning. (1.3.40-44)

These lines immediately recall Chapman's lines from the *Iliad* Book 22:

Hecuba then fell upon her knees,  
 Stript nak't her bosome, shew'd her breasts and bad him  
 reverence them

And pitie her—if ever she had quieted his exclaime,  
 He would ceasse hers and take the towne, not tempting the  
     rude field  
 When all had left it . . . (68-72)

Here Shakespeare contaminates Homer's text because Volumnia speaks like Hera, not like Hecuba: Hecuba of Homer supplicates Hector to seek safety behind the city walls instead of fighting Achilles because, in dying, he is killing a part of herself; but Volumnia appropriates the virile heroic ethos by making Hector's bloody forehead a more beautiful image than the breasts of Hecuba. By binding her own nurturing maternity to the masculine wound of her bleeding son, she declares that her masculine heroism has fashioned her son; as she tells him later, "Thy valiantness was mine; thou suck'st it from me" (3.2.131-32). But by having her declare the nursing breasts are not as lovely as Hector's fatal wound inflicted by Achilles' sword, Shakespeare signals the tragic undercurrent of tension beneath her heroic façade. Rather than invoking "the source of [Coriolanus's] anger in the deprivation imposed by his mother,"<sup>23</sup> Volumnia's words are paradoxical in that she unknowingly prophesies her son's death at the hand of his enemy and, in so doing, reveals her maternity to be nurturing as well as destructive.

This tragic tension of simultaneous "plenitude and loss"<sup>24</sup> by the mother increases when Shakespeare more directly identifies Volumnia with Hera, a goddess of marriage and birth. In the *Iliad*, Hera claims to be Achilles' surrogate, albeit divine, mother, and is his most wrathful and fanatical supporter. Philip Slater and Joan V. O'Brien focus on the Hera-Heracles mythology. Slater examines it psychoanalytically and posits that their myth is a prototype of the actual, though "ambivalent," mother-son relationship that existed in Athenian society.<sup>25</sup> He shows that, despite their low and powerless social and legal status, females often played prominent parts in Greek mythology and that, in particular, maternal goddesses like Hera were a powerful, active, and aggressive presence, often over-involved with their sons. O'Brien's study also invigorates Hera's role in the *Iliad*. She finds that Hera's and Achilles' wrath is crucially linked as reflections of their moral character, and shows that Hera is a necessary element that helps to gauge a problematics in the Achillean heroism.<sup>26</sup>

In the play, this mythical relation appears cumulatively. On the way to welcome the victorious Coriolanus against the Volscians, Volumnia hints that she is a follower of Hera: "For the love of Juno, let's go" (2.1.97). Coriolanus responds to her approbation



of heroic victory as if it were a sign of divine support: "You have, I know, petitioned all the gods / For my prosperity!" (2.1.166-67). In the face of Coriolanus's banishment from Rome, she rages, like him cursing the town to utter destruction: "Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome, / And occupations perish!" (4.1.13-14). But most telling is her direct self-identification with Hera, when Menenius invites her to a consolatory dinner after Coriolanus's banishment. She rages at the victorious tribunes, goddess-like, and adopts the masculine vocabulary of anger and self-cannibalism:

Anger's my meat: I sup upon myself  
 And so shall starve with feeding . . .  
 Leave this faint puling and lament as I do,  
 In anger, Juno-like. (4.2.53-56)

In Volumnia's vision of supping on herself, Hecuba and Hera converge: she had taught her son to suckle on this self-consuming anger from her under the name of valor. It is this anger that Sicinius remarks when he says, "They say she's mad" (4.2.11), and asks her, "Are you mankind?" (4.2.18). Homer shows Achilles' and Hera's vengeful angers on the edge of acceptable norms in books 18 through 22. So does Shakespeare here, and sets in relief the mother and son in mutual moral degeneracy inherent in their heroic anger. Moreover, since cannibalism reduces her to the animal level, it means not only her fall from being the signifier of maternal sacrifice, but also her renunciation of the human community.

Yet Shakespeare's concern with the dark side of the heroic ethos takes a new turn as he reshapes this Hera-Volumnia conflation into that of Priam-Volumnia. This scheme establishes a new moral tone for her. It also allows Shakespeare to make sense of the cessation of Coriolanus's and Volumnia's angry disquiets while compelling me to see in it a fit conclusion to the climactic moment in the story of Coriolanus. The parallel actions taking place in *Iliad* book 24 may support this notion. In book 24, Achilles is at a height of angry savagery. He ties Hector's body to his chariot and drags it around the barrow of Patroklos, his close warrior companion whom Hector killed. Consumed by grief and anger, he is behaving outside the norms of the human community.

Priam, Hector's father, meanwhile, wants his son's body back for proper burial. With divine support, Priam goes to Achilles to ransom the body. Achilles at first refuses. But Priam appeals to Achilles' familial pity and invites Achilles to remember his father, who stands in the same relationship to Achilles as Priam stands to Hector. Achilles' subsequent epistemological elevation is confirmed

when he ceases his anger and recognizes that a gentle character composed of compassion and strong obligation to others is a much better measure of heroic qualities. Achilles' moral education is complete when he shares with Priam a meal, a fundamental human activity signifying his fresh communal self.

Shakespeare seems to be working with this epic vision when Volumnia appeals to Coriolanus to spare the city in act 5, scene 3. Like Achilles, Coriolanus is in most avenging rage, having just returned to Rome utterly "to annihilate the city and the people among whom the true roots of his heroic identity lie."<sup>27</sup> His family enters, and at the sight of them he forces himself to deny all humanity, truth and logic:

Let the Volsces  
Plough Rome and harrow Italy! I'll never  
Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand  
As if a man were author of himself  
And knew no other kin. (5.3.33-36)

This unnatural speech, fueled by his avenging rage, inverts the true order of nature. The inversion of familial hierarchy is embodied in the meeting between mother and son, as Volumnia kneels to her son in supplication. He hastily bids her rise, and as she rises, she introduces others who have come to beg for peace. He first asks her, "Desire not / T'ally my rages and revenges with / Your colder reasons" (5.3.85-87). But she will talk, and after appealing, not to the established custom or heroic code, but simply asking him to cease his anger: "show a noble grace [mercy]," and have "pity to our prayers" (5.3.122, 172). She then asks Coriolanus to hold "hands for fellowship" (5.3.176).

A tableau of no words ensues, just silence with Coriolanus holding her by the hand. Here the above-noted Chapman passage from *Iliad* book 22 overlaps in a challenging association: two mothers, two pleas for two cities, and two sons who will die in the end. But for the moment, this most tender act of hand-holding reveals the triumph of natural feeling and bridges the angry man of action to the Priam-like mother of suffering (at the first sight of his family, Coriolanus concedes, "Great nature cries, 'Deny not'. . . [my mother's] intercession" [5.3.33, 32]). His response shows a kind of cognitive change happening in him since he can now feel the compassion himself ("it is no little thing to make / Mine eyes to sweat compassion" [5.3.196-97]). She succeeds, not only as a mother, but also as a now-penitent community member, in convincing Coriolanus of a new vision of heroism comprised not

of an isolationist, avenging sword of anger ("All the swords / In Italy, and her confederate arms, / Could not have made this peace" [5.3.208-10]), but of the ability to learn to feel others' suffering and compassion as something that matters.<sup>28</sup>

Further Homeric still, his new learning becomes apparent when he offers Volumnia and Virgilia the hospitality of "drink[ing] together" to complete "this peace" (5.3.204, 210). Unlike Menenius's rejected supper, such hospitality is a metaphor for the best of the hero's honorable conduct because it restores him to his family ("Come, enter with us. Ladies, you deserve / To have a temple built you" [5.3.207-08]). But more than that, sharing a drink with his family by extension restores him to the larger community. Indeed, Coriolanus discards his old heroic identity and acquires a new heroic self more in compliance with the strong obligations of his original community.

The image of the clasped hands, however, recoils on what the Second Citizen snidely has said about Coriolanus's relation with Volumnia early in the play—Coriolanus has served his country "to please his mother" (1.1.36)—or on Volumnia's own assertion that "There's no man in the world / More bound to's mother" (5.3.159-60). It recoils because this is also an image of horror, especially because Volumnia invokes Rome as "our dear nurse" (5.3.111) and links motherhood and motherland. Underneath the fecund, nurturing image is a chilling irony which points to her hidden destiny to impel the son's death, which is foreshadowed in Aufidius's cynical aside: "I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour / At difference in thee. Out of that I'll work / Myself a former fortune" (5.3.201-03).

In writing his lives of Greek and Roman heroes of history and legend, Plutarch has "an explicit ethical motive: 'actions of virtue give the enquirer an admiration and an enthusiasm that leads him to imitate.'"<sup>29</sup> I have argued that, in conceiving Coriolanus and Volumnia in Romanized Achilles and Hera, Shakespeare brings off the feat of "this accurate identification of shape of thought" (Nuttall's comment) not only of Plutarch, but also of Homer. J.A.K. Thomson rephrases Shakespeare's feat by saying, "I believe that it was from Plutarch that Shakespeare learned how to make a tragedy of the kind exemplified in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Lear*."<sup>30</sup> In *Coriolanus*, then, Shakespeare has created a protagonist who is a heroic hero in the social formation aided by Roman culture and politics (the ideology of militarism, the class conflict between patricians and plebeians, the external war against the Volscies) and by economics (famine and the scarcity of grain for the citizens),

who then passes into a psychological anti-hero of who then passes into a psychological anti-hero of individual brutality and divided self (Plutarch's Volumnia asks her son, "Is it right to yield everything to wrath and resentment" [209])—only to change into a man of tragedy.

It is curious to me, however, that, unlike Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, or Lear, Coriolanus meets his own death, not in the fullness of reflective self-knowledge, but in his full martial rage. In his banishment from Rome, he was condemned as "a traitor to the people" (3.3.66), occasioning the full violence of his shame-filled anger; his banishment from Corioli, effected by Aufidius's deliberate choice of the word, "Ay, traitor, Martius!" (5.6.88), causes the same reaction. But here is further shame: he loses his identity signified in Aufidius's cruel jibes "Martius" and "boy of tears" (5.6.88, 103). At these taunts, his former unruly rage bursts forth in a vain attempt at recovering his heroic self: "Boy! False hound! / If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there / That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles. / Alone I did it, boy" (5.6.113-17).

If one's error is known by its consequences, could it be, then, that Coriolanus's tragic error resides in the anger that precipitates the loss of his place in both Roman and Volscian communities, and thus his hold on his whole self? But in retrospect, his error is prophesied early in the play. Before Coriolanus and Aufidius launch their great *aristeia* (display of military excellence in battle) in act 1, scene 9, Aufidius mocks Coriolanus, likening him to Hector, whom Homer has die a hero of no country: "Wert thou the Hector / That was the whip of your bragged progeny, / Thou shouldst not 'scape me here" (1.9.12-14).

So like Hector, in the end Coriolanus must die because there is nothing left for him to do, because for him there no longer exists a community which understands him and to which he can belong. So he dies without knowing that, whether native or adoptive, his community can make, yet also unmake him. Through the act of textual contamination and crossing, Shakespeare makes us see this core problem contained in the socially formed traits and behaviors deemed proper to a heroic man. In this sense, Aufidius's noble epitaph inscribing Coriolanus's death and fame in funeral pomp is a fitting, yet ironic, closure for Shakespeare's ambivalent protagonist who synthesizes Homer's, Plutarch's, and Chapman's strangely tragic yet ethical heroes.

## Notes

1. Erns Honigmann, "Shakespeare's Life," in *Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.
2. Gordon Braden, "Plutarch, Shakespeare and the Alpha Males," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189.
3. William Shakespeare, *Henry the Fifth*, Epilogue 2.
4. Allardyce Nicoll, introduction to *Chapman's Homer: The Iliad, the Odyssey and The Lesser Homeric*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, vol. 2, *The Iliad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), xiv-xvi.
5. A. D. Nuttall, "Action at a Distance: Shakespeare and the Greeks," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 215, 217.
6. Plato, *Book X of The Republic*, in *Criticism: The Major Tests*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 48.
7. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
8. Madeline Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), 85-93, 223-24.
9. Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, in *Criticism: The Major Tests*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 95.
10. *Ibid.*, 95.
11. George Chapman, *Chapman's Homer: The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Lesser Homeric*, 2nd ed., ed. Allardyce Nicoll, vol. 2, *The Iliad* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), book 1, 1. Quotations from the epic are noted parenthetically by book and/or line numbers.
12. Chapman, book 1, marginal comments for lines 212-15.
13. Robert S. Miola, "On Death and Dying in Chapman's *Iliad*: Translation as Forgery," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 48.
14. Alexander Pope, trans., *Homer's Iliad*, 1791, ver. 406n; quoted in Steven Shankman, *Pope's Iliad: Homer in the Age of Passion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 15.
15. John Dryden, "Dedication of *Examem Poeticum*," in *Essays of John Dryden*, Albion Classics, ed. W. P. Ker, vol. 2 (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), 13.
16. Plutarch, *Plutarch Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 4, *Alcibiades and Coriolanus, Lysander and Sulla*, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann and Company, 1916), 121-22.
17. *Ibid.*, 121.
18. G. K. Hunter, "A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson," in *An English Miscellany: Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. B. S. Lee (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1977), 94.
19. Text references are to act, scene, and line of 'The World's Classics' *Coriolanus*, ed. R. B. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
20. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 148.
21. For discussions about angry emotions and the problems they presented from Homer to late antiquity, refer to William V. Harris's *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

22. C. Luckyj, "Volumnia's Silence," *Criticism* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 327.

23. Janet Adelman, "'Anger's My Meat': Feeding, Dependency and Aggression in *Coriolanus*," in *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. Jay L. Halio and David Bevington (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), 111.

24. Madelon Sprengnether, "Annihilating Intimacy in *Coriolanus*," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 107.

25. Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 33.

26. Joan V. O'Brien, *Transformation of Hera: A Study of Ritual, Hero, and the Goddess in the Iliad* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 3.

27. Stephen Coote, *William Shakespeare: Coriolanus*, Penguin Critical Studies (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 72.

28. This idea of Volumnia and Virgilia as penitential community members was inspired by a post-presentation talk with Professor Jessica Tvordi of Southern Utah University, who asked me how I felt about the director's visual presentation of those who appeared on the stage exposing their penitentially shorn hair. I appreciate Professor Tvordi's question, which has added the necessary depth to this part of my paper, as I could expand my idea of the community's role in *Coriolanus*'s life.

29. Quoted in T. P. Wiseman, "Gladiator and The Myths of Rome," *History Today* 55.4 (April 2005): 40.

30. J. A. K. Thomson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), 242.