Coriolanus

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Though he is perhaps the most famous writer in history, much of Shakespeare's life remains a mystery. His father was a glove-maker, and the young Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The basic story of the play is taken from the life of the legendary general Caius Martius, who is thought to have lived in the 5th century BC. He supposedly received the surname "Coriolanus" for his role in the Roman conquest of Corioli, a Volscian city. Those who chronicled his life some two hundred years after his death wrote that Coriolanus was banished from Rome, and that he thereafter led a Volscian army to attack Rome in revenge. Though ancient historians believed Coriolanus was a real person, modern scholars and historians question whether he was partly or wholly fictional. Some events in English history contemporary with Shakespeare's composition of the play seem also to have impacted *Coriolanus*. Around the time that Shakespeare was writing, rich land owners in England consolidated small public farmlands into private farms, a process known as enclosure. In protest against the loss of formerly communal lands, a man named John Reynolds, also known as "Captain Pouch," led a large rebellion called the Midland Revolt in 1607. The Midland Revolt might be seen in parallel with the hunger-fueled riots by the common people at the beginning of *Coriolanus*, which were not included in the ancient sources; instead, they appear to be a contemporary concern Shakespeare chose to emphasize and explore.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Shakespeare consulted numerous sources for information about Coriolanus. The main work he seemed to have used was the "Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus," from *Lives*, written by the famous ancient Greek historian Plutarch. Scholars believe that Shakespeare relied on the popular contemporary translation of *Lives* by Sir Thomas North, which was reprinted in 1595. Another ancient source Shakespeare probably consulted when writing the play is the *History of Rome*, written by Livy, a Roman historian. Shakespeare wrote three other Roman plays: *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Titus Andronicus*, and though *Coriolanus* was written last of the four, it takes place during the earliest time period.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Tragedy of Coriolanus
- **When Written:** 1607-1608
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Genre:** Tragedy
- **Setting:** The early Roman republic and the Volscian towns of Corioles and Antium
- **Climax:** Coriolanus leads a Volscian army to conquer Rome but is confronted and stopped by his family.
- **Antagonist:** Tullus Aufidius

EXTRA CREDIT

Popular or Not? Part of what makes *Coriolanus* unique is that its title character was initially perceived as unlikable. Compared to other characters in Shakespeare's major tragedies, like the pensive Hamlet or the poetic, terrifying Macbeth, Coriolanus doesn't often soliloquize or eloquently offer insight into the reasoning behind his decisions. He is extremely proud and blunt, and for many of the same reasons that Coriolanus's political career fails so miserably, the character and the play itself were not beloved by early audiences. It was only later that critics like T.S. Eliot began praising the play.

Political Fodder. As so much of the play's content and thematic material is political, it is no surprise that the play has been used for political purposes on both sides of the aisle. Many have read the play through a leftist, Marxist lens, siding with the play's hungry citizens. The play has also been used through a militaristic, fascist lens to the point that it was extremely popular during Hitler's rule and subsequently banned in Germany after World War II. *Coriolanus* has been adapted numerous times and used as political fodder for a multitude of causes. Former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon even wrote a screenplay for a hip-hop musical adaptation of *Coriolanus* set during the Rodney King riots in L.A.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the early Roman Republic, plebeian citizens revolt due to a famine. The people name Caius Martius, a patrician (aristocrat) and a famous soldier, as their chief enemy, since he despises the common people. An old, reputable Roman patrician named Menenius Agrippa tries to calm the people by telling them a fable about the **belly**. Just as the people are calming, Caius Martius arrives, curtly telling the common people what he thinks of them, and announcing that their wish has been granted: Junius Brutus and Sicinius Velutus have been named tribunes of the people.

News arrives that the Volscians, among them Martius's chief enemy general Tullus Aufidius, are attacking Rome, so Martius and Roman general Cominius lead the Roman forces against the Volscians. While some soldiers run away, Martius fights valiantly in the battle, single handedly capturing the city of Corioles despite being unable to kill his rival. For his excellence in the battle, Caius Martius is given the new surname "Coriolanus."

Back in Rome, Menenius and Coriolanus's mother, Volumnia, begin preparing for his political campaign. Despite the fact that he is hated by the tribunes, they hope to make him Roman consul. They're excited to hear he has been wounded again, as **wounds** can be used to convince the people of his worthiness. In front of the Roman Senate, Cominius uses masterful oration to tell of Coriolanus's valiant deeds, and officially nominates him for consul.

As part of the tradition of becoming consul, Coriolanus must ask for the people's **voices** and show them his wounds. Though he is groomed by his mother, his general, and Menenius, Coriolanus is extremely hesitant to play politics. Coriolanus awkwardly asks the people for their voices, dressed in the traditional candidate's robe, and they find it strange but agree. As soon as Coriolanus finishes, however, the tribunes are easily able to persuade the people to retract their votes by reminding them of how much Coriolanus hates them. The tribunes tell Coriolanus that the people have changed their minds, and he becomes enraged, berating the people for being fickle and continuing to espouse his view that they should be powerless. The tribunes take this to be treason, and they gather a mob of citizens to kill Coriolanus.

Ultimately, the tribunes agree to give Coriolanus a public trial, and Coriolanus's supporters urge him to be calm and mild during the trial. Coriolanus doesn't want to conceal his true feelings toward the people, however, and though he tries to do so at first, the tribunes are immediately able to enrage him, at which point he curses the common people publicly once more. The tribunes use this outburst as more evidence that he is the people's enemy, and they sentence him to banishment.

Once banished, Coriolanus seeks out his rival Aufidius. At Aufidius's house in Antium, Coriolanus reveals his desire to get revenge on Rome and asks if he can join with the Volscians. Aufidius and the Volscian lords agree, and the Volscian soldiers immediately become obsessed with Coriolanus. Aufidius, though, secretly plans to turn on Coriolanus once the Volscians have captured Rome. They lead a successful military campaign to the gates of Rome.

There, Cominius and Menenius come to the Volscian camp in attempts to dissuade Coriolanus from attacking his own city, but they are unable to do so. Coriolanus's mother Volumnia, his wife Virgilia, their child young Martius, and their dear friend Valeria meet him outside the city in a final attempt to save Rome. By invoking their family bond, Volumnia is able to convince Coriolanus to abandon the military campaign, despite the fact that he knows this action might result in the loss of his life. Volumnia returns to Rome as a hero, and Coriolanus goes back to the Volscians, hoping they will accept peace between the two states.

In the city of Corioles, Coriolanus presents Volscian Lords with a formal peace agreement. Aufidius and his Volscian conspirators, however, tell the lords not to accept the agreement, calling Caius Martius a traitor to the Volscian state. Coriolanus becomes enraged, and Aufidius turns the Volscian people against Coriolanus by reminding them that he killed their families. At the protests of the Volscian lords, Aufidius and his conspirators kill Coriolanus.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Caius Martius / Coriolanus – Caius Martius is an aristocratic Roman general with unmatchable military and combat skills. His mother, Volumnia, sent him into battle as a boy, where he gained a reputation for being something like a super soldier. During the course of the play, he singlehandedly captures the Volscian city of Corioles, a deed for which he is given the surname "Coriolanus." Through his violent deeds and heroism, he becomes described as a "thing" instead of a person, like a killing machine instead of a man. After returning from the battle for Corioles, Coriolanus is set to be named consul, a position for which he is preened by his mother and by his surrogate father figures, Cominius and Menenius. In order to be elected consul, Coriolanus must "politic" for the **voices** (votes) of the common people. But Coriolanus can't (or won't) do this. He refuses to accept praise for his accomplishments, since he cares only about his self-image, not what others think; he refuses to give a political speech, since he believes politics are theatrical and dishonest; he adheres to strict Roman virtues of pride and passion; and he curses out the common people and fails so miserably in his campaign that he ends up banished from Rome. His first instinct is for revenge, and he partners with his

longtime rival Tullus Aufidius to lead an army of Volscian troops against Rome. Ultimately, though, he is convinced to abandon this revenge by his wife, Virgilia, his son, Young Martius, and mostly his mother, who humanizes him, thereby leading to his death.

Volumnia – Volumnia is the bold and domineering mother of Caius Martius Coriolanus. She cares about her son, but mostly seems to care about his honor and his success, almost like an early modern stage mother. She sent him into battle when he was only sixteen years old, and when he is set to return from Corioles, Volumnia hopes that he has **wounds** to show the people in order to advance his political campaign. Part of the reason that Volumnia is able to control Coriolanus is an inversion of the typical Shakespearean dynamic between fathers and daughters, where fathers are described as sculptors who created (and therefore have control over) their daughters. But Volumnia constantly reminds Coriolanus that she "framed" him, showing both maternal pride and a sense of maternal possession over her son. Ultimately, though, she chooses Rome over her son; she convinces Coriolanus to spare the city of Rome, and therefore she becomes a hero, but she also probably knows that this decision will result in her son's death.

Virgilia – Virgilia is the wife of Coriolanus. While Volumnia hopes that Coriolanus has been **wounded**, Virgilia simply hopes that he is safe—she is much more submissive and less forceful in her opinions than her mother-in-law. Virgilia is also more emotional than Volumnia, and she worries when her husband is gone. She is very quiet, and is even referred to as "silence" by Coriolanus.

Tullus Aufidius – Tullus Aufidius is a Volscian general and the mortal enemy of Caius Martius Coriolanus. The two men have an agreement to fight in hand-to-hand combat whenever they meet on the battlefield. Between the two there is both a mutual hatred and a mutual respect, such that when Coriolanus has been banished from Rome, Aufidius welcomes him to join the Volscian army. Though he cannot fully match Coriolanus in battle, Aufidius surpasses his rival in political skill and oratory abilities. After Coriolanus decides to abandon the siege on Rome, Aufidius is easily able to convince the other Volscian conspirators to turn on and murder Coriolanus.

Menenius Agrippa – Menenius is a Roman patrician and surrogate father figure to Coriolanus. He is a master orator and politician, able to expertly calm the common people during the play's opening rebellion by telling the **belly** fable and invoking the "body politic." Menenius tries to coach Coriolanus on what to say, almost like a campaign manager, and he is shocked when Coriolanus can't (or won't) simply tell the common people what they want to hear.

Cominius – Cominius is the head Roman general and a senator. He is Caius Martius's commander and superior, and it is Cominius that grants Caius Martius the name of "Coriolanus." Like Menenius, he is a surrogate father figure to Coriolanus and a campaign coach. Cominius is also a skilled orator, as it's his chronicle of Coriolanus's military deeds that first proclaims Coriolanus's worthiness to the public and announces him as a candidate for consul.

Roman Citizens – The Roman citizens in the play are described as a hungry, volatile mob. They riot because of **food** shortages, and they elect Junius Brutus and Sicinius Velutus as tribunes; they hate Caius Martius. Throughout the play, they are described as "**voices**" or "fragments," and are characterized as one multitude instead of individuals. At the same time, this multitude of plebeians contains some power, as they are able to force Coriolanus into exile.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Young Martius – Young Martius is the son of Coriolanus. When he rips apart a butterfly, Volumnia praises him for having the violent spirit of his father.

Sicinius Velutus – Sicinius Velutus harnesses the public unrest during the **food** riots to be named a Roman tribune of the people. He recognizes Coriolanus's disdain for the common people, hates Coriolanus, and, with Junius Brutus, uses his political acumen to get Coriolanus banned from Rome.

Junius Brutus – Junius Brutus is the other Roman tribune of the people. With Sicinius Velutus, he turns the people against Coriolanus and gets him banned from Rome.

Valeria – Valeria is a Roman lady and Virgilia's friend.

A Gentlewoman – A gentlewoman serving Volumnia and Valeria.

Titus Lartius – Titus Lartius is a Roman general and senator.

Niancor – Niancor is a Roman defector who spies on Rome for the Volscians.

Adrian – Adrian is a spy for the Volscians and a friend of Niancor.

Roman Soldiers – Roman soldiers that fight alongside, then abandon Coriolanus, favoring the spoils of war over the fighting itself. They are cowardly and greedy, and they think it's absurd for Coriolanus (then Caius Martius) to try and enter the city of Corioles during the battle.

Roman Senators and Nobles – There are several unnamed Roman senators and nobles in the play who support Coriolanus for his deeds and his love of patricians.

A Roman Lieutenant – A Roman lieutenant to Lartius.

Roman Officers – Officials of the Roman senate.

Roman Aediles – Officers commanded by the Roman tribunes.

Roman Herald – An unnamed herald of Rome.

Roman Messengers – Several Roman messengers deliver

information throughout the play.

Volscian Conspirators – They conspire along with Aufidius to turn on and kill Coriolanus at the end of the play.

Volscian Senators and Lords – Several Volscian senators who trust and support Aufidius.

Volscian Lieutenant – A lieutenant to and follower of Aufidius.

Volscian Soldiers – Soldiers fighting for Aufidius. They are terrified of Coriolanus.

Two Members of the Volscian Watch – Two watchmen at the Volscian camp; they turn Menenius away from the camp when he comes to plead with Coriolanus.

Volscian People – The Volscian people accept Coriolanus as a general, but when prompted by Aufidius and the Volscian conspirators, they remember that Coriolanus has killed their family members and turn back against him.

Three Servants of Aufidius – Three servants working for Aufidius. They encounter the disguised Coriolanus.

Citizen of Antium – A citizen of Antium who shows a disguised Coriolanus where to find Aufidius.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POLITICS, CLASS, AND ROME

Coriolanus is a difficult, masterful, historically unpopular play. The easiest way into this confusing play is politics, and for this reason journalists often cite the "Coriolanus effect" to describe the difficulties of a military figure turned politician. And indeed, in many ways *Coriolanus* is eerily modern, and it reads almost like a 21st-century political tragedy. At the same time, the play is just as much about ancient Roman politics as it is proto-modern. Shakespeare wrote three Roman plays in addition to *Coriolanus*: *Julius Caesar*, set at the end of the Roman Republic, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, set immediately following *Caesar* at the dawn of the Roman Empire, and *Titus Andronicus*, set in the late Roman Empire. *Coriolanus*, despite being the last written of the four (and among Shakespeare's last plays) takes place before the other three, during the early days of the Roman Republic. Rather than the large, metropolitan Rome at the center of a growing empire (like in *Caesar and Antony*), Rome in *Coriolanus* is simply a town in the center of Italy. The population of this smaller Rome consists mostly of two classes: the poor, **hungry** masses (plebeians – the lower class), and the ruling, wealthy few (patricians – aristocrats).

The inequality and the struggle for balance between these classes creates a power vacuum and the play's political landscape. The play begins amidst plebeian riots over a grain shortage. Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus harness the power of the mob, often characterized as one multitude, and the two men are named tribunes (elected authorities) of the people. Menenius, a patrician, tries to calm the Roman citizens during the riots. He explains the proper relationship between the government and governed by discussing the "body politic," a classic analogy in which a king is a ruler and the subjects are different **body parts**. In Menenius's fable of the belly, the senate is the belly which takes all the food in order to properly distribute it to the other limbs, which he says are made up of commoners. But the military hero (and therefore patrician) Caius Martius, later surnamed "Coriolanus" for an impressive achievement on the battlefield, views the common people with contempt, deflates Menenius's speech, and opposes the tribunes of the people.

After returning from war, Coriolanus seeks to be named a Roman Consul, and though he has support from Senators and other patricians, he needs to gain the **voices** and the votes of the common people he so despises. In the grooming of Coriolanus as a political candidate we see the early representations of campaign managers, handlers, stump speeches, and pandering that make the play read so much like a modern political drama. Coriolanus, though, cannot properly enter the political sphere. He cannot act like a politician—he considers this to be theatrical and dishonest—and therefore he cannot win votes. The other, more politically adept figures in the play outmaneuver him in the political arena, since they could not hope to in the arena of war. First the two tribunes have Coriolanus banished, and later Tullus Aufidius, Coriolanus's longtime-enemy, uses his political prowess to get Coriolanus killed.

We can draw comparisons between *Coriolanus* and Roman history, Shakespeare's contemporary government, and our own times, and the play can be used in arguments from both the political left and right, but it is extremely difficult to say (or argue) with any kind of certainty what Shakespeare's own political views on imperialism, the political process, absolute power, and the class struggle might have been. Regardless of the playwright's specific views, the play offers insight and deep questions into both the righteousness and the surreptitious nature of politics—asking how power should be balanced and how material goods should be controlled, and examining both the plight of the common people and the fickle, ever changing nature of their opinions.

LANGUAGE AND NAMES

As much as *Coriolanus* is a play about politics, it is also (overtly) a play about language. Put most simply, the play's thesis about language could be summed up as "language is power." It seems insufficient to say that language is important to politics within the play—language *is* politics. Throughout the play, the plebeians are called "**voices**," referring both to their opinions and "voices" meaning votes. It's these voices (votes) that Coriolanus must seek to be named Consul. The two tribunes harness the voices of the public, and they become the "**tongues** [of the] common mouth." They're able to use language to turn the public against Coriolanus and enact his banishment, showing that language can be an act with powerful consequences. And on the other side of the political sphere, language is still used as power. Menenius masterfully uses language to manipulate, to obscure the truth, to debate, to comprise, to prop men up, and to bring them down. In other words, he uses language to politic. And Cominius, too, despite being a military figure, is able to use language to politic. His brilliant oration describing Coriolanus's heroic deeds is a perfect example. Note that this speech begins with the classic rhetorical move of claiming ineptitude – one that echoes Mark Antony's claim to be a terrible orator in *Caesar* – "I shall lack voice."

While Cominius is using false humility to make his language and his argument more convincing, Coriolanus truly *does* lack voice. As a military man of action, Coriolanus has no ability to make eloquent speeches, to politic, or to even pretend that he does. Throughout the play, Coriolanus is told to use his words and his eloquence to win the "voices" of the common people, but his language simply fails him. He is not able (or is not willing) to speak, and he even says that he prefers **wounds** to words. Ultimately, Coriolanus tries to stop speaking (and stop engaging with language) altogether. When leading a vengeful military attack on Rome, Coriolanus is met by his former advisors and generals, but he refuses to speak with them or hear them. It's not until his mother confronts him with first a long speech and then a painful, silent demand for a response that he abandons his military pursuit (action) in favor of language. This decision saves Rome, but it quickly leads to Coriolanus's death, which is in turn caused by Aufidius's own language.

Names and naming are also a crucial aspect of the way language operates within the play. In Rome, the naming system was based on three names: *praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen*. The *nomen* was a family name, used to identify families and clans within Rome. Caius Martius's son, for example, is only referred to as Young Martius. The *praenomen*, like Caius, was more personal and used as a first name. However, in Roman naming convention there were only a handful of names in popular use for *praenomen*, so these names weren't very useful for distinguishing between people. This is the context in which Caius Martius is given the *cognomen* (a nickname that then usually becomes hereditary) of "Coriolanus." Thus, the deed for which he is given the name, conquering Corioles, becomes his defining characteristic – it becomes the essence of himself, and the new name seems to lead him in the transition from human to unfeeling, unhuman hero as explored in the Heroism vs. Humanity theme. Yet Coriolanus, who is inept when it comes to language, has no idea of the power that names carry. Coriolanus tries to spare a man from the city of Corioles, for example, but he cannot because he forgets the man's name. The casual unimportance of that Volscian's name in all likelihood leads to his death. Likewise, Coriolanus seems unaware that for Volscians, his new surname is a constant reminder of the way he ravaged their city, an insult added to injury that helps push them to turn on him and murder him.

WAR, VIOLENCE, AND MASCULINITY

What Coriolanus lacks in voice and language ability, he makes up for in military might and a gift for violence. In Cominius's masterful oration mentioned in the Language theme, we learn that as a sixteen-year-old boy, young, beardless Caius Martius fought against the bearded men supporting a dictator. When he might have "act[ed] the woman," he became a man. Since then, he has fought in seventeen battles, until he became a "thing of blood" and entered and captured the entire city of Corioles. It is for this magnificent, bloody deed that he earns the title of Coriolanus. The **wounds** he receives in this battle are viewed by his mother, Volumnia, as a commodity. She even urges him to show his wounds, evidence of his violent deeds, in order to better convince the common people to vote for him to be Consul. In other words, it's military excellence and violence (both enacting and receiving it) that lends Coriolanus his credibility, and by the end of the play, his military force is so great that it even threatens to conquer Rome itself.

As seen in Cominius's speech, violence is intimately tied to masculinity – it is what distinguishes a man from a woman or a boy. Cominius uses "acting the woman" to present what's considered the cowardly path, and when Aufidius calls Coriolanus "boy" it is taken as a final, outrageous insult. And not only are violence and war tied to masculinity, they also tie individual men together. It's through violence that we see male homosocial bonding. In other words, violence is what creates and defines the social relationships between men in the play. Upon seeing general Cominius (his ally) on the battlefield, for example, Coriolanus says he wants to hold the general in his arms like when he wooed, as happy to see the general as he was on his wedding day.

Another example is between Coriolanus and Aufidius, who have a fierce military rivalry. As fierce as it is (they have sworn to fight in hand-to-hand combat each time they meet in war), they are bound and brought together by this rivalry, with a

rhetoric in which violence and war are replacements for love and marriage. When Coriolanus has been banished from Rome and goes to see Aufidius, Aufidius greets his formal rival by saying that he wants to take him in his arms, even going as far to say that he is happier to see Coriolanus than he was to first see his wife cross the threshold on his wedding day. The ties between Coriolanus and Aufidius and between male soldiers in general blur the lines between war and sexuality. Violence is at once a bloody cleaver and a homosocial twine, and passions for one's allies and even for enemies seem to outweigh passions for one's lover.

FAMILY AND FEMININITY

While Coriolanus is the epitome of violent masculinity, and he has strong homosocial bonds with both allied and enemy soldiers, the play also explores his ties to his family, which is mostly comprised of female figures. Many Shakespeare plays feature characters whose mothers are conspicuously absent, a sort of missing mother trope. Coriolanus, on the other hand, has no mention of a father, but he has the mother of all mothers, Volumnia, and he also has a wife Virgilia, who is mother to their child Young Martius.

Virgilia is depicted as the silent, supportive wife. When Volumnia hopes that Coriolanus has **wounds** (mentioned in the above theme), Virgilia hopes that he isn't hurt. However, Coriolanus's most profound connection is probably to his mother Volumnia, who exhibits maternal pride, but also maternal possessiveness. It was Volumnia who pushed Coriolanus to go to war as a sixteen-year-old boy, and throughout the play she stakes the claim that she framed him and made him what he is. During the political process, she constantly gives him directions, tells him to swallow his pride, and acts like an early modern stage mother. It's because of this intense relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus that the play is often read through a Freudian, psychoanalytic lens. The Freudian reading is strengthened when Volumnia explains the strength of her connection with Coriolanus, saying: "There's no man in the world more bound to [his] mother." Earlier in the play, when Volumnia tells Virgilia to be happy that Coriolanus is at war, the strange Oedipal undertones are made even more explicit: she says, "If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honor than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love." Not only does Volumnia here reinforce the notion (from the Violence theme) that the battlefield is a replacement for the field of love, but she also imagines herself married and in bed with her son. (Freud's famous psychoanalytic idea of the Oedipus complex refers to the Greek hero who killed his father and married his mother.)

The other psychoanalytical, Freudian aspect of the play is an interesting reversal of the "family romance." The family romance is a complex described by Freud in which a child fantasizes that her parents are not *actually* her parents. Typically, a lower-class child believes her real parents are actually of higher rank and status. When Coriolanus is leading the Volscian army to conquer Rome, his family tries to convince him to spare the city—and in her speech, Volumnia denies Coriolanus, in a reversal of the family romance. Instead of the child imagining different parents, Volumnia says that Coriolanus must have some other, Volscian family, since she, Virgilia, and young Martius are not his real family. It's this brutal denial and disavowing of Coriolanus and the ensuing silence that forces him to abandon the invasion. He responds with "O mother, mother! What have you done?" reclaiming his role in the family. But in accepting this role (and, as we'll see in the following theme, in finally being humanized), Coriolanus also knows that he accepts a likely death.

Family, then, is both formative and destructive in the play. It is the source of an enduring bond, able to reach Coriolanus even when he is most alienated from Rome, but it can also create a bond that is *too* close, like the strange Oedipal dynamic between Coriolanus and his mother. Virgilia's role as a mostly silent woman is aligned with the Renaissance ideal of a wife, and seems safe. Volumnia, on the other hand, breaks that ideal, and though she destroys her son, her form of femininity ultimately outlasts Coriolanus and his violent masculinity, and she becomes (again, as we'll see in the following theme) a new kind of hero.

HEROISM VS. HUMANITY

Coriolanus also explores the questions of what makes someone a hero, and whether or not one can be both a hero and a real human. Coriolanus is a man of immense pride, and he is fatally attached to his Roman values. He is uncompromising in his values, and he believes politics and acting are lying and dishonest, so he refuses to take part in them. In this way, Coriolanus is similar to Julius Caesar, who is killed just after explaining that he wishes he could be convinced to change his opinion like other men. Caesar, though, says he is as "constant as the Northern Star," meaning he is unshakeable in his values, more so than any human. Coriolanus, too, is unshakeable, and he refuses to beg or to play the political part, so he is banished from Rome. He tries to pretend to love the common people as instructed by his mother, but when the tribunes call him a traitor, Coriolanus becomes infuriated. His passion for the city and his tremendous pride are so great that he cannot help revealing his true self and his contempt for the commoners.

Given Coriolanus's pride and ideals, it makes sense that his heroism is also one of solitude and individuality. He fights by himself on the battlefield, and there only for honor, glory, and Rome. When the other soldiers abandon him in Corioles to loot, he captures the city singlehandedly. In the War, Violence, and

Masculinity theme, we saw how Menenius's speech outlines Coriolanus becoming a man in battle, then eventually a "thing of **blood**." By the end of the speech, Coriolanus has become a "planet." Coriolanus is a hero, but throughout the play he is described as more than human—as a "thing of blood," a "planet," a "god," a "thing made by some deity other than nature," an "engine." Heroism in the play is thus defined as contradictory to humanity. A hero is a thing or a machine, something un-natural and unhuman. Coriolanus becomes a sort of unfeeling, heroic, early-modern Terminator.

It's only when he is confronted by his family that he compromises his values and changes his mind, thereby both being humanized and losing his power as a hero. As seen in the Family and Femininity theme, Volumnia forces Coriolanus to accept his role in the family. Rather than a god or a machine, he is a man bound to his mother and to his family. He is humanized and made mortal once more. But Aufidius instantly takes advantage of Coriolanus's humanization and new mortality. Aufidius, too, calls Coriolanus a traitor, and sets the Volscians on Coriolanus to tear him into pieces. Becoming human seals his fate. And with his humanity, Coriolanus loses his status of heroism along with his life.

At the end of the play, it's Volumnia who has saved Rome, Volumnia who "is worth of consuls, senators, patricians, a city full;" Volumnia who is the hero, the "patroness, the life of Rome." And when she and Virgilia are welcomed back into the cities, it's as "ladies." Volumnia then has become a new kind of hero, able to preserve her humanity by means of femininity. While Coriolanus had to use his violence (read masculinity) to be a hero, thereby becoming more machine than man, Volumnia was able to save Rome by using language and reinforcing her femininity, her role as a family member, and her humanity.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HUNGER, FOOD, AND CANNIBALISM

Hunger and food are immediately introduced as the crucial driving force of the riots that open the play: the people are hungry and they demand corn, mirroring food revolts from Shakespeare's own time. And as soon as hunger is introduced, a citizen must clarify that the people are hungry only for food and not for revenge, showing that food and hunger can represent both the literal and figurative desires of the common people. In contrast, the language of gluttony and excess is used to describe the aristocracy. Food in the play is thus equated with power and control, with the plebeians being hungry and the patricians being gluttonous. This idea is also illustrated when Menenius describes the "body politic," as he calls the Roman Senate the belly that gathers and then distributes food to the other **body parts**.

As the play becomes more and more **bloody**, food is also used to describe acts of violence. When Coriolanus enters battle for a second time, Cominius says he is coming to a "feast having fully dined before." Finally, the power struggle becomes so intense and the hunger of the people so strong that they figuratively "devour" Coriolanus himself, totally consuming his life (and power) when they banish him from Rome.

BODY PARTS

The renaissance trope of the "body politic" (an analogy comparing various parts of a nation to various body parts) is used throughout the play to describe the political relationship between the government and the governed. As important as the whole body is to the play, even more emphasized are various different body parts. Numerous body parts are mentioned throughout the play, like lips, chins, eyes, knees, mouths, tongues, feet, arms, teeth, stomachs, eyes, and hearts. The citizens are described as the hands of the tribunes, for example, and the tribunes as the tongues of the people. In cases like this one, body parts are used to analogize relationships, often in reference to the body politic as a whole. Coriolanus himself is characterized as a diseased foot that must be amputated from Rome. But the sheer number of body parts referenced in the play leads to a fragmentation effect, where the body is broken up into bits and pieces, representing the divided city of Rome and the common people (who are thus not so "common" after all). The citizens have a diverse set of opinions and are even called "fragments" by Coriolanus. At the same time, they are characterized as a many-headed multitude, a grotesque body with excessive parts. This fragmentation also has the threat of being made literal, as dismemberment is a very real possibility in war, and both Brutus and Coriolanus face the threat of literally being torn into pieces.

WOUNDS AND BLOOD

Given the play's obsession with **body parts** and its heavy investment in violence, it makes sense that wounds and blood are another important symbol. Blood represents family and passion, but mostly it relates to violence. Coriolanus is so deadly in war that he gets covered with blood from head to toe and becomes "a thing of blood." This blood is mostly from his enemies, but Coriolanus's passion for violence is so great that when he spills his own blood, he says it's medicinal to him rather than dangerous.

The wounds from which blood pours are accrued during violent episodes, and they become physical reminders of valiant feats and of risks one has taken for one's country. At one point in the play, Volumnia and Menenius meticulously count each wound

that Coriolanus has received, because in the political sphere wounds are treated like a commodity. The more wounds someone has, the more honorable and worthy they are perceived to be. Cominius, for example, uses his wounds to remind the common people of his credibility, and Coriolanus's wounds are constantly the topic of public debate. One of the reasons he is banished is that he refuses to publicly show his wounds to the people as is customary, demonstrating that the wounds (and thus the violence associated with them) don't fully belong to him; they also belong to Rome itself.

VOICES

As explained in the Language and Names theme, voices refer to literal voices and language, to opinions, and to votes, and ultimately they also represent the common people themselves. When Cominius prepares to give a speech, for example, he humbly says "I shall lack voice," and throughout the play different characters shout over each other in public trying to make sure their voices are heard. This struggle to be heard is essentially the struggle of the common people, who have elected tribunes to speak for them. Traditionally, the people must give their voices (votes of approval) to whomever the senate elects as consul, and it's this type of voice that Coriolanus dreads begging for, receives, and ultimately loses. Throughout this process, Coriolanus starts calling the citizens "voices," as to him they are disembodied voices rather than people of consequence. It's this way of thinking, and his desire to remove any power the people's voices carry, that gets Coriolanus banished, suggesting that it's dangerous to undervalue commoners and their voices. At the same time, the common people are shown to be extremely fickle, giving and then revoking their votes, and then later claiming that they were forced into banishing Coriolanus. Thus, the notion the people are just disembodied voices is both supported and challenged by the play.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Coriolanus* published in 2009.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

Related Characters: Roman Citizens (speaker), Menenius Agrippa

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.1.87-88

Explanation and Analysis

A Roman citizen speaks this line to the nobleman Menenius amidst riots over the current food shortage in Rome. Throughout the play, and in lines like this one, the need for physical food comes to symbolize the power imbalance in Rome between the common people (plebeians) and the ruling class (patricians). Here the citizen cleverly plays with imagery of food and eating, saying that while the people are starving, they are also afraid they will be devoured or eaten up. There is always the potential that the citizens will have to go and fight (and die) in war. The reason the citizens are rioting, though, is that they believe that the ruling class is just as likely to rob them of their lives, or at least keep them powerless and foodless.

The imagery of the patricians eating the plebeians, when taken literally, is one of cannibalism. Cannibalism is usually depicted as savage and unnatural, suggesting that the power dynamic and class structure of Rome is inhumane or less civilized than it appears at first glance. Such an argument could be social commentary by Shakespeare on class divisions and the balance of power in a government, or just apt criticism on the part of the citizen speaking the line.

There was a time when all the body's members
Rebelled against the belly, thus accused it:
That only like a gulf it did remain
I' th' midst o' th' body, idle and unactive,
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
Like labor with the rest, where th' other instruments
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
And, mutually participate, did minister
Unto the appetite and affection common
Of the whole body.
...
The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members. For examine
Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
Touching the weal o' th' common, you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you
And no way from yourselves.

Related Characters: Menenius Agrippa (speaker), Roman Citizens

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.1.98-163

Explanation and Analysis

Menenius tells this fable of the belly during the food riots in order to placate the rebellious citizens and convince them that the power structures in place are actually just and in their favor. In the fable, he invokes the "body politic," a political analogy in which a government is described as a physical body; the king or ruler is the head, and other parts of the country and those governed are different body parts.

Showing that he is a masterful orator, Menenius adapts the body politic to address the current political dilemma and the specific needs of the people. He substitutes the belly for the head and makes it the ruler of the body. In doing so, he is careful to describe the common people as "mutinous members," fighting against the body and thereby preventing Roman society from operating as it properly should. The accusations against the belly are ones made against the patricians of Rome, suggesting that they reap all the benefits without doing the work.

The citizens suggest that the division of the classes is unjust. But Menenius argues that the patricians control power and the literal food for the city in order to serve the best interests of the citizens. All the body's food flows into the belly and then outward to the different parts; likewise, all of the food (and power and other benefits) in Rome begins with the patricians before being given out to the citizens. While the citizens argue that the patricians have done nothing to deserve their higher status in society, the patricians argue that the citizens do nothing to create (or deserve) the public benefits they receive.

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Volumnia (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus, Virgilia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.3.43-46

Explanation and Analysis

Volumnia speaks these lines to Virgilia, Coriolanus' wife, who is at the time worrying about her husband off at war. While Virgilia hopes Coriolanus is not injured and the war ends soon, Volumnia is obsessed with the glory and political advancement her son can win in battle. In these lines, she forms a haunting, vivid image and shows that she privileges bloodshed and warfare above motherhood and femininity.

Volumnia references the Greek myth about the Trojan War; Hector was a Trojan prince and his mother was named Hecuba. Volumnia asserts that the image of Hecuba breast feeding Hector isn't as beautiful (lovely) as the image of Hector's forehead gushing blood as he dies. This strange image comparing two body fluids (milk and blood) is one of the first indications of how blood and wounds are given priority over life, of how Volumnia is more concerned with war and glory than with traditional motherhood, and of how Volumnia's relationship with Coriolanus is so strange. While through most of the play violence is associated with masculinity and male bonding, here Volumnia is able to feminize violence with her intense juxtaposition.

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

MENENIUS: Is he not
wounded? He was wont to come home wounded.
VIRGILIA: O no, no, no!
VOLUMNIA: O, he is wounded, I thank the gods for 't.
MENENIUS: So do I too, if it be not too much. Brings he victory in his pocket, the wounds become him.

Related Characters: Volumnia, Virgilia, Menenius Agrippa (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.1.122-127

Explanation and Analysis

Menenius, Virgilia, and Volumnia have this exchange upon learning that Coriolanus is returning from war. Virgilia is a worried wife, and so she hopes that her husband has not been injured. But Menenius and Volumnia understand that in Rome, wounds are a political commodity. As long as Coriolanus isn't wounded "too much" and really in danger of dying, then every wound he collects is a symbol of his

victory and his service to Rome. In the dialogue that follows, Menenius and Volumnia are so obsessed with these wounds that they try and count the number of scars Coriolanus has, all in name of Coriolanus' honor, glory, and political career.

Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

I shall lack voice. The deeds of Coriolanus
Should not be uttered feebly.
...
At sixteen years,
When Tarquin made a head for Rome, he fought
Beyond the mark of others. Our then dictator,
Whom with all praise I point at, saw him fight
When with his Amazonian chin he drove
The bristled lips before him. He bestrid
An o'erpressed Roman and i' th' Consul's view
Slew three opposers. Tarquin's self he met
And struck him on his knee. In that day's feats,
When he might act the woman in the scene,
He proved best man i' th' field and for his meed
Was brow-bound with the oak. His pupil age
Man-entered thus, he waxèd like a sea,
And in the brunt of seventeen battles since
He lurched all swords of the garland.

Related Characters: Cominius (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.2.98-117

Explanation and Analysis

Cominius delivers this speech to the Roman senators and tribunes in order to explain Coriolanus' most recent valiant deeds in the battle at Corioles. He starts with a rhetorical move called *humility topos*, or feigned humility, in which the speaker pretends to be a terrible orator. This type of gesture might be compared to Marc Antony's famous funeral speech in another Roman Shakespeare play, *Julius Caesar*.

After this introduction, in which he establishes (by denying) his rhetorical prowess, Cominius describes how Coriolanus first entered war at the age of a boy while Rome fought to expel the dictator Tarquin. "Amazonian chin" implies that Coriolanus had a youthful, beardless chin by referring to the mythical female Amazon warriors. While fighting bravely is called "prov[ing] best man" and exhibiting cowardice is acting "the woman in the scene," the evocation of the Amazon warriors adds hints of femininity to the stereotypically masculine field of war.

The mention of numerous body parts in this scene contributes to the play's compounding list, all of which together create a fragmentation effect that symbolizes both the fractured political landscape of Rome and the very real threat of dismemberment. It's also of note that as Coriolanus becomes more and more heroic, he starts figuratively transforming from a man to something more; here he starts as a boy and is then described as an entire "sea."

Before and in Corioles, let me say,
I cannot speak him home. He stopped the flyers
And by his rare example made the coward
Turn terror into sport. As weeds before
A vessel under sail, so men obeyed
And fell below his stem. His sword, Death's stamp,
Where it did mark, it took; from face to foot
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was timed with dying cries. Alone he entered
The mortal gate o' th' city, which he painted
With shunless destiny; aidless came off
And with a sudden reinforcement struck
Corioles like a planet.

Related Characters: Cominius (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.2.118-130

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt is the second half of Cominius' speech to the Roman senators and tribunes explaining Coriolanus' valiant deeds in Corioles. In the first half, Cominius described how Coriolanus started fighting wars when he was only a boy. The second half focuses on the most recent battle, the events of which are so unbelievable that Cominius "cannot speak" about them properly. It's also of note that "I cannot speak him home" emphasizes Coriolanus' isolation and foreshadows his banishment and exile from Rome.

"The flyers" Cominius refers to are cowards who were fleeing from battle. According to the speech, Coriolanus

was so exemplary and heroic on the battle field that these cowards were turned into brave soldiers. Coriolanus is so masterful in war that his sword is compared to death's stamp, and he's so violent that he becomes "a thing of blood." This marks another step in his transition from mere human to something more. He is a "thing," not a person, suggesting that heroism requires one to lose or sacrifice one's humanity.

Again, Coriolanus' isolation is emphasized with "alone he entered" the city, and again Coriolanus is described as something more than human. By the end of the speech, Coriolanus has moved from "pupil age" to "man" to "like a sea" to "a thing of blood" to "like a planet." Coriolanus is so heroic that he starts sounding less like a human and more like a god, and his new name "Coriolanus" makes these valiant deeds and this elevated status his new identity.

Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

❝ We have power in ourselves to do it, but
it is a power that we have no power to do; for, if
he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we
are to put our tongues into those wounds and
speak for them. So, if he tell us his noble deeds, we
must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.
Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to
be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude,
of the which, we being members, should
bring ourselves to be monstrous members.

Related Characters: Roman Citizens (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.3.4-13

Explanation and Analysis

A Roman citizen speaks these lines in a public debate about whether the common people should give Coriolanus their voices (votes) for the position of consul. He claims that they have the power to deny Coriolanus the votes, meaning that the requirement for approval of the common people is a hard-fought right they have earned which grants them the ability to deny Coriolanus the position of consul.

At the same time, they don't really have the power to deny him (claims the citizen), because they have an obligation to him due to his military service to Rome. This service is symbolized by Coriolanus' wounds; if he shows the wounds to the common people, they must figuratively put their "tongues into those wounds and speak for them," meaning vote for them. Likewise, if Coriolanus chronicles his valiant deeds, the people must accept him. The wounds and the deeds then belong both to Coriolanus and to the people and the city.

The citizens don't want to be ungrateful, since that would equate them to being a monstrous (many-headed) multitude, a characterization which they despise. "Members" means people in a group, but it also means body parts, showing that the citizens use the body politic to understand themselves and their relationship to Rome and to each other. If they have too many conflicting opinions, then they are like a body with too many heads, and if they are too ungrateful or dishonorable they stop being a normal body and become a monster.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

❝ For
The mutable, rank-scented meiny, let them
Regard me, as I do not flatter, and
Therein behold themselves. I say again,
In soothing them, we nourish 'gainst our senate
The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have plowed for, sowed, and
scattered
By mingling them with us, the honored number,
Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that
Which they have given to beggars.

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus (speaker), Roman Citizens, Sicinius Velutus, Junius Brutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.87.97

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus has received the votes of the people, but he has just been informed by the tribunes that the citizens have revoked their approval. Here he speaks in fury, calling the common people a fickle ("mutable"), disgusting ("rank-scented") multitude ("meiny"). Since Coriolanus refuses to flatter or to say anything he doesn't mean, he tells the common people that they can use his opinion to know what they are truly are.

He then goes on to espouse his political opinion: Coriolanus believes that Rome functions because of the rigid social structure and power dynamics in place. By giving in to the desires of the common people – nourishing them both figuratively and literally by giving them free corn – Coriolanus believes that the patricians are sowing the seeds of rebellion. In other words, giving into the demands of the people only makes the nobles weaker and makes the citizens more likely to ask for more. Not only is such a practice impractical, but to Coriolanus it is also dishonorable and unnatural.

His nature is too noble for the world.
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident
Or Jove for 's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth;
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent,
And, being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of death.

Related Characters: Menenius Agrippa (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.326-332

Explanation and Analysis

Menenius says this of Coriolanus after Coriolanus furiously lambasted the common people when they recanted their votes. Coriolanus' adherence to strict, classic Roman virtues is beyond practical, and hence he is "too noble for the world." He won't compromise his values or change his mind no matter what. Menenius illustrates this stubbornness by saying that Coriolanus wouldn't even flatter gods for their supernatural powers.

Part of the reason Coriolanus won't flatter is that he finds it dishonorable and despicable. But Menenius also drives at the other reason Coriolanus won't flatter or speak kindly to the people: he can't. "His heart's his mouth," meaning his heart speaks directly what he feels. He lacks the ability to use language as a tool to obscure his true intentions. He has to immediately say whatever he thinks, and he's so brave that whenever he becomes angry, he speaks his mind without any fear of death or some other repercussion. Ironically, the very things that make Coriolanus such a valiant soldier and honorable person also make him a terrible politician.

SICINIUS: He's a disease that must be cut away.
MENENIUS: O, he's a limb that has but a disease—
Mortal to cut it off; to cure it easy.
What has he done to Rome that's worthy death?
Killing our enemies, the blood he hath lost—
Which I dare vouch is more than that he hath
By many an ounce—he dropped it for his country;
And what is left, to lose it by his country
Were to us all that do 't and suffer it
A brand to th' end o' th' world.

Related Characters: Menenius Agrippa , Sicinius Velutus (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.378-87

Explanation and Analysis

Sicinius and Menenius have this exchange after Coriolanus responded in fury to the citizens retracting their votes. The tribunes and citizens want to execute Coriolanus, and Menenius is attempting to use his language skills to placate them and to save Coriolanus' life and political career. Sicinius characterizes Coriolanus as a disease that is killing Rome and therefore must be excised.

Menenius relates this imagery back to the body politic and characterizes Coriolanus as a diseased limb in order to emphasize that while Coriolanus might be problematic, he is still a necessary part of Rome. Menenius argues that amputating the limb (killing Coriolanus) would be deadly to Rome (since he is such an important part of their military), but curing the disease (compromising) would make Rome healthy again. The threat of amputation emphasizes the fragmentation within Rome, and the tribunes' disregard for Rome's wellbeing emphasizes that they are just out to gain their own power.

Menenius also makes an argument similar to the reason the citizens felt compelled to vote for Coriolanus. He has shed much of his own blood (even more than in his body at one time, Menenius guesses) all in military service for Rome. Therefore, if Rome were to kill Coriolanus it would be ungrateful and shameful, a mark of dishonor upon the city that would last even to the end of the world.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

MENENIUS: Return to th' Tribunes.
CORIOLANUS: Well, what then? What then?
MENENIUS: Repent what you have spoke.
CORIOLANUS: For them? I cannot do it to the gods.
Must I then do 't to them?
VOLUMNIA: You are too absolute,
Though therein you can never be too noble
But when extremities speak.

Related Characters: Volumnia, Caius Martius / Coriolanus, Menenius Agrippa (speaker), Junius Brutus , Sicinius Velutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.2.46-3

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place after Menenius gets the tribunes to agree to give Coriolanus a trial instead of just executing him. Menenius and Volumnia are trying to instruct Coriolanus on how to rectify the situation and salvage his political career. They believe that if he returns to the tribunes and apologizes for his previous outburst he might still become consul, possibly showing that Menenius and Volumnia's ambition blinds them to the reality that the tribunes are conspiring against Coriolanus and will do anything to prevent his election.

Coriolanus again outlines his limitations with language. It's not just that he won't flatter or apologize, it's that he cannot, due to both his lack of ability and his steadfast adherence to his values. For this reason, his mother says that he is "too absolute," and, like Menenius said earlier, "too noble." While Coriolanus seems to represent a romanticized, sometimes dangerous "all-or-nothing" adherence to Roman virtues, Menenius and Volumnia (and other figures in the play like the tribunes and Aufidius) understand that politics require a more practical approach.

For in such business
Action is eloquence, and the eyes of th' ignorant
More learnèd than the ears—waving thy head,
Which often thus correcting thy stout heart,
Now humble as the ripest mulberry
That will not hold the handling. Or say to them
Thou art their soldier and, being bred in broils,
Hast not the soft way, which thou dost confess
Were fit for thee to use as they to claim,
In asking their good loves; but thou wilt frame
Thyself, forsooth, hereafter theirs, so far
As thou hast power and person.

Related Characters: Volumnia (speaker), Roman Citizens, Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.2.94-105

Explanation and Analysis

Volumnia speaks these lines to Coriolanus while counseling him on how to speak to the tribunes and the people to save his political career. Like an early-modern stage mother, she tells him exactly what to say, what to wear, and how to wave his head and his hat. Coriolanus has said numerous times that he prefers action over words. Here, Volumnia (with masterful language of her own) shows Coriolanus that in politics, action *is* speech, or "action is eloquence." This means both that speech is an act, and that the ignorant citizens place more emphasis on what they see (like hand gestures) than what they hear.

Coriolanus might make the (true) excuse that he grew up fighting wars and therefore lacks the language ability the public might want in a consul. Regardless, he must "frame [him]self," meaning change his disposition and act like he is a man of the people, or, put simply, he needs to keep it together. Framing here is akin to political posturing, which is exactly what Coriolanus finds so dishonest, despicable, and (for him) impossible. Shakespeare also often uses framing or molding imagery to convey the way fathers shape their daughters, and later Volumnia will say that she framed Coriolanus to convey ownership over him.

To beg of thee, it is my more dishonor
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin. Let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list.
Thy valiantness was mine; thou suck'st it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself.

Related Characters: Volumnia (speaker), Roman Citizens, Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.2.150-158

Explanation and Analysis

Volumnia speaks these lines to Coriolanus, after he refuses to play politics and apologize to the citizens and tribunes. While Coriolanus refuses to do so on the grounds that it would dishonor him, she claims that it would be even more dishonorable for a mother to beg from a son. Volumnia suggests (as the tribunes have argued) that Coriolanus' stubborn adherence to his values (his "dangerous stoutness") is prideful – it's excessive nobleness that therefore becomes ignoble.

Volumnia calls into question whether Coriolanus' heroism and strict Roman virtue is genuine, and at the same time she claims ownership over Coriolanus and his best attributes. She says that all of his bravery and "valiantness" came from her; he "suck'st it from [her]" while breast feeding. This imagery recalls the reference Volumnia made to Hecuba breast feeding Hector, and it reinforces the idea that for Volumnia motherhood and violence are intertwined. While she claims ownership over her son's bravery, she also denies responsibility for the stubbornness and pride that ultimately isolate and ruin Coriolanus.

Act 3, Scene 3 Quotes

The fires i' th' lowest hell fold in the people!
Call me their traitor? Thou injurious tribune!
Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,
In thy hands clutched as many millions, in
Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say
"Thou liest" unto thee with a voice as free
As I do pray the gods.

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus (speaker), Roman Citizens, Sicinius Velutus, Junius Brutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.3.89-95

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus speaks these lines in a fury after the tribunes publicly call him a traitor. This is one of the moments in which Coriolanus most clearly expresses his hatred for the common people, saying that they can all go to hell. Though he has promised to speak "mildly," the tribunes were easily able to rile him up by accusing him of the one thing so contrary to his identity – treason to Rome. Coriolanus has shown that he values his Roman virtue above his life itself, so the accusation of treason enrages him.

Coriolanus simultaneously gives weight to his own voice while discrediting the voices of the tribunes. By evoking the body politic and different body parts to represent the common people in mass numbers – "twenty thousand deaths," a "million" in the tributes "hands," both numbers combined in their "lying tongue" – Coriolanus claims that no matter how many plebeians support the tribunes, their voices will still be meaningless. At the same time, Coriolanus reassures the tribunes (and the public) that his voice expresses his genuine opinion, by emphasizing that he is speaking as freely as he does when praying.

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek o' th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you!
And here remain with your uncertainty;
Let every feeble rumor shake your hearts;
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
Fan you into despair! Have the power still
To banish your defenders, till at length
Your ignorance—which finds not till it feels,
Making but reservation of yourselves,
Still your own foes—deliver you
As most abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows! Despising
For you the city, thus I turn my back.
There is a world elsewhere.

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus (speaker), Roman Citizens

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.3.150-165

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt comes from Coriolanus' final public speech after being banished from Rome. He calls the people a pack ("cry") of dogs ("curs") and, like the tribunes did earlier in the play – see "stinking breaths" at 2.1.262 – he characterizes their opinions as bad ("rotten") breath. While he is banished for being a figurative disease to Rome, Coriolanus maintains that it is the citizens who are corrupting and rotten.

Not only are they corrupting him, he claims, but they also corrupt themselves. Coriolanus points out what Menenius tried to warn the citizens: in banishing Coriolanus, they get rid of one of their strongest defenders, rendering them vulnerable to invasion and to winding up "captives to some nation" that might take over Rome. The citizens are so corrupting that they even get Coriolanus to hate Rome, the city he has so long valued above his own life. When Coriolanus turns his back on his city and admits "there is a world elsewhere," he turns his back on a key part of his identity; his Roman-ness has been stripped from him or eaten away.

Act 4, Scene 2 Quotes

Anger's my meat. I sup upon myself
And so shall starve with feeding.
Come, let's go.
Leave this faint puling, and lament as I do,
In anger, Juno-like. Come, come, come.

Related Characters: Volumnia (speaker), Virgilia, Caius Martius / Coriolanus, Sicinius Velutus, Junius Brutus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.2.68-72

Explanation and Analysis

Volumnia speaks these lines to Menenius after an angry interaction with the tribunes in which Volumnia lamented her son's banishment. Menenius asks her to dinner, but she refuses, saying that she feeds on anger and will "sup upon" herself. Here Volumnia brings the play's eating imagery to the (auto)cannibalistic level. She is so furious that she will eat herself. However, this is a self-sustaining feeding. Part of what makes her so powerful is that she cannot be devoured. Rather than allowing grief or rage to consume her (like the Renaissance's stereotype of a woman), she uses her emotions practically as a never-ending source of fuel.

Volumnia says "come, let's go," to Virgilia and tries to instruct Coriolanus' wife on how to best handle her emotions in the wake of Coriolanus' banishment. Rather than just being sad, Virgilia should act like the goddess Juno and become filled with anger, which can be harnessed and used "to better vantage" (3.2.38). Invoking the goddess Juno is a perfect inversion of the stereotype of the hysterical woman, suggesting a theme of female empowerment. If used properly, emotions can be food and fuel, not disqualifications or hindrances.

Act 4, Scene 5 Quotes

My name is Caius Martius, who hath done
To thee particularly and to all the Volsces
Great hurt and mischief; thereto witness may
My surname Coriolanus. The painful service,
The extreme dangers, and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country are requited
But with that surname, a good memory
And witness of the malice and displeasure
Which thou shouldst bear me. Only that name
remains.

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus (speaker), Roman Citizens, Tullus Aufidius

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.5.73-82

Explanation and Analysis

After being banished from Rome, Coriolanus goes in disguise to Aufidius' house in Antium. He takes off his disguise, but Aufidius doesn't recognize him, so he reveals himself by name in this speech. To the Volscians, the surname "Coriolanus" is a reminder of all the awful things he has done in wars against them. "Caius" and "Martius" connect Coriolanus to Rome, to his family, and to the humanity he had before becoming fully realized as a non-feeling hero, but since he has become disjointed his country and family and lost his humanity, he is now only Coriolanus,

the "thing," the "machine," the "planet." "Only that name" and that thing remains.

Coriolanus also underscores the ungrateful ("thankless") nature that the people feared they'd show and that Menenius argued against. For all of his wounds and blood shed for the country, more than enough political currency to win him the position of consul, Coriolanus has received only exile, hatred, and a new name in return. Though he realizes the name is not pleasing to the Volscians, he has no idea of the power names has and just how much they hate him for using that name.

O Martius, Martius,
Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart
A root of ancient envy.
...
Let me twine
Mine arms about that body, whereagainst
My grainèd ash an hundred times hath broke
And scarred the moon with splinters.
...
Know thou first,
I loved the maid I married; never man
Sighed truer breath. But that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold.

Related Characters: Tullus Aufidius (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.5.111-131

Explanation and Analysis

Aufidius speaks these lines after his rival Coriolanus reveals himself and his intention to seek vengeance on Rome for his banishment. Though Aufidius calls him "Martius" instead of "Coriolanus," the Volscian general is extremely pleased to see his Roman rival. Like in the reunion with Cominius earlier in the play, the men share an embrace. The military nature of their relationship is emphasized with a pun on "arms," which means both arms on the body and weapons. The intense male bond between soldiers is also characterized by comparison to feminine and familial relationships. Reuniting with Coriolanus, Aufidius says, is even more pleasurable than the marriage bond with his wife. Saying that he loves Coriolanus "hotly" suggests a possible sexual connotation to their masculine bond. It's also of note that Aufidius calls Coriolanus a "noble thing," showing both that Aufidius respects Coriolanus' nobility and that he recognizes that Coriolanus is more than just a man.

Act 4, Scene 6 Quotes

He is their god; he leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than Nature,
That shapes man better; and they follow him
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies
Or butchers killing flies.

Related Characters: Cominius (speaker), Junius Brutus , Sicinius Velutus, Menenius Agrippa , Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.6.115-120

Explanation and Analysis

Cominius speaks these lines about Coriolanus after news reaches Rome that Coriolanus has joined forces with the Volscians and is invading Roman territory. Cominius describes how fully Coriolanus has transformed from human to something more than human. He is now a "god" or an unnatural "thing" that is superior to humans. Meanwhile, without Coriolanus the Roman army is figuratively transformed to "brats." Going even further, Cominius says if the Volscian soldiers are "boys" then the Romans are "summer butterflies," an image that recalls Young Martius playing with and ultimately killing a butterfly earlier in the play. "Butcher" emphasizes the blood that Coriolanus and his new army will shed, while the Romans are finally reduced to flies. Thus, Cominius describes the coming invasion as the battle between a god and a fly, heightening the drama (since Rome could legitimately be destroyed) and criticizing the tribunes (since they brought this on themselves by banishing Coriolanus).

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

Yet one time he did call me by my name.
I urged our old acquaintance, and the drops
That we have bled together. "Coriolanus"
He would not answer to, forbade all names.
He was a kind of nothing, titleless,
Till he had forged himself a name o' th' fire
Of burning Rome.

Related Characters: Cominius (speaker), Menenius Agrippa , Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.1.10-16

Explanation and Analysis

These lines are excerpted from Cominius' explanation of what happened when he went to the Volscian camp to try to convince Coriolanus not to invade Rome. Cominius invoked the battles the two had fought and the blood they had shed together – markers of the strong homosocial bond between two soldiers ("our old acquaintance") – but Coriolanus wouldn't answer to his name. He is now titleless and has no name, and he will remain nameless until he wins himself a new name in defeating Rome, just like he did in Corioles.

To Aufidius and the Volscians, Coriolanus said that only his new name remained, but now he has moved beyond any human identifier. He has become "nothing," since his entire identity was tied to Rome, from which he is now completely alienated. Coriolanus' namelessness is indicative of his utter loss of humanity and identity.

Act 5, Scene 3 Quotes

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 honor. Say my request's unjust
And spurn me back; but if it be not so,
Thou art not honest, and the gods will plague thee
That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
To a mother's part belongs.

Related Characters: Volumnia (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.3.180-190

Explanation and Analysis

Volumnia speaks these lines in a lengthy speech to her son. At the time, she is the last hope of Rome to stop Coriolanus from destroying the city. She starts by invoking the intense relationship that they have, even saying that there is no mother/son duo more bonded in the world. Whether she thinks the relationship is healthy or not is unclear, but this line is often used to support Freudian / psychoanalytic readings.

"I' th' stocks" refers to public humiliation. Throughout the play, Volumnia stakes claims of ownership over Coriolanus and his valiant deeds. Now she pushes further, saying not only is she responsible for his greatness, but also that he has never properly appreciated her as is his duty. Like the Roman citizens have a duty to be grateful to Coriolanus for fighting for Rome, he has a familial duty to his mother. Part of the impossibility or the paradox of Coriolanus' position is that he is paralyzed by two conflicting obligations: duty to the Volscian Senators (and to keeping promises he made them) and duty to his mother (and the rest of his family and, through them, Rome).

Volumnia: This fellow had a Volscian to his mother,
His wife is in Corioles, and his child
Like him by chance.—Yet give us our dispatch.
I am hushed until our city be afire,
And then I'll speak a little.
(He holds her by the hand, silent.)
CORIOLANUS: O mother, mother!
What have you done?

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus, Volumnia (speaker), Young Martius, Valeria, Virgilia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.3.200-206

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of Volumnia's speech to Coriolanus and Coriolanus' response. Part of what Volumnia gets at in

her speech (and an idea that pops up throughout the play) is the paradoxical split of duty between family and Rome. When Coriolanus is attacking the city, his family is frozen, since rooting for their family member would mean the destruction of their city, and praying for Rome to survive would mean praying for Coriolanus to be defeated. Volumnia resolves the split of duty between family and Rome by saying that they are dependent on the other. If Coriolanus is not a Roman, then he must not be their family member. Instead, he must have a Volscian mother and a Volscian wife, and Young Martius isn't his real son but merely happens to look like Coriolanus.

After making this profound rejection of her son, Volumnia begins a powerful silence. Throughout the speech Volumnia asks Coriolanus why he won't speak, and just like Coriolanus won't take a name until Rome burns, Volumnia says she won't speak until the city is ablaze. This leaves a vacuum during which Coriolanus reconciles with his family and is finally forced to speak. In reconnecting with his family (and sparing Rome), Coriolanus becomes a husband, son, and father, where he was once a sea, a thing, a planet. He is re-humanized, and therefore becomes vulnerable. His "Mother, mother, what have you done?" comment is followed by a note that she has won a victory for Rome most mortal (read deadly) to her son. Though he has the power to destroy the city, it is a power that he cannot really act upon.

Act 5, Scene 4 Quotes

❝ There is differency between a grub and a butterfly, yet your butterfly was a grub. This Martius is grown from man to dragon. He has wings; he's more than a creeping thing.

…

When he walks, he moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before his treading. He is able to pierce a corslet with his eye, talks like a knell, and his hum is a battery. He sits in his state as a thing made for Alexander. What he bids be done is finished with his bidding. He wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in.

Related Characters: Menenius Agrippa (speaker), Caius Martius / Coriolanus

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.4.11-25

Explanation and Analysis

These lines are filled with dramatic irony, as Menenius speaks them in terror, fearing that Coriolanus will destroy Rome, but audiences know that Coriolanus has just surrendered. The transformation of Martius to Coriolanus is characterized as one from "man to dragon." Menenius also uses the word "engine" to describe Coriolanus, continuing to emphasize that he is a "thing" or a "god" or a machine – some sort of early-modern terminator. It's ironic that the most complete description of Coriolanus' transformation from mere human to a godly, merciless, machinated hero comes only after Coriolanus has been re-humanized by reconciling with his family. This makes Coriolanus' fall more tragic, as audiences are reminded of just how powerful he is (or was) just as he is crashing back to earth.

Act 5, Scene 6 Quotes

❝ AUFIDIUS: Tell the traitor in the highest degree
He hath abused your powers.
CORIOLANUS: "Traitor"? How now?
AUFIDIUS: Ay, traitor, Martius.
CORIOLANUS: Martius?
AUFIDIUS: Ay, Martius, Caius Martius. Dost thou think
I'll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol'n name
Coriolanus, in Corioles?
You lords and heads o' th' state, perfidiously
He has betrayed your business and given up
For certain drops of salt your city Rome—
I say your city—to his wife and mother,
Breaking his oath and resolution like
A twist of rotten silk, never admitting
Counsel o' th' war, but at his nurse's tears
He whined and roared away your victory,
That pages blushed at him and men of heart
Looked wond'ring each at other.
CORIOLANUS: Hear'st thou, Mars?
AUFIDIUS: Name not the god, thou boy of tears.

Related Characters: Tullus Aufidius (speaker), Virgilia, Volumnia, Volscian Senators and Lords

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5.6.101-120

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place when Coriolanus tries to explain

to the Volscian Senators and Lords why he decided to spare the city of Rome. Aufidius shows that he is an adept political operator by using the same trigger that the tribunes did to get Coriolanus enraged in public: they call him a traitor. Ironically, in a way Coriolanus *is* a traitor, both to Rome and to Antium. He fought against Roman armies and killed his own people, making him a traitor to Rome, and he ultimately broke his oath to the Volscian nobles, making him a traitor to them.

Aufidius' refusal to use Coriolanus' surname shows that Aufidius understands the power of naming, something Coriolanus has shown that he does not understand (see forgetting the name of the man he would save in 1.9). Aufidius calls Coriolanus "Martius" in order to rob him of his legitimacy. In un-naming Coriolanus, Aufidius emphasizes the humanity and newfound vulnerability of his rival. At the same time, he reminds the public of how much they hate Martius, since he wreaked havoc on their families.

Aufidius says that Coriolanus abandoned the war and gave up Rome simply because of the tears of his female family members (Aufidius has shown he thinks of women's emotions much like Coriolanus thinks of plebeian's opinions, so this is meant as an insult). The two have always had a mutual respect and an intense, masculine, homosocial bond formed from their fierce rivalry. Therefore, when Aufidius calls Coriolanus "boy," he is offering the ultimate disrespect and insult and inverting the transformation that Cominius described earlier. Coriolanus started as a boy, went to war, became a man, then became like a "god" or a "planet," only to become a "boy of tears" once more.

> Cut me to pieces, Volsces. Men and lads,
> Stain all your edges on me. "Boy"? False hound!
> If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
> That like an eagle in a dovecote, I
> Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles,
> Alone I did it. "Boy"!

Related Characters: Caius Martius / Coriolanus (speaker), Volscian People, Tullus Aufidius

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.6.133-138

Explanation and Analysis

Coriolanus shouts this in outrage in response to Aufidius' insult (above). It's possible that for Coriolanus, "boy" is the only thing worse than "traitor." It could be argued that in compromising and surrendering on the battlefield, Coriolanus relinquishes his violent masculinity (that which made him a man at the age of 16) and thus becomes a boy once more. To counteract this effect, or to simply argue in fury at Aufidius' assertion, Coriolanus evokes the spectacular military achievement for which he earned the surname Coriolanus. Once more, he is compared to something other than human, choosing to compare himself to an eagle fluttering and devouring Volscians, and once more, the fact that he did so alone adds to both his glory and his isolation.

But Coriolanus is only reminding the friends and family of his victims that he is soaked in Volscian blood, and thus his call to be cut into pieces becomes literal instead of a figurative outcry of frustration. The fragmentation imagery that has been building through the play (all the different body parts underscoring the political divide in Rome and Coriolanus' divided obligations) culminates in literal dismemberment. Without even the chance to fight back (so possibly as a boy), Coriolanus is cut apart from all sides by Aufidius' conspirators. Coriolanus goes from boy to man, from man to god, from god back to man, and then, finally, from man (or merely from boy) to corpse.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

A group of mutinous Roman citizens floods a street in Rome. One calls out to make sure that his fellow people are prepared to die instead of go **hungry**. He names Caius Martius as "chief enemy of the people," and says that the people should kill him so that they can set their own price for corn. The mob shouts out in agreement, but a second citizen speaks out. The first citizen decries the fact that the patricians (aristocrats) are considered substantial while the rest of the citizens are forced to be poor.

The citizens' emphasis on hunger and food is a departure from Shakespeare's source material, and it can be seen in parallel with food-based riots in Shakespeare's own time. The mob introduces the tense class divide in Rome. Part of the difference between classes is in resources: the rich have more and the poor have less. But in addition to wanting access to more resources, the citizens also desire a more respected position in society.

The first Roman citizen says that the surplus **food** that the ruling class "surfeits" on would be more than enough to humanely feed the common people and relieve the famine, but the aristocrats find this plan to be too expensive. What's more, the famine that afflicts the lower-class, the citizen argues, is the very means of profit for the aristocrats. Therefore, the citizens should take revenge with pitchforks before they become as lean as rakes. The citizen clarifies that he speaks in hunger for bread, not thirst for revenge.

The word "surfeit" (excess) adds sentiments of gluttony and sin to the tactics of the ruling class, suggesting that the play's moral stance might side with the citizens. The clarification about literal hunger vs. hunger for revenge indicates how hunger will be used in the play to represent both literal and figurative (but often violent) desires.

The second citizen asks if the mob is intent on getting revenge specifically on Caius Martius, even considering the service he has done for Rome. The mob says that they want revenge against Caius Martius first and foremost, since he is an enemy of the common people. The first citizen believes that all Caius Martius's deeds were done for fame. While weak-minded people think Caius Martius served his country, the citizen says, really he only serves his mother and his pride. The second citizen protests that what the first citizen calls "vice" is merely Caius Martius's nature, which is not self-serving in the slightest.

The citizens' political views and fury about the class division are pitted against their respect for honor and heroism. While some would condone Martius' elitism since he is an accomplished Roman soldier, others question if his violent deeds are truly genuine. One point of view holds that Martius is not a hero, since his Roman patriotism is just a ruse to cover pride and vanity, as well as an obligation to his family. His heroism is tied to his masculinity, and the citizen's dig about Martius' mother is another suggestion that he isn't a genuine hero. In this perspective, a hero is defined not just by their deeds, but also by their true motivations (which ought to be service to Rome alone).

Shouts indicate that the other side of the city has risen up in revolt, and the Roman citizens prepare to make for the capitol. Before they can continue, however, the "worthy" Menenius Agrippa, a patrician recognized as a friend to the common people, enters the street. Menenius addresses the citizens as his countrymen and asks them what's the matter and why they are carrying weapons. The second citizen explains that the Roman Senate knows full well what they have been planning and what they are now enacting. The Senate thinks that poor protesters have strong **voices**, and now they'll see that they have strong **arms** as well.

Menenius is one of the few aristocrats trusted by the common people, attempting here to bridge the class divide. The citizens are becoming violent since they are viewed as only having voices, meaning that they are just opinions without substance, and that they are all talk. The use of "arms" is a pun, meaning both weapons and literal arms. The play is filled with references to different body parts, invoking the idea of the "body politic" that Menenius will soon use to pacify the violent citizens.

Speaking colloquially and emphasizing that he is a friend to the common people, Menenius asks why the citizens are undoing themselves. The citizens, though, believe they are already undone. Menenius tries to calm the crowd, saying that the patricians have only the best intentions for the citizens. They should direct all complaints about desires and their suffering in the **famine** to heaven, since it's the gods causing everything, not the Roman state. The common people should take to their **knees** (i.e. pray to the gods) instead of taking up arms against the state. The people, Menenius says, have become carried away, causing them to slander the Roman leaders that are like fathers to the common people, not enemies.

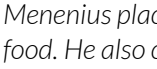
Menenius' colloquial language is carefully chosen to avoid seeming elitist and to reinforce the image of himself as a friend to the citizens. He then shifts the blame for the famine from the ruling class to the gods, relating to the citizens by looking upward to the ultimate ruling class above all humans. He continues to characterize the citizens with reference to body parts (knees) to reinforce his point. He also tries to redefine the political dynamic between the ruling and the ruled as a parental relationship.

The second Roman citizen, though, remains convinced that the patricians are causing the famine, that they support usury (illegally lending money at high interest), and that they prop up themselves and keep the poor suppressed. If the wars don't "**eat** [the common people] up," the citizen claims, the patricians will. Menenius responds that the citizens are either being extremely malicious or foolish, and he offers to better explain the situation with a "pretty tale." On behalf of the mob, the second citizen agrees to listen to the tale, though he tells Menenius that a mere story will not get rid of the people's hardships.

While the common people are hungry for food, they are also afraid that they in turn will be devoured by war. Consumption now refers to literal hunger, to figurative desires like revenge, to dying in war, and to the exploitive relationship of the governors to the governed. Menenius prepares to use words and a "tale" against action, showing how deft political maneuvering in the play is accomplished through language.

Menenius begins his tale of the belly: once there was a time when all of the different **body parts** rebelled against the belly, accusing it of being only a "gulf" in the middle of the body, lying idle and doing nothing. The mutinous body parts claimed that the belly stored all the **food** without doing any of the labor, like walking, seeing, hearing, feeling, or thinking. The second citizen asks for the belly's response, but Menenius drags out the story, characterizing the belly as smiling and taunting. The second citizen presses Menenius for the belly's answer to the mutinous parts, outlining a traditional idea of the "body politic" with "the kingly crownèd head, the vigilant eye, the counselor heart, the arm our soldier, our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter," and he asks Menenius what the belly could possibly say if these other parts complained.

Menenius' tale of the belly invokes the body politic, an analogy used to describe the relationship between ruler and ruled in which the king is the head of the body and the citizens and different aspects of society are different body parts. Menenius' list of body parts shows that there are various roles to play in a functioning society. The body rebelling against itself is then an analogy for the fractured, divided city of Rome. While the rulers are usually the head of the body, Menenius places emphasis on the belly due to the citizens' desire for food. He also carefully keeps them engaged in conversation rather than just orating at them.



After telling the second citizen to be patient, Menenius explains that the belly was deliberate in his answer. The belly responded that it's true that he receives the **food** that the whole body lives on *first*, since he is the storehouse of the body, but he reminds the other parts that he is also responsible for sending that food through the blood to all of the different **body parts**. Even though it isn't always apparent what the belly is doing, everyone lives on the substance he provides to them, while saving only the scraps for himself. The second citizen then asks Menenius how the common people should interpret the belly's answer.

Menenius highlights the role that the belly plays, depicting the other limbs of the body as dependent on it. He does so in order to establish the plebeian class's dependence on the patricians. Any grain surplus of the senate is thus recast as a storehouse that will soon be distributed throughout all of Rome, instead of a hoard of food for the greedy. While part of the political functionality in Rome is below the surface, Menenius insists that it operates in a way that is beneficial to everyone, with the citizens' needs placed above the needs of senators.

Menenius explains that the senators of Rome are the belly, and the Roman citizens are the mutinous **body parts.** The senators "digest things rightly" for the common good, and all public benefits come from the senators, not from the citizens themselves. Menenius calls the second citizen a "toe of this assembly" and asks what he thinks. Menenius clarifies that the citizen is a toe because he is one of the "lowest, basest, poorest of the most wise rebellion," but he leads out in front, hoping to get an advantage.

Menenius explains to the citizens what was outlined in the analysis above, namely that the belly represents the senators, who, he claims, are the sources of all the benefits and goodness in Roman society. Part of the reason this dependence must be established is that the citizens so outnumber the patricians. Calling the rebellion "most wise" is both flattering and sarcastic.

Caius Martius enters and asks what's the matter, calling the common people "dissentious rogues" that "rubbing the poor itch of [their] opinion[s] make [themselves] scabs." The second citizen comments that the people always have Caius Martius's good word, but this sends Caius Martius into a rant. He says that giving good words to the common people is worse than flattery. The common people are dissatisfied with both war and peace, being afraid of war and becoming prideful in peacetime. They cannot be satisfied, and they are extremely fickle and ever changing in their opinions and desires, making them extremely untrustworthy. It's outrageous, Caius Martius says, that the commoners are rising up against the senators who keep the citizens from **devouring** each other.

Martius almost immediately undoes Menenius' work of soothing the people's anger. Martius compares their opinions to itches and bodily irritation, suggesting that they are merely annoying and destructive. He expresses the elitist view that the plebeians are essentially a fickle, never-satisfied mob. His evocation of war emphasizes his heroic, military prowess while depicting the citizens as cowards. He claims that without the senators, the citizens would devour each other, both emphasizing the plebeian dependence on patricians and adding a new (cannibalistic) meaning to the imagery of food and consumption. Martius believes that without the social structure and the ruling class keeping the peace, the citizens would be consumed by chaos.

Menenius tells Caius Martius that the people want "**corn** at their own rates," since they believe the city has a surplus of corn. Martius cries "hang 'em!" outraged that the common people sit at home presuming to know what's happening in the capital. He wishes the nobility would set their pity aside and let him slaughter the protesters. Menenius tells him that there's no need for that, since he has almost persuaded this cowardly group.

While the citizens believe they are not treated humanely by the senators, Martius wishes the senators would be less *humane and allow them to exhibit his violent capabilities by killing all the revolting citizens. His criticism of the common people drives at the idea that many form strong opinions without any basis for them.*

Menenius asks for the status of the other group of citizens on the other side of the city, and Caius Martius reports that the group has dissolved after saying that they were **hungry** and listing proverbs and demands, until they were granted a strange resolution. The city has granted "five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms," and two are named Junius Brutus and Sicinius Velutus. Martius himself would have sooner allowed the people to destroy the city than grant them tribunes, which he believes will lend more power to their argument and insurrection. He cries out to the people, "Go get you home, you **fragments**!"

The material demands of the people are leveraged into a political change: they are now granted representation in the form of tribunes. Martius holds the belief that the more power and concession granted to the people, the more likely they are to revolt and upset the social structure in Rome. He'd rather see the city collapse into literal war than grant any political power to the people, whom he characterizes as "fragments," invoking the imagery of body parts and dismemberment, and again dehumanizing the plebeians.

A messenger enters the street in Rome asking for Caius Martius, whom he informs that the Volsces (Volscians – a neighboring, enemy Italian people) have taken up arms. Martius is thrilled, saying it will give the Romans the opportunity to "vent [their] musty superfluity." Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus (the two new tribunes) enter along with Roman general Cominius, his lieutenant Titus Lartius, and other Roman Senators. One senator affirms what Martius just heard from the messenger, and what the Senator says Martius has been saying all along: "the Volsces are in **arms**."

The political dispute at home is interrupted by a foreign threat, setting up the transition to war. Superfluity means surplus, and musty means moldy, suggesting that the patricians do have a surplus they are keeping from the common people for profit alone. Instead of feeding the people, Martius prefers to use the surplus to feed soldiers and support the coming war. As an archetypical Roman hero, he is thrilled to enter battle.

Caius Martius reports that the Volscians have a leader, Tullus Aufidius, whom Martius envies for his nobility. If Martius were anyone but himself, he says, he would wish he were Aufidius. Martius claims that if two halves of the world were divided and fighting against each other and Aufidius were on his side, he would revolt to fight Aufidius, since "he is a lion that [Martius is] proud to hunt." Martius and Lartius agree to accompany Cominius in the war, and the senators beckon all of the soldiers to return to the capital. They instruct the citizens to go home, but Martius says they should follow, since the Volsces have a lot of **corn**. The citizens disband anyways, and the soldiers and Roman senators exit, leaving the two tribunes alone in the street.

As soon as this rival is introduced, Caius Martius' relationship with Tullus Aufidius is depicted as more than just enemies. There is a mutual hated between them, but also a mutual envy and respect, establishing the strange homosocial bond between soldiers (on either side of the battlefield). Although the spoils of war (in addition to the surplus) could end the food crisis, the citizens don't support Martius on principle, suggesting a stubbornness among the commoners and a tendency to act against their own best interest. In this way, the play establishes arguments both for and against the plight of the common people.

Sicinius asks Brutus if there ever lived a man so proud as Caius Martius, and Brutus responds that "he has no equal." They reflect on how poorly Martius reacted when they were named tribunes, and hope that the wars **devour** him. He has become too proud, which they believe is dangerous.

The tribunes hold the view expressed earlier by some of the citizens: that Martius is not a true hero, and that he fights for his tremendous pride instead of for Rome. They hope he is killed in war because they see him as a threat to their newfound power.

Sicinius wonders how someone so insolent can even be commanded on the battle field, but Brutus responds that Caius Martius only fights for fame (which he already has), and that it's better for his fame to be second in command, since all of the problems will be seen as the general's fault, which will then cause people to say 'if only Martius were in command!' At the same time, if things go well people will say it's only because of Martius instead of the general. The tribunes the decide to follow Martius and the Roman Senators to the capital to see what new decisions are made as Martius heads off to war.

Even though they represent the common people, the tribunes understand how fickle and easy to manipulate the people can be. They fear that public opinion will automatically favor Martius given his position in the war and his military reputation. Though they think he fights only for his fame, they are forced to acknowledge that already he does have renown and the reputation of a hero.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Tullus Aufidius consults with Volscian Senators in the Senate House in Corioles. A senator asks Aufidius to confirm his opinion that the Romans know the Volscians' plans. Aufidius confirms this, asking what the senators expect, since nothing planned in Corioles can be brought into action before Rome catches word of it and comes up with a countermeasure. He reads from a letter that he received four days ago, which reports that Rome has gathered an army. The report says that included in that army are Cominius, Caius Martius (who is Aufidius's old enemy, and is hated by Rome more than Aufidius himself is), and Titus Lartius, a valiant soldier. This army is most likely moving towards Corioles.

Part of the political landscape of Volces and Rome is a network of spies, suggested by Aufidius' assertion that nothing can be planned in Corioles without it being discovered by the Romans. Aufidius knows that Romans hate Martius despite his military excellence. The fact that they hate an insider more than an outsider shows how fractured Rome is and might suggest that the citizens are ungrateful for Martius' service.

The Volscian Senator says that he never had any doubt Rome would be ready to respond, and Aufidius laments that the early discovery of their plan – taking as many towns as possible before Rome found out – has hindered their ability to execute it. A second senator tells Aufidius to take his commission and leave them to defend Corioles unless his army is desperately needed, but Aufidius says that some of the Roman army is already on their way, and he has no doubt that they are well prepared for the war. He tells the senators that he and Caius Martius have sworn to fight to the death if they ever fight again. The senators wish him luck in this battle, and he wishes them safety in the coming war.

Roman military might is in general superior to the Volscians, as the Volscian plan was to catch Rome by surprise. Aufidius further reveals the intense bond between himself and Martius. They are united by their desire to kill one another in hand to hand combat—a kind of brutally intimate encounter.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

In Caius Martius's house, Volumnia, his mother, and Virgilia, his wife, sew. Volumnia tells her daughter to be more comfortable. If her son were her husband, Volumnia says, she'd be happier in his absence—during which he might win honor—than in bed with him. When Caius Martius was young and her only son, she sent him to "seek danger where he was [likely] to find fame," knowing how well honor would become him. She sent him to war, and he returned crowned with oak, proving himself a man.

Volumnia's alarming hypothetical "If my son were my husband" is often cited as evidence for Freudian psychoanalytic readings of the play (related to Freud's idea of the Oedipus complex, in which male children are said to have a subconscious sexual desire for their mothers and jealous hatred of their fathers). Volumnia and Martius' strange relationship is also characterized by the fact that Volumnia sent Martius to war when he was only a boy in order to turn him into a hero. Oak crowns were given to soldiers who saved Roman citizens.

Virgilia asks Volumnia what would have happened if Martius died as a child in that first war. Volumnia responds that the good reputation Martius would have received from dying in war would make up for the tragedy of his death. She professes that if she had twelve sons, each as beloved to her as Martius, she would rather eleven die nobly for Rome than one overindulge himself and avoid action. Their serving gentlewoman then enters and announces that Lady Valeria has come to visit.

While she loves her son (maybe even too much – see above), Volumnia cares more about his honor and reputation as a valiant hero than she does about his life. It's important to her that this heroism is in service of Rome. She wants him to be famous, but honorably so.

Virgilia asks Volumnia to let her leave, but Volumnia tells her to stay. She thinks she hears her son's war drum, and visualizes him defeating Aufidius and uplifting Roman soldiers. She describes his **bloody** brow and compares him to a laborer hired to mow down an entire field or not get paid for his work. At the mention of Caius Martius being bloody, Virgilia cries out "no blood!" but Volumnia scolds her, saying that blood is more becoming than gold, and "the breasts of Hecuba when she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood at Grecian sword." Virgilia prays that heaven will protect her husband from deadly Aufidius, but Volumnia is confident that Martius will defeat his rival.

Just as she is controlling over her son, Volumnia controls also her son's wife. While Virgilia becomes distraught imagining her husband bloodied, Volumnia corrects her, comparing blood to gold and thereby introducing the notion that wounds are valuable commodities. With vivid imagery of Hector (an archetypical warrior hero from Homer's Iliad*) and his mother, Volumnia makes it clear that violence and war are superior to motherhood and family.*

Valeria enters, greets Volumnia and Virgilia, and asks how Virgilia's son Young Martius is doing. He prefers swords and military drums to school, which prompts Valeria to say he is his father's son. Valeria says she looked after him on Wednesday for half an hour, during which she saw him chasing a butterfly. The boy would catch it, let it go, and then catch it again, until he tore it up with his teeth. Volumnia confirms that this is like his father Caius Martius.

Young Martius' displays of violence liken him to his father, who (as Volumnia said earlier in the scene) went to war when he was only a boy.

Valeria tells Virgilia to leave her sewing and come with her, but Virgilia doesn't want to go outside until Caius Martius returns from war. Valeria tries to convince Virgilia to visit a woman who is pregnant, but Virgilia refuses. Valeria then compares her to Ulysses' wife Penelope, who spun extensive amounts of yarn while her husband was gone, only to fill their home with moths. Valeria offers to tell Virgilia news of her husband if she'll agree to go with her. The Volscians have gathered an army now pitted against Cominius and part of the Roman army; Caius Martius (and Titus Lartius) are attacking and prevailing against the city of Corioles. The war will be over soon. At the good news Virgilia agrees to go with Valeria, but Volumnia tells her to just stay home because her bad mood will ruin their mirth.

Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek) is another famous hero from Greek myth (most notably described in Homer's Odyssey*). His wife Penelope waited at home during the Trojan war and the 10 years of wandering it took her husband to get home. This comparison reinforces the notion that Martius is a heroic, even godlike soldier. Virgilia and Volumnia present two ways for family to react when someone is at war. Virgilia essentially keeps a silent vigil, praying for her husband's safe return, but Volumnia (and Valeria) have loftier expectations and pray for valiant victories and wounds which can be used as political leverage.*

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Caius Martius, Titus Lartius, along with Roman soldiers, are outside the gates of Corioles; a messenger approaches. Martius wagers that Cominius has met the enemy, and Lartius takes the bet, offering his horse against Martius's. The messenger reports that Cominius is in view of the enemy, but they haven't yet encountered one another. Martius tries to buy back the horse he just lost in the wager, but Lartius says he'll only lend the horse back to Martius for fifty years.

The scene shifts to the battlefield, and Martius' wager with Lartius heightens the drama for the audience, since they don't know if the fighting has begun or not. Lending the horse back to Martius for fifty years is a way of winning the bet without actually taking the prize, demonstrating the male camaraderie between Martius and Lartius.

Martius invokes Mars, the god of war, and then the trumpets sound, signaling to the Volscians. Two Volscian senators enter on the walls of the city, and Martius cries out, asking if Tullus Aufidius is inside the city. One senator says no, and says that there are no men in the city that fear Martius less than does Aufidius. Rather than waiting for the Romans to try and attack the walls, the Volscians decide to open their gates and send their army out, warning that Aufidius is approaching.

Since Martius is a great warrior, it makes sense that he would invoke the Roman god of war. While he wants to win the battle, he seems more concerned with fighting his personal rival, suggesting he might be tied more closely to Aufidius than to Rome.

As the Volscian army charges, Martius tries to encourage the Roman soldiers. He tells them to be brave and to advance, even threatening them, but the Roman army is beaten back to their trenches (and off stage). Martius reenters, cursing the Roman soldiers and trying to rile them up. He calls them "shames of Rome" and a "herd of boils and plagues," telling the men to charge the enemy, or else he'll stop fighting the Volscians and turn on his own troops. He hopes to beat the Volscians back to their wives, as they have beaten the Romans back to their trenches.

Part of Martius' role as hero is to encourage his fellow soldiers. In this role, however, he is ineffectual, and he becomes enraged with the soldiers comprised of common citizens. Calling them a "herd" emphasizes the herd mentality of the common people that he so frequently lambasts. Just as Aufidius said Martius is more hated in Rome than he is, so Martius hates Roman weakness and treachery more than the enemy, as shown by his threats of turning on his own troops.

The Volscian army reenters, and the Romans drive them back to the gates of Corioles, which open to readmit the Volscian army. Seizing the opportunity, Martius cries out for the Roman soldiers to be good supporters and follow him, as he runs after the fleeing Volscian soldiers through the gate—and then is shut in the city of Corioles.

Martius' isolation and aloneness are emphasized in this heroic moment. He is a bold, daring, masterful soldier, but he is almost completely without support from common soldiers or citizens.

Two Roman soldiers remark that they have no desire to follow Martius into the city, considering him foolish and as good as dead. Titus Lartius enters and asks the soldiers what happened to Martius, and they reiterate that he's probably dead. They describe how he chased after the fleeing enemy, entered the city gates, and found himself closed in "alone to answer all the city." Lartius praises Martius for his nobility, saying he "sensibly outdares his senseless sword." Thinking Martius is dead, Lartius characterizes his fallen ally as a perfect jewel, and as a "thunderlike," "fierce and terrible soldier" who made his "enemies shake, as if the world were feverous and did tremble." After this would-be hero's goodbye, Martius re-enters, **bleeding**, followed by Volscian soldiers. Shocked, Lartius and the soldiers come to Martius's aid and enter the city.

Again, Martius' aloneness is emphasized alongside his excellence. Lartius describes him as the superlative of bravery, saying he's braver than his sword, which is an inanimate object incapable of fear. The more heroic Martius becomes, the less like a human and more like something else he seems to be. In addition to being compared to a sword, Martius is compared to a god or a force of nature with "thunderlike," and Lartius's claim that Martius makes enemies shake as if the very earth is quaking. Lartius's speech sets up the expectation that Martius is dead, making his bloody reentry all the more dramatic and heroic.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Some Roman soldiers enter a street in Corioles carrying spoils they intend to bring back to Rome. Martius and Lartius then enter, and Martius curses the soldiers for taking spoils even before the fighting is over. After they exit, a battle alarum is sounded in the distance, which Martius recognizes as Cominius's. Martius believes that his enemy, "the man of [his] soul's hate, Aufidius" is the one attacking the Romans on the other side of the city. He instructs Lartius to secure the city while he (along with those bold enough) goes to help Cominius and fight Aufidius.

Again, Martius' exceptional heroism is pitted against the behavior of the common Roman soldiers, who he sees as dishonorable cowards. He associates this cowardice and greed with the fickle common people of Rome. Martius' tie with Aufidius is also developed as more than just a rivalry between military foes. Martius doesn't just hate Aufidius: he hates him with his soul, blurring the lines between violent passion and amorous, sexual, or at least intense fraternal passion.

Lartius points out that Martius is **bleeding**, saying that he has been injured too much in the first violent episode to continue fighting. But Martius says he has only just gotten started. He reassures Lartius that the blood he is losing is not dangerous but is in fact curative to him. He will appear to and fight Aufidius in his bloodied state. The two men wish each other luck and exit to carry out Martius's plan of action.

Martius' heroism and love for violence is so great that he considers his bloody wounds medicinal to him rather than life-threatening. He becomes more and more associated with blood – he's covered in it – which continues to connect him with (and define him by) death, violence, and warfare.

ACT 1, SCENE 6

Near the Roman camp, Cominius enters with Roman soldiers. He commends his troops on a battle well fought, but warns them that the Volscians are likely to charge again. He believes that the Roman gods are causing their success, and he thanks the troops for their service. A messenger enters reporting that Volscian soldiers drove Lartius and Martius to their trenches over an hour ago. Even though the camp is only a mile away, the messenger was chased by Volscian spies on his way and forced to take a longer route. The messenger exits.

Cominius believes that the Roman gods support Rome (and that other gods might support other cities), so he attributes his military victory to a divine victory, all done in the service of Rome. The messenger reinforces the fact that there is a network of spies on either side of the battle, explaining how the Romans knew the Volscians were forming their army and how the Volscians knew exactly who was in command of the Roman forces.

Caius Martius then enters the camp in a **bloodied** state that Cominius has seen many times before. Martius repeatedly asks if he has come too late, and Cominius responds that he's only too late if he has come covered in his own blood rather than the blood of Volscians. Martius then embraces his general "in **arms** as sound as when [he] wooed, as merry as when [his] nuptial day was done."

Cominius has just heard that Martius was driven back to his trenches (essentially defeated), so when Martius enters bloody and victorious, there is a moment of dramatic irony mirroring the moment when Lartius thought Martius was dead and then saw him reemerge from the gates. While the connection between Martius and his enemy has been well established, here Martius shows the strong homosocial connection between fellow soldiers by comparing reuniting with his general with his wedding day. This connection is reinforced by the military pun on "arms."

Cominius asks how Titus Lartius is, and Martius reports that he is busy running the city of Corioles, handing out punishments, and securing the city that has just been captured for Rome. Cominius first wants to beat the messenger who told him that the Romans had been beat back to the trenches, but Martius confirms that this really happened. The common soldiers, though, have infuriated Martius. He calls them a plague, still furious that they have won tribunes back in Rome, and says they are rascals. Cominius wants to know how Martius survived, but Martius says there is no time, preferring to be updated on the status of the battle.

Here Martius explicitly connects his frustrations with the common soldiers with his fury at the common people and the political landscape back in Rome. Just as he called the soldiers a "herd of boils," he compares the common people to a plague. Martius always prefers fighting to talking, as he doesn't want to recount his victory, instead preferring to reenter battle as soon as possible.

Cominius believes the nearing army is made up of soldiers from Antium, including Aufidius. Martius asks his general to ensure that he is the one to face Aufidius, evoking all of the battles Martius and Cominius have fought and the **blood** they have shed together, all the vows they've made, and their long friendship in his request. Cominius wishes that Martius would care for his wounds, but the general knows better than to deny Martius the opportunity to fight Aufidius.

Martius evokes the homosocial bond with his general – one formed with violence – to ensure that he's able to continue in his other violent, homosocial bond with his rival. All of Martius' male relationships are formed through and defined by warfare, and his passion for Aufidius is so strong that it overrides any physical need for his body to heal.

Martius tells the Roman camp that if there is anyone there who loves to be painted in **blood**, if anyone is unafraid and thinks a brave death is better than a bad life, if anyone loves Rome more than himself, then they should follow him into battle. He waves his sword to see who is willing, and the whole camp erupts in response. Martius says if this response isn't just an outward show, then each Roman is worth four Volscians. Though all of them are brave and able to fight against Aufidius himself, Martius selects only a few of them, leaving the rest to some other battle. Cominius commands Martius and his group to march on and live up to the bravery they have just promised.

Martius outlines the ideals of a Roman hero: obsessed with violence, bold, and favoring honor over life and Rome above all else. This speech contrasts the view of him held by the tribunes, namely that he fights for himself, for pride, and for fame instead of these ideals. Ironically, when the soldiers respond with resounding willingness, even Martius questions if they are genuine, suggesting it might not be Martius under question, but the notion of fighting for these heroic Roman ideals itself.

ACT 1, SCENE 7

Before the gates of Corioles, Lartius orders Roman soldiers to take up guard posts. If needed, these soldiers should come to aid the rest of the army, since a loss in the battle field will mean the loss of the city. A lieutenant agrees to obey the orders, and Lartius orders the new guards to shut the gate, and then he heads to the Roman camp.

This quick scene is simple military explanation, showing that (thanks to Caius Martius) Rome is now in control of the city of Corioles.

ACT 1, SCENE 8

Caius Martius and Aufidius enter at opposite sides of the battlefield near the Roman camp. Martius says that he will fight with no one other than Aufidius, whom he despises. Aufidius hates Martius equally. The first to flee or try to escape the battle, they agree, will die the other's slave or will be hunted down like an animal. Martius brags that he fought for three hours within the walls of Corioles and was able to do so easily; the **blood** that covers his body is not his own. He goads Aufidius to try his best for revenge, and Aufidius says he will not let Martius escape no matter what. The two begin to fight, and Volscian soldiers come to aid Aufidius, but Aufidius complains that their support shames him. Martius fights them all and beats them back, and he Aufidius exit separately.

Finally Aufidius and Martius meet face to face, and it's clear that the two love to hate each other. Again, Martius emphasizes his heroism alongside of his isolation while bragging about the capture of Corioles. While his heroism makes him more than human – like a god or a force of nature – running away from a battle would make him less than human – like a slave (in his worldview) or an animal. Martius' isolation is further emphasized by the assistance that Aufidius receives, and Aufidius' shame in getting support shows the bold heroism of fighting alone. For all their talk and oaths of fighting to the death, their battle ends with both alive, adding drama and leaving audiences hoping that they meet and fight again.

ACT 1, SCENE 9

Cominius and the Roman soldiers are met by Martius, whose **arm** is tied in a sling. Cominius says the deeds Martius has done that day are so spectacular that if recited, Martius himself would not believe them. Cominius plans to report the deeds to the Roman senators and patricians, which will cause even the "dull tribunes" and their rotten plebeians to thank the gods that Rome has a soldier like Martius. Cominius is still awed that Martius went back into battle after fighting alone within the city gates, comparing it to coming to a **feast** having fully dined before.

Cominius shows that he thinks of the common people much in the same way that Martius does, indicating that this anti-plebian position is a symptom of the class divide in Rome, not just Martius' personal bias. Again, Martius' heroism is tied to his aloneness. While words like "devouring" have been used to describe dying in war, here Cominius compares enacting violence to eating. Like Martius' comment that his wounds are curative, Cominius' comparison suggests that warfare is nourishing as opposed to devastating.

Titus Lartius then enters with some more Roman soldiers. He also begins to praise Martius, but Martius cuts him off, saying that he doesn't even like it when his mother praises him. He only did what everyone else did, which is the best he could. His motives were the same as well: he did it for Rome.

Martius appears to be genuine in his heroic ideals, suggesting that he truly fights for Rome and not for his own fame like the tribunes suggest, especially given that he hates to hear his valiant deeds expressed with language.

Cominius insists that Martius not hide his accomplishment and merit, since Rome must know what a valuable soldier it has in Martius. Concealing these deeds would be slander and worse than stealing, and accepting praise here is modest. Cominius wants to reward Martius for what he is, not for what he has done, and Martius says that he has "**wounds**" that "smart to hear themselves remembered." Cominius says that if they are not, they'll become infected on account of ingratitude, and heal themselves.

Cominius is cleverly able to refigure praising Martius as patriotism, so that Martius is forced to listen to his own heroism recounted or else be a traitor. "Smart" means hurt, so Martius is saying once again that it pains him to hear his actions spoken of. It's also of note that Martius personifies his own wounds here, as if the wounds are the ones who will be praised, not Martius himself.

Cominius then offers Martius his choice of all of the horses they have taken in the war, but Martius refuses, saying he cannot consent to take a bribe for his sword. He refuses the gift and asks for no more spoils than every other soldier who did his part. The Roman soldiers chant Martius's name, and Martius continues with a small speech, saying that flattery should never be involved in war. The day trumpets and war drums and weapons are flatterers, he says, cities will be filled with hypocrites. The day steel receives an ovation for a battle is the day it turns soft as silk. Fighting while injured and defeating many (weak) enemies is something that many soldiers have done unnoticed. Praising him with hyperbolic accolades, Martius claims, is like lying.

Martius remains stubborn in his adherence to the ideals of Roman heroism, believing that accepting any payment for his violent services would make him a mercenary. Martius' speech, ironically, argues that speech, language, and flattery have no place in war, which is the sphere of action, not words. Martius wants to separate language and war – in part – because he hates dishonesty. Flattery, hyperbole, and undeserving praise all offend his sensibilities as a classic Roman hero, and they are all expressed through language.

Cominius believes that Martius is being much too modest and cruel to himself. If Caius Martius is intent on harming himself, they'll figuratively treat him like someone they'd have to put in straight jacket and continue praising him anyway. Cominius proclaims that Martius is this war's hero, for which he will present Martius with his noble steed. What's more, from this time forward, for what Martius did in the war at Corioles, he will be given an additional name and be known as Martius Caius Coriolanus. The trumpets flourish and the Roman soldiers shout out Coriolanus's new name.

The Roman naming system used three types of names: praenomen, nomen, and cognomen (familiar names, family names, and extra surnames). There were very few options for first names in ancient Rome, so a cognomen was often the best way to identify people. This naming convention lends even more importance to Martius' new cognomen Coriolanus. Conquering, warfare, and violence become (even more formally than before) his defining characteristics. The new name pushes him further in the transition (already hinted at) from human to more-than-human hero.

Coriolanus says he'll go wash off the **blood**, after which Cominius will be able to tell if he is blushing. Coriolanus thanks the general, and says he'll ride the horse and do his best to use and justify his new name. Cominius will write to Rome of their success, while Lartius will stay in and oversee Corioles.

Coriolanus' playful remark that blood obscures any red blush from his cheeks emphasizes his belief that soldiers should be modest, and that flattery and praise have no place in warfare.

Coriolanus, after refusing most gifts from his general, asks Cominius for a favor. Once Coriolanus stayed in the city at a poor man's house, where he was treated well. During the battle, this man was taken prisoner and cried out to Coriolanus, but Coriolanus saw Aufidius, and his wrath against his enemy overcame his pity for the poor man. Coriolanus asks Cominius if he will free the man, and Cominius says he'd let the man go even if he had killed Cominius's own son. Cominius instructs Lartius to free the man, and Lartius asks Coriolanus for the man's name, but Coriolanus has forgotten it. He is weary, and his memory is tired, so he asks for wine. They retire to Cominius's tent, since the blood covering Coriolanus is drying and his wounds need to be cared for.

It's left unsaid in the play, but it's probably the case that this man remains imprisoned and dies because Coriolanus forgot his name. Just after he receives his heroic new name, Coriolanus shows he doesn't understand or value the power of names, including his own. He seems unaware of the dehumanizing effect his name and heroism have on him, and later he'll fatally forget that this new name is an extreme insult to the people of Volces. This lack of appreciation for names is reflective of his general preference for action (mostly violence) in favor of language.

ACT 1, SCENE 10

A bloodied Tullus Aufidius enters the Volscian camp with some Volscian soldiers. Aufidius reports that the town has been taken, but a soldier believes that Rome will give the city back on good terms. Aufidius says he wishes he were a Roman, since in being a Volscian, he cannot be himself; furthermore, he doesn't believe Rome will agree to any such terms. He laments that he has fought with and lost against Martius five times, and he knows that Martius would beat him every time, even if they fought as often as they **eat**.

The naïve Volscian soldier demonstrates the effect that Coriolanus lambasted in Rome: common citizens speak as if they know the situation, but in reality, they're unaware of relevant political information or truth. Aufidius knows better than to think that Rome might easily surrender any territory without more fighting. Again, violence is equated to food and nourishment.

Aufidius swears by the elements that if he and Martius meet again "beard to beard," one will kill the other. Yet no longer does their rivalry have honor, for while Aufidius once hoped to best Martius in hand to hand combat ("sword to sword"), he now hopes some craft or other method will help him win. A soldier calls Martius the devil, and Aufidius says that Martius is even bolder than the devil, though less subtle. Nothing in the world, he says, can lift his hatred of Martius, whom he still hopes to kill. He instructs the Volscian soldiers to gather information about the Roman occupation, and they go their separate ways.

Aufidius' oaths are intense, but also hard to believe, since the two men were sworn to fight to the death when they last fought only moments ago. Fighting "beard to beard" means man to man, but it also suggests imagery of the two men kissing, adding sexuality to the blurred, homosocial/military rivalry between Aufidius and Coriolanus. The homosexual undertone is reinforced with phallic imagery in "sword to sword." Aufidius aptly comments that Coriolanus is extremely bold but lacking in the subtle skills of language and political maneuvering.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Menenius and the two Roman tribunes Brutus and Sicinius enter a public place in Rome. A soothsayer (seer) has told Menenius that news of the war is on its way. Menenius comments that the common people do not like Martius, saying that they want to "**devour** him." The three men discuss whether Martius is more like a wolf or lamb or bear, and Menenius asks the tribunes what vice Martius has that the tribunes do not possess themselves. They claim he's prideful, to which Menenius responds that the tribunes utterly lack self-awareness. Not only are they feeble and "infantlike" without the support of the common people, but they are also "unmeriting, proud, violent, testy magistrates," and "fools."

The presence of a soothsayer might remind readers of another Roman play of Shakespeare's – Julius Caesar, in which a soothsayer famously tells Caesar to "beware the ides of March." While the common people once feared they would be devoured by war or by the patricians, they're now emboldened and empowered, and so threaten to devour Coriolanus (still called Martius by Menenius, because news of his renaming hasn't reached Rome yet). The tribunes continue suggesting that Martius is prideful as opposed to a genuine Roman hero. Menenius is known as a friend to the common people, but he realizes the way the tribunes have harnessed the power of the common people for political gain.

Sicinius says that Menenius is also notorious, but Menenius launches into a description of his own character: he is known as a whimsical patrician who loves wine, stays up late, and says exactly what he thinks. If he sips a drink he doesn't like, it immediately shows on his face. Though he'll be patient with anyone who calls the tribunes great or respected men, he'll call them liars if they say the tribunes have good faces. Everything he thinks, he says, is visible on his face. He then asks the tribunes what harm they see in his completely transparent character.

Menenius describes himself as utterly straight-forward, honest, and direct, opposing the two-faced political maneuvering he might see in the tribunes. His line about the tribunes' faces is a bit confusing grammatically, but he is essentially just insulting them by calling them ugly. The open-book mentality he describes is what gets Coriolanus into trouble, suggesting that Menenius isn't actually as transparent as he says he is.

When Brutus says he knows Menenius, Menenius responds that the tribunes don't know him, themselves, or anything at all. They are only ambitious for the support of the people, and they are terrible at their jobs, allowing their personal whims to influence their decisions. They make peace between two parties, while calling both knaves. Brutus responds that people believe Menenius is more of a dinner-table wit than an important Roman statesman, but Menenius replies that even priests would make fun of the tribunes. He finds it ironic that they call Martius proud, since Martius is worth more than them and all of their combined ancestors since the "Flood." He tells them goodnight, since any more conversation with them would "infect [his] brain." Menenius begins to exit, but then Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria enter.

Again, Menenius recognizes that the tribunes are just clamoring for political power. Though they represent the people, they just want to take advantage of them and use them for their support. The comment in response that Menenius is a dinner-table wit is meant to suggest that Menenius is smart but without real power, further highlighting how power-hungry the tribunes are. The "Flood" reference is to an ancient Greek flood myth, not the biblical Flood of Noah. The series of insults between Menenius and the Tribunes are all based on the question of whether Martius is prideful or a genuine Roman hero. The notion that conversation could infect Menenius hints at the physical power that language has within the play.

Menenius greets the ladies, and Volumnia reports that Martius is coming home. Menenius celebrates this news, and Volumnia says that there have been many letters from the battle front, including one for Menenius. Menenius jokes about his health and asks if Martius is **wounded** (which he thinks is preferable). Virgilia hopes he isn't wounded, but Volumnia thanks the gods that he is wounded, as does Menenius (as long as Martius isn't *too* wounded). For the third time, Volumnia says, Martius is returning with victory on his brows and an oaken garland.

Again, the oaken garland was a mark of a war hero, received by someone who saved a fellow Roman soldier. The discussion of Martius' wounds highlights different family roles and different interpretations of violence. Virgilia, Martius' wife, sees wounds as threats to his life and cares only for his safety. Volumnia, his mother, sees wounds as a political commodity, and (as long as he isn't dead) hopes that he has suffered based on her political aspirations for him.

Menenius wonders if Martius has fought with Aufidius, and Volumnia tells him that Lartius reported they fought indeed, but Aufidius escaped. Menenius remarks that he would not want to be treated like Martius would treat Aufidius (had he not escaped) for all the gold in the city of Corioles. Letters from Cominius have been delivered to the Roman Senate, and they say that Martius has outdone, and even doubled his former military triumphs. Menenius taunts the tribunes, saying that Martius is returning with even more reason to be proud, and he repeatedly asks where Martius has been wounded.

Menenius' confusing phrase highlights the intense hatred and potential for violence between Martius and Aufidius. Martius already had a reputation of military excellence, and his new deeds (and wounds) cement him as both a hero and a public figure in Rome. Menenius is obsessed with the wounds, even wanting to know their precise location to maximize their political potential.

Volumnia says that Martius has been **wounded** in the shoulder and the left **arm**, noting that he will be able to show his large scars to the people when standing as a candidate for Consul. In the battle to expel Tarquin, he received seven wounds, and Menenius counts nine that he knows of. Volumnia produces the true number of wounds before the latest war: twenty-five. After the battle in Corioles, he has been wounded twenty-seven times. Menenius notes that "every gash was an enemy's grave," and trumpets sound in the distance heralding Martius, in whom Volumnia says death itself dwells.

Martius' military history is further explicated with the strange, mathematical counting of all the wounds and scars he has ever received. The purpose for this wound obsession is now made explicit: the wounds are political capital that will be used by Martius to help become Consul, the highest elected position in the Roman republic. With artful (and alliterative) language, both Menenius and Volumnia use Martius' wounds to emphasize his military might.

Cominius arrives with Titus Lartius, captains, Roman soldiers, a Roman herald, and Coriolanus, who is crowned with an oaken garland. The herald announces to the city that Martius fought all alone within the gates of Corioles and won, both the battle and the addition of a new name "Coriolanus." The crowd cheers, but Coriolanus says this offends his heart.

Coriolanus' new name is introduced and made official within the city at the same time that his heroic deeds are announced, further tying his identity to warfare, but also further isolating him, since he fought the battle by himself and is praised on his own as opposed to with the rest of the soldiers.

Coriolanus greets his mother, who he knows has been praying for his success. He kneels to her, but she tells him to rise and comments on his new name. When Volumnia mentions his wife, who is crying, Coriolanus lauds Virgilia as his "gracious silence," and jokes that she would laugh if he came home in a coffin, since she cries now that he has come home in triumph. Her tears, he says, belong in the eyes of the new widows and mothers lacking sons in Corioles. He also excitedly greets Menenius and Valeria.

"Gracious silence" essentially describes the ideal wife in Shakespeare's time. By referencing the wives and mothers of the men he killed, Coriolanus ties war to family. More precisely, he defines war as something that destroys family. Virgilia's response to Coriolanus' homecoming and his joke about reversing this response are significant since for Coriolanus, the relationship between family and war is already reversed. He was sent to war by his mother at a very young age, so rather than being destroyed by war, his family creates war and is then defined by it.

Volumnia welcomes everyone home from war, and Menenius echoes her sentiment, saying he could weep or laugh since he is so "light and heavy." He notes that though there are some "old crab trees' that might not be excited to see Cominius, Lartius, and Coriolanus, he believes the three men should be doted on by Rome.

Menenius' instinct to both weep and laugh echoes Coriolanus' comment about Virgilia's response to their homecoming, suggesting that war is at once glorious and horrifying. The "old crab trees" Menenius refers to are the Tribunes of the people.

Coriolanus takes the hands of his wife and mother and says that before he returns to his own home, he needs to visit the good patricians to thank them for the promotion he has received. Volumnia boasts that she has lived to see all her desires for him come true, excepting one thing (the Consulship for Coriolanus) that she is certain Rome will give him. Coriolanus reminds his mother that he would rather serve the patricians in his own way than in theirs. They all exit for the Capitol, leaving the two tribunes alone on stage.

Part of the heroic Roman ideal that Coriolanus adheres to is placing his class (patricians) and the Roman senate above his own needs. At the same time, he expresses his individualism (which is also solitude) and his preference of military service over politics. Volumnia reveals herself to be like a stage mother, pushing Coriolanus into politics (like she did into war) and claiming ownership over him and his accomplishments.

Brutus laments how everyone is completely obsessed with Coriolanus, clamoring for the chance to even look at him, acting like he has become a god instead of human. Sicinius believes that Coriolanus will be named consul, which Brutus notes will make their positions as tribunes powerless. They take comfort, though, in the fact that they think Coriolanus cannot hold his new honors with good temperament and will surely lose them.

Brutus chronicles part of Coriolanus' transformation from a mere human to a god-like hero, but he does so with a negative tone, seeking either to delegitimize this transformation or characterize it as a bad thing. As always, the Tribunes' primary interest is their own political power, and they continue assuming that Coriolanus is arrogant and prideful.

The tribunes say that the common people, too, will be quick to forget these new honors when they remember their longtime hostility towards Coriolanus, something Sicinius can spark by just asking Coriolanus about his pride. Coriolanus has sworn that he would not stand in public and show the people his **wounds** according to tradition, nor "beg their stinking breath" (**voices**, meaning votes). The tribunes decide that in order to preserve their power, they must destroy Coriolanus by reminding the common people that Coriolanus hates them, and that as consul he will restrict their freedoms. Setting the common people against him will be as easy as setting dogs on sheep, and it will permanently ruin his reputation.

Whether Coriolanus is prideful or a genuine hero, Sicinius is right when he says that Coriolanus' entire identity is attached to Roman ideals, and an attack claiming otherwise will infuriate him. In a political formality, the common people must vote and agree on a Consul. Like Coriolanus and other patricians, even the tribunes think of the people only as votes, as disembodied voices. By comparing the people's opinions to "stinking breath" and comparing the people themselves to dogs, the tribunes show that they, too, dehumanize the citizens, disrespect them, and use them only for their own gain – ironically exactly what they'll accuse Coriolanus of.

A messenger enters, saying that the tribunes are called for at the Capitol. He reports that it's thought Martius will be consul, and he has seen "the dumb men throng to see him, and the blind to hear him speak," and everyone showering him with praise like he's a god. They head to the Capitol to try and prevent Martius from becoming consul.

The messenger continues the pattern of comparing Coriolanus to something more than human, and he suggests that the people view this change as an awe inspiring, positive one, not with the same distrust (and disgust) that the tribunes expressed earlier in the scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Two Roman officers enter the Roman Senate House, laying cushions for senators to sit on. There are three candidates for the consulship, but everyone thinks the position will go to Coriolanus. One officer notes that Coriolanus is brave, but also proud, and he doesn't love the common people. The second officer responds that many great men have flattered the common people without loving them, and many men have been loved by the common people for no reason; the people hate and love without much legitimate reason. In not caring whether the people love or hate him, Coriolanus thus has "true knowledge" about the people's disposition; he lets them see that he doesn't care what they think only out of his "noble carelessness."

The two officers express both sides of the dispute about Coriolanus' character: no one doubts his bravery and valiance, but the question is whether he is overly prideful and stubborn, or merely honest and adherent to old Roman principles. They also express the common assessment about the citizens: they constantly change their opinions without much reason. The second officer believes that Coriolanus knows how the common people truly are, and he reframes Coriolanus' obstinacy as noble carelessness, meaning that Coriolanus is just too noble to flatter the common people or pretend that they aren't fickle.

The first Roman officer says he would agree if Coriolanus didn't actively try to get the people to hate him even more than they were willing to; trying to be despised by the commoners is just as bad as flattering them. They ultimately agree that Coriolanus has done much for his country and is worthy, and the second officer goes as far to say that if the people are **silent** about his greatness it would be a kind of malice and "ingrateful injury."

Coriolanus' military deeds (according to the officers) must come before any debate about his character. He is so heroic (and has been injured in battle so many times) that the common people simply cannot refuse him as tribune, or else they will be extremely ungrateful. The debate about the true motivations for Coriolanus' heroism continue throughout the play, but the officers here suggest that at a certain point, if a person is heroic enough it doesn't matter how or why.

Roman Senators enter along with the tribunes, Cominius, Menenius, and Coriolanus. Coriolanus stands, and Menenius says it's time to honor the noble service Coriolanus has done for his country. The current consul, Cominius, will speak on behalf of Coriolanus and chronicle his latest deeds. A senator tells Cominius to tell the story in full, leaving no details out for brevity's sake, and the senator also asks the tribunes to listen. They say that they will listen, so long as Coriolanus starts valuing the common people more than he has in the past. Menenius says that Coriolanus loves the people, just not an excessive amount. Coriolanus offers to leave the room while Cominius speaks, but the senator tells him to sit down, since it is not shameful to hear someone recount one's noble deeds.

This is the most political scene so far in the play, and it is immediately evident that Coriolanus is out of place, as most of the characters speak for him and all around him while he says almost nothing. All the talk about loving the people is really just posturing, as Menenius knows Coriolanus hates the people (since he hates them, too), and the tribunes just want to use the people (whom they call "stinking breath") to preserve their own power.

Coriolanus, though, says he would rather have his **wounds** heal all over again than hear talk about how he received them. While he would never run away from a fight, he has "fled from words," and he assures the tribunes that he loves the people "as they weigh." Coriolanus would rather be idle during battle than hear his deeds, which he calls "nothings," be "monstered" in a retelling. He exits, and Menenius tells the people that there are a thousand worthless flatterers for every good man, and Coriolanus would rather risk losing all of his **limbs** in battle than be flattered himself. Menenius tells Cominius to proceed in recounting Coriolanus's deeds.

Coriolanus hates flattery because it opposes his sense of old Roman virtue, but he also hates it because he sees it as rooted in the realm of language, not as based on the actions he has done, and he literally "[flees] from words" and leaves before his story is told. His comment that he loves the people "as they weigh" means he loves them as much as they are worth. It is a backhanded insult, because he believes they aren't worthy of any love at all.

Cominius begins humbly, saying "I shall lack **voice**," and he notes that Coriolanus's deeds should not be spoken of lightly. If it's true that valor is the most important virtue, then Coriolanus is certainly the most virtuous person in the world. At age sixteen, while Tarquin raised an army to conquer Rome, Coriolanus fought better than anyone else. Coriolanus, with his "Amazonian **chin**," fought against bristled, bearded men and killed three men. He even fought with Tarquin himself and wounded him in the knee. That day, Cominius says, Coriolanus might have acted "the woman in the scene," but instead "proved best man" in the battle. For his valor, he was crowned with a garland of oak leaves. At the age of a student, he became a man, grew like a sea, and has fought valiantly in seventeen battles since then.

The first line of Cominius' speech is a classical rhetorical move known as humility topos, a feigned modesty in which the speaker pretends to lack speaking ability. Mark Antony employs this technique in his famous funeral speech in "Julius Caesar." "Amazonian" refers to mythical female warriors. Coriolanus' chin was Amazonian, meaning hairless, because he was still a boy. Though Cominius invokes female warriors, he ultimately equates cowardice to femininity and bravery and war to masculinity. It's also of note that as soon as Coriolanus grew from boy to man, he also became associated with something more than man – in this case "a sea."

As for this last battle at Corioles, Cominius claims, he cannot even do Coriolanus justice. Coriolanus stopped soldiers from fleeing, and by his valiant example he inspired cowards to "turn terror into sport." Everyone obeyed him, and his sword acted as "Death's stamp," killing wherever he marked, until Coriolanus became "a thing of **blood**, whose every motion was timed with dying cries." Coriolanus entered the gates of the city alone, and without reinforcements he "struck Corioles like a planet." When he began to tire from the battle, he immediately revitalized himself and joined the battle once more, never stopping fighting or slaughtering until the city was won and the battle was completely over.

While Coriolanus was a man at the age of a boy, in the past war he has become something else entirely. His violent deeds have transformed him into an unfeeling "thing." He's elevated by his heroism, but he loses his humanity and is marked once again as alone. By the end of the battle (and Cominius' speech), Coriolanus has become not a person but an entire planet. He doesn't even suffer from the human condition of exhaustion, and is able to recharge himself immediately to continue fighting.

Menenius cries out that Coriolanus is a "worthy man," and a Roman senator says that Coriolanus cannot be honored enough for these deeds. Cominius tells of how Coriolanus denied all the spoils of war he was offered, since for him fighting and serving Rome are rewards in and of themselves. The senators call for Coriolanus, and he reenters. Menenius informs him that the senate wishes to make him consul. All that remains before he is named consul is that he needs to speak to the people.

Coriolanus' humility and adherence to Roman ideals is on display again with his refusal to accept any gifts for his deeds. After Cominius recounts all of Coriolanus' spectacular military feats, it seems like the small thing standing in the way of him becoming consul – speaking to the people – will be easily accomplished by such a man. Ironically, this is exactly the one thing Coriolanus can't *do.*

Coriolanus asks if he can skip that custom, since he cannot wear the candidate's robe and stand exposed in front of the people, using his **wounds** to ask for their votes. But Sicinius responds that the people must have their **voices**. Menenius tells Coriolanus to follow custom, and Coriolanus agrees, though he says it's a part that he'll "blush in acting." He doesn't want to brag to them about his deeds and show them his scars, as if he only got them so the people would give him votes.

The word "candidate" comes from Latin, since political candidates wore white robes like the one Coriolanus describes. Coriolanus doesn't want to speak to the people as is custom both because he lacks language and political skills, and because he doesn't want it to seem like he fought in Corioles just to win the opinions of the citizens he despises.

But Menenius tells him not to worry—the senators and tribunes are supporting him and want only joy and honor for him. The senators cry out in support, and then everyone exits except Sicinius and Brutus. In private, the two tribunes note how Coriolanus seems to dread asking the people for votes, as if he doesn't believe they should even have the power to vote at all. The tribunes plan to inform the Roman citizens of what has happened in the Capitol.

The tribunes' assessment that Coriolanus thinks the people should not have power is accurate, especially since he has said as much literally earlier in the play. If it weren't for the power of the citizens (and for the newly granted tribunes), Coriolanus would already be consul, as he has the full support of the patricians.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Several Roman citizens enter the Roman Forum, a public marketplace and meeting space. One citizen says that if Coriolanus requires their **voices** they should not deny him. Another says that the citizens have the power to deny votes, but at the same time they don't really have the power to do so, since if Coriolanus shows his **wounds** and tells of his deeds, the citizens must "put [their] **tongues** into those wounds and speak for them." If he recounts his noble deeds, they need to nobly accept them, since "ingratitude is monstrous," and "for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude," thereby making all of the citizens "monstrous members."

With the visceral image of licking wounds, a citizen explains that if Coriolanus follows tradition and invokes his bloody deeds, the citizens will be forced to vote for him. This conversation between the citizens brings back the idea expressed by Roman Officers that at a certain point, violence and military deeds transcend questions of character or temperament. The citizens recognize their own potential to be characterized and to really become a monstrous multitude, showing that they understand the fears and criticisms others have of their class. "Monstrous members" also invokes the body politic.

Such behavior, says the first citizen, would make them look bad, for even though they revolted over **corn**, Coriolanus didn't call them the "many-headed multitude," as the citizens have been called by so many different people. No one recognizes their diversity and their various, conflicting opinions – if they agreed to go one direction they'd end up moving in all directions of the compass at once. One citizen makes an obscene joke, playing on the figurative language about directions, and the citizens agree to give Coriolanus their votes. If Coriolanus would "incline to the people," there would never be a worthier man for consul.

The image of the many-headed multitude is a distorted body politic. With many heads (many contrasting opinions) there is no leader, and rather than acting as a unified body, the people act as a disjointed, confused monster. This characterization of the public could also be seen as Shakespeare's response to the difficulties of trying to please a demanding, wide ranging audience.

Coriolanus then enters the public Forum in a gown of humility, along with Menenius. One citizen notes that Coriolanus is approaching in this gown, and instructs the other citizens to watch Coriolanus. The citizens are to meet him only one or two at a time, not all at once, since he is supposed to make his requests for votes personally, and the citizens are supposed to each get the honor of "giving him [their] own **voices** with [their] own **tongues**." The citizens exit and prepare to meet with Coriolanus individually.

The citizens meet the candidates in small groups to receive the pleasure of personally voting, showing that in most cases the voting process is just a formality, a concession made to the common people to placate them or compromise in place of granting some other demand.

Menenius, meanwhile, is coaxing and prepping Coriolanus to meet with the citizens. He says that the worthiest men have participated in the custom of asking for the citizens' votes. Coriolanus, though, doesn't know what to say. He believes he cannot even force his **tongue** to beg, or to say "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."

In coaching Coriolanus, Menenius is playing the part of a campaign manager. He attempts to assure Coriolanus that participating in this custom doesn't go against his ideals, but Coriolanus can't even attempt to ask for votes without being reminded of his fury at the cowardice of the common Roman soldiers in Corioles.

Menenius warns him not to talk about that, since it would insult the citizens; Coriolanus should instead try and make them think well of him. But Coriolanus says he would rather they forget him like they have forgotten their classic Roman virtues. Menenius warns him not to ruin everything, and prays that Coriolanus will speak to the citizens "in wholesome manner." He then leaves Coriolanus alone. In his moment alone onstage, Coriolanus hopes the citizens wash their faces and keep their teeth clean.

Coriolanus' character is defined by classic Roman values, so his criticism of the common people is that they ignore those values. In war, he asked for soldiers who loved Rome more than themselves, and likewise in politics he loves his values more than his own best interest. He is so filled with hate of the common people that in the moments before he meets them all he can think about is that they are dirty.

Three citizens then enter, and Coriolanus greets them, saying they know why he is there. They say they do, and ask what has brought him to stand for the position of consul. He responds, simply, that he is deserving of it. One citizen asks him to clarify, and Coriolanus repeats that he is deserving, though he did not desire the position, since he never wanted to "trouble the poor with begging." The citizens say Coriolanus must know that they will only give him the consulship if they expect to gain something from him, so Coriolanus asks what the price is. One citizen responds that the price is asking nicely. Nicely, then, Coriolanus asks for the consulship and their **voices**, saying he has **wounds** to show in private. The citizens find the situation odd, but they agree to give Coriolanus their votes, and exit.

As Menenius mentioned in glee when he learned where Coriolanus was injured, traditionally the wounds were shown publicly, suggesting that the wounds (and the deeds) belong not just to the hero but to Rome as well. Coriolanus is more than glad to attribute his deeds to the city, but he doesn't want to share them with the cowardly common people themselves. The interactions here border on awkward and reinforce the fact that Coriolanus has no political acumen, no eloquence, and no qualms being extremely direct with the citizens.

Two more citizens enter, and Coriolanus asks for their **voices**. One responds that Coriolanus has been both noble and not noble. He clarifies that Coriolanus has been a scourge to both the enemies and the common people of Rome. Coriolanus, though, believes he is more virtuous because he does not give his love easily. At the same time, he agrees to flatter the common people to earn a better reputation, since this is considered friendly and traditional. Since the people want this flattery instead of genuine love, he says he will play the part and act like someone well loved by the people, even though everyone knows it is just an act. The citizens agree to give Coriolanus their voices and exit.

Coriolanus' argument that he is virtuous because he doesn't flatter points to his classic Roman ideals: he hates dishonesty. He won't pretend to flatter, but he will give the customary disingenuous praise overtly in the hopes of remaining honest while fulfilling the tradition. These citizens seem content with openly fake love, but the abnormality of the exchange seems to suggest that the citizens' minds might easily be changed.

Alone, Coriolanus says it's better to die or to starve then to desire and beg for the reward he has already proved he deserves. Why, he asks, should he stand in a toga and beg every random citizen for their unnecessary votes? It's customary, but he wonders if customs should always be followed, thinking nothing would ever change and mistakes would constantly be made if so. Rather than playing the fool and only obeying custom, Coriolanus would prefer to let the honor and the position go to someone else who would follow custom and beg for votes. At the same time, he recognizes that he is halfway through the task, and since he has come this far, he will suffer through the rest.

Coriolanus outlines the principles that the tribunes have been accusing him of holding: he thinks the citizens should not have the power to vote for consul, he thinks asking for their votes goes against his values, and he thinks that the custom is stupid and bad for Rome. While he claims that he'll continue with the process and suffer through, based on his ideology and his stubborn adherence to his values it seems likely even here that he will not.

Three more citizens enter, and Coriolanus asks for their **voices**. He says he has fought for them, stood watch for them, and received dozens of **wounds** for them. He asks to be consul, and the citizens answer that any honest man could not refuse Coriolanus in this request. The citizens exit, and Menenius, Brutus, and Sicinius enter. Menenius says that Coriolanus has fulfilled his customary obligation to the people; the tribunes grant him the people's vote, and all that remains is for the senate to officially grant him the position. Coriolanus makes sure that he is done asking for voices, and he asks if he is allowed to change out of his candidate's robe. He plans to change and then appear before the senate as has been requested. Menenius and Coriolanus exit, while Brutus and Sicinius stay behind.

Coriolanus breaks from his earlier desire not to attach his deeds to the people in saying that he received his wounds for them. Momentarily, he's able to play the part required of him, and it is enough to force the tribunes to grant him the people's vote. As soon as this is over, though, Coriolanus wants to cease his political posturing, showing that he believes his challenges are over. His discomfort in the candidate's robe mirrors his discomfort acting in the political sphere.

The plebeian citizens enter, and Sicinius asks them how they have chosen Coriolanus. While he has won their votes, Brutus prays that Coriolanus deserves their love. The citizens argue about whether or not Coriolanus was mocking them when asking for their votes, or if it was just his way of speaking. One complains that Coriolanus did not show them his **wounds**, and all the citizens agree that no one saw the wounds. He said he had wounds which he could show in private, but other than that he simply raved about their **voices** and dismissed them once they agreed.

Coriolanus lacks the subtle skills of language that Menenius and Cominius have, so the people couldn't tell if he was being honest, if he was being rude, or if he was outright mocking them. His choice to forgo the traditional public display of his wounds plays a large role in his undoing, since his credibility for the position of consul is based entirely on his military prowess, and the wounds are the physical evidence of his military campaigns.

Brutus and Sicinius question why the people were so childish and granted Coriolanus their **voices**. Why didn't they do as they were taught? When Coriolanus had no power, he was the enemy of the people and constantly spoke against their freedom. Now that he is about to win a place in the government, if he remains so opposed to the needs of commoners, the citizens' voices might be "curses" to themselves. They should have gotten him to promise to be kinder to the common people (as they were instructed by the tribunes), or enraged him and therefore made him unelectable. If he expressed open contempt while campaigning, why wouldn't he continue to be hateful once he has power? Have they ever denied anyone their votes?

Brutus and Sicinius reveal that they instructed the people not to vote for Coriolanus, but the fickle mob disobeyed, even though Coriolanus cursed them out during the riots. The tribunes point out how Coriolanus' well-known views will hurt the common people, expressed in the comment that the citizens are cursing themselves with their votes. The tribunes' assessment of the common falsehood that hateful campaign rhetoric will cease once a candidate is elected is one of the moments where the play feels eerily modern in its political viewpoint.

One citizen notes that Coriolanus has not yet been officially confirmed; they can still deny him. Another citizen chimes in that the people will deny him. The citizens say they have hundreds of **voices** who all will speak to deny Coriolanus. Brutus instructs them to leave immediately and to tell their friends that they have chosen a consul who will strip them of liberties and ignore their voices. Therefore, they should assemble and undo this mistaken election. They must remember Coriolanus's pride and how much he hates them, and not continue to let his noble deeds distract them from these qualities.

Just after the play seems to criticize hate as a campaign tool and absolute power, it shows the citizens fulfilling the common stereotype that they are fickle and easily swayed into changing their opinion. The citizens also reinforce this stereotype by calling themselves "voices" instead of people. It's this kind of back-and-forth that makes the general political argument of the play so hard to pin down, and makes it open to readings from both sides of the aisle.

The people can even blame the tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus say, as long as they take back their votes. The citizens exit for the capitol, repenting their election of Coriolanus. Brutus believes that causing the citizens to rise up like this is a risk worth taking. If Coriolanus becomes enraged by their retracted votes, they'll capitalize on his anger. By waiting behind, the tribunes hope to make it seem like it is the citizens' own idea to revoke their support of Coriolanus.

This bold gesture is a risk worth taking, since if Coriolanus becomes consul he'll likely render the tribunes powerless. With their plan to wait behind and to capitalize on Coriolanus' anger, the tribunes show that while Coriolanus is superior in the realm of violence, they are far more skilled at politics than he is.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Coriolanus, Menenius, Cominius, Lartius, Roman Senators, and other patricians enter a street in Rome. Coriolanus asks Lartius if it's true that Aufidius has gathered a new army, and Lartius confirms that it is. Coriolanus believes they are waiting to attack Rome again, but Cominius (who calls Coriolanus "lord consul") says that the Volscians are too tired from the previous battle to attack any time soon. Coriolanus wants to know about his rival, and Lartius reports that he met with Aufidius, who cursed the Volscians for surrendering Corioles so easily. Aufidius is now in Antium, the Volscian capital, and he told Lartius about how often he has clashed with Coriolanus, whom he hates above all things. Coriolanus wishes he had a reason to go to Antium to fight with Aufidius once more.

Part of the tension in this scene is driven by dramatic irony; the characters on stage all assume that Coriolanus will become consul, and Cominius even calls him by that title. Coriolanus is thrilled to move from politics back to war. Immediately upon return from battle he is looking for a reason to go back to it, and part of his heroism seems to be his unending hunger for violence. He's a terrible politician since he has no interest in peace or governing. As always, he's curious about Aufidius, the rival that he loves to hate.

Brutus and Sicinius enter, and Coriolanus greets them as "the **tongues** o' th' common mouth." He despises them since they are trying to amass power, which he believes is detrimental to Rome's nobility. The tribunes vaguely warn Coriolanus, and finally reveal that he no longer has the support of the people, who have become "incensed against him." Coriolanus calls the people a herd of the tribunes, and he asserts that Brutus and Sicinius control the people and have turned them against him. Menenius tries to calm him, but Coriolanus claims that the tribunes are intentionally plotting against him in order to resist the power of Rome's nobility. If the nobles allow this, he warns, they will completely lose the ability to rule.

Coriolanus invokes the body politic to describe the tribunes' roles of expressing the opinions of the people. Coriolanus is right that the tribunes are power hungry and are plotting against him, but he wrongly attributes this to a crusade against the whole patrician class rather than the personal vendetta they have against him. His political philosophy amounts to the idea that the more power given to the people, the less effectively (authoritatively and efficiently) the nobles of the Roman government can lead.

Brutus, though, says that it's no plot; Coriolanus mocked the people, and when they were given free **corn** during the famine, he called them "foes to nobleness." Coriolanus replies that they knew this when they elected him, but Brutus claims they did not, prompting Coriolanus to ask if Brutus told the people in order to undercut him. Brutus denies it and claims he would make a better consul than Coriolanus, who responds, enraged, that maybe he deserves the terrible position of being made tribune.

Brutus brings the debate back to corn and to the disparity of material resources that first enraged the people. To Coriolanus, being named tribune would be an insult and a dishonor, since he believes the position is superfluous and even detrimental to the Roman government.

Sicinius takes Coriolanus's rage as an opportunity, saying that he is demonstrating exactly what makes the people not want him as consul. If Coriolanus hopes to be consul, he must cooperate and exhibit a calmer, "gentler spirit." Menenius and a senator try to calm Coriolanus, and Cominius says that the people have been deceived and manipulated by the tribunes, but Coriolanus remains furious. He refuses to apologize for what he said about the people receiving free **corn**. He calls the people "the mutable, rank-scented many," and says that conceding anything to the people sows the seeds for "rebellion, insolence," and "sedition." The common people should not mingle with the nobles, who have virtue and power as long as they don't give it away to "beggars."

Sicinius knows that Coriolanus cannot exhibit a gentler spirit, because it would require him to act like a politician, which he can't *do because of his lack of language ability, and which he* won't *do because it's so contrary to his values. Coriolanus finally uses the type of imagery that the citizens hate most, calling them a fickle, disgusting multitude. His understanding of the power structure in Rome is that nobles need to maintain their power by keeping as separate as possible from the powerless masses. In his eyes, ceding to any of the citizens' demands threatens the existence of Rome itself.*

Menenius and a Roman senator try to silence Coriolanus, saying "no more words," but Coriolanus continues. He says he has shed **blood** for his country without fear of any outside force, and likewise he will speak words against the common people, who he characterizes as a leprosy that the nobles have set themselves up to contract. Brutus comments that Coriolanus speaks of the people as if he was "a god to punish, not a man of their infirmity," and Sicinius says they had better report this to the citizens, but Menenius tries to dismiss Coriolanus's rantings as mere "choler." Coriolanus, though, refuses this excuse, saying that even if he were as calm and patient as he is sleeping at midnight, his opinion would be the same.

Usually Coriolanus avoids language in favor of action, so it's ironic that this single deluge of words brings his downfall. Again he is compared to a god instead of human, but Brutus makes this comparison to highlight Coriolanus' arrogance and elitism, not his heroism. Renaissance medicine held that bodily "humors" were responsible for emotions; "choler" was the humor responsible for anger. By blaming it on choler, Menenius hopes Coriolanus will not be held accountable for his rant against the plebeians and their tribunes.

Sicinius responds that this opinion "shall remain a poison where it is, not a poison any further." Coriolanus lashes out, furious at the audacity of Sicinius to say "shall remain." He calls the tribune a "Triton of the minnows," and makes sure his fellow nobles noticed Sicinius's use of the absolute "shall." Cominius remarks that Sicinius was out of line, and Coriolanus launches into a furious speech. He asks why the patricians and senators have given this "hydra" an official position, when he is so audacious and outright with his duplicity.

Though Coriolanus prefers action, violence, and wounds to words, here he lashes out due to a single insulting word. In Greek mythology Triton is the messenger of the sea, and in Coriolanus' analogy the common people are minnows, at once insulting the people and suggesting that the tribune is virtually powerless. The hydra is a mythical multi-headed monster, the perfect metaphor to describe the worst view of the common people.

Coriolanus continues his rant: if the tribunes really have power, then the senators should be ashamed; if not, then they should wake up and cease being so mild. If the senators are smart, they should stop acting like fools; if they are foolish, then they should allow the tribunes to sit with them in the senate. Senators are made plebeians if the tribunes are made senators. When the **voices** of the senators and the people are blended, it favors the people. The people chose for their tribune someone like Sicinius, who has popular approval but speaks arrogantly to the great Roman senate. Such a man debases the very role of consul itself. Coriolanus's soul aches, he says, witnessing the struggle between the senate and the tribunes, a struggle that leaves a power vacuum filled with confusion and chaos.

In one of his only long speeches in the play, Coriolanus makes a straightforward plea for the senators to either revoke power from the tribunes, or just allow Rome to collapse into chaos. The structure of this speech is fairly simple, showing again that Coriolanus is no master rhetorician. Coriolanus' criticism is both impassioned and practical. As a classic Roman idealist, he is offended to his soul by the concessions made to the common people. But in a practical sense, he sees a power vacuum which makes it extremely difficult to rule and threatens to throw Rome into chaos.

Cominius tries to cut Coriolanus off, saying that they should all go to the marketplace to meet the people, but Coriolanus continues ranting. He says that whoever had the idea to give the people state-owned **corn** for free only fed the people's disobedience and "fed the ruin of the state." Brutus prods Coriolanus, asking why the people should give their **voices** to someone with that opinion, and Coriolanus launches into yet another speech.

Coriolanus makes a food pun, saying that feeding the people only works to feed rebellion and the ruin of Rome. He's of the belief that granting requests teaches the people that they can get their way by asking, and thus teaches them to continue asking for more and more, which will eventually lead the state into destruction.

Coriolanus claims that the reasons behind his opinions are much more meaningful than the **voices** of the people. The people know the **corn** was not given to them as a reward, since they did nothing to earn it. When the common people were conscripted to war, they refused to enter the gates of Corioles; for this they surely did not deserve free corn. In the war, they mutinied, revolted, and disobeyed, showing no valor whatsoever. Their fury at the senate is completely undeserved and unjustified, especially since the senate granted their wishes and donated corn.

Coriolanus reiterates the idea that the people's opinions are subject to change without rhyme or reason. The corn represents the broader desires of the people, and their anti-Roman cowardice in the most recent war gives Coriolanus even more reason to despise them. These are topics that Menenius and Volumnia explicitly told Coriolanus not to mention in front of the common people for the sake of his political career.

How did the "**bosom** multiplied **digest**" the senate's kindness, Coriolanus asks? They decided that they got what they want since they asked for it and since they have the greater numbers, believing that the senate accepted their demands out of fear. By giving in and allowing this type of thinking, Coriolanus believes the senate has debased itself and made itself extremely vulnerable. Menenius tells Coriolanus "enough," and Brutus agrees, but Coriolanus offers even more words.

In calling the common people the "bosom multiplied," Coriolanus finally uses the many-headed multitude language that the people hate. "Digest" is meant literally, since they ate the corn, and figuratively as "understand." Since the people know that they do not deserve the corn (in Coriolanus' mind), he reasons that they must recognize their power in numbers. It's ironic that Coriolanus hates words but finds himself unable to stop speaking (and thereby stop killing his political career).

Coriolanus swears by divine and human powers in his final speech. He claims that power is divided in Rome. One side hates the other (for good reason) and the other insults the first without cause. The senators and patricians currently cannot make decisions without looking to the approval or disapproval of the ignorant masses. This situation and division of power, Coriolanus claims, prevents important decisions from being made and leaves the government extremely fragile. Planning is made impossible, so nothing happens according to plan.

Though Coriolanus is unable to make an argument without insulting the common people – as in the "for good reason" comment – his argument (and his hatred) seems derived from a legitimate threat to Rome. He describes a power vacuum and the impracticality of governing while constantly looking to the common people (who admit to having many opinions) for approval. Coriolanus seems to hate the commoners insofar as their demand for a voice threatens the stability of the city he loves more than himself.

Therefore, Coriolanus continues, anyone who will be wiser than he is afraid, anyone who loves the essence of Rome more than he fears the recent changes in the city, anyone who prefers a noble life to a long life, and anyone willing to risk a dangerous medical treatment without which the **body** of Rome would surely die, should rip out "the multitudinous tongue." The senators must not allow the people to get away with flattery, or allow their dishonor to cloud their judgment. They must claim the power they require to do good for the people they control.

Coriolanus' list of "anyone who" characteristics echoes his battle speech given outside of Corioles. Attempting to use a battle speech in a political debate perfectly captures Coriolanus' inability to transition from soldier to politician. He uses the body politic and a medical analogy to suggest the people be stripped of their new tribunes, whom he has already called "tongues of the common mouth."

At the end of this speech, Brutus simply responds that Coriolanus "has said enough." Sicinius proclaims Coriolanus a traitor who must face punishment. At this accusation, Coriolanus becomes overwhelmed by rage. He questions why the people should have tribunes at all, since they were only granted power during a revolt. Now that the revolt is over, the correct thing to do is strip the tribunes of their power.

The tribunes have been waiting for Coriolanus to incriminate himself enough to take action. Though he's already "said enough," Coriolanus might be said to have shown some ounce of restraint up until he is called a traitor. After that point, his love for Rome and his adherence to his ideals are so strong that all attempts to play the part are abandoned, along with metaphors and analogies, and he directly says that he thinks the tribunes should be stripped of their power.

Brutus and Sicinius cry out, continuing to call Coriolanus a traitor. They call in a Roman Aedile, whom they instruct to gather the people. Sicinius then formally accuses Coriolanus of being a traitor and enemy of the public. The patricians say that they'll defend Coriolanus, who threatens to shake Sicinius's bones out of his **body**. Sicinius cries out for help, and a rabble of citizens and the Aediles enter. Menenius calls for more respect from both sides, but Sicinius shouts to the people that Coriolanus is the one who wants to take away all their power. The citizens yell "down with him!" and in a chaos, everyone surrounds Coriolanus. Menenius doesn't know what is about to happen – he's confused, out of breath, and he cannot speak. He tries to calm Coriolanus, and tells Sicinius to calm the people.

An Aedile was a Roman officer under control of the people's tribunes. While Sicinius and Brutus are playing a careful political game, Coriolanus is quick to resort to physical violence. Though he loves Rome more than himself, the tribunes are able to accuse him of being a traitor since he's against part of the city's government structure. In the chaos, even a master orator like Menenius is rendered speechless. Menenius tries to keep the peace, but the tribunes don't want peace, as they are intentionally creating an uproar in order to seize power and oust Coriolanus.

Sicinius, though, tells the people that they are about to lose their liberties, since "Martius" wants to remove them. Menenius is furious, recognizing that Sicinius is stoking the flames rather than calming the people. A senator says Sicinius is going to destroy the city, but Sicinius responds that the people *are* the city. Brutus reminds him that the tribunes were named the magistrates of the people through consensus, and the citizens cry out that the tribunes must remain in power. Coriolanus says the real way to destroy the city is to collapse the social hierarchy—but this, Sicinius says, "deserves death." Brutus says he will either exhort his power or tribune or lose it; he demands that "Martius" be put to death. Sicinius calls for officers to throw Coriolanus from the Tarpeian rock – a steep cliff near the Roman Forum used as a place for public execution.

As mentioned above, Sicinius doesn't want to calm the people, since he is using their anger to get rid of his political competition. Calling Coriolanus by his original name is an insult and a rejection of the most recent military deeds that qualified Coriolanus to be a politician, another subtle way for Sicinius to undercut and infuriate Coriolanus. The arguments here make up two major political viewpoints of what makes Rome great. For the tribunes (and those reading through a leftist or Marxist lens) the greatness and power of the city comes from the common people. From the other perspective, Rome is strong because of the firm social hierarchy in place. Threats to this social order (which in some ways mirrors the social order of Shakespeare's England) are to Coriolanus threats with the potential to destroy the city he loves.

The citizens cry out in agreement, but Menenius speaks out, trying to dissuade the tribunes and the people from killing Coriolanus. Brutus, though, will not acquiesce, and he calls for the mob to take Coriolanus to the rock. At this point, Coriolanus draws his sword, saying he'd rather die on the spot. Some people present have seen him in battle, he says, and anyone is welcome to experience it for themselves. Menenius tells him to put the sword away, and Brutus continues stoking the mob, but Menenius calls for the nobles to help Coriolanus. In the chaos the tribunes, citizens, and officers are pushed away.

Again, in drawing his sword Coriolanus cannot contain his inner soldier. He'd rather die on the spot, both because he'd die in battle and because dying by formal execution would mean he died as a traitor to Rome. Menenius is concerned with saving Coriolanus' political career, not with saving the common people.

Menenius tells Coriolanus to go home, or all will be lost. Coriolanus wants to stay where he is, since they have "as many friends as enemies," but Menenius hopes it will not come to an all-out civil war. The Roman senators and Menenius continue encouraging Coriolanus to go home, and they compare his loss of approval to a **wound** that he himself cannot cure.

Coriolanus is war-minded again, hoping to fulfill his earlier wish of slaughtering the common citizens. Somehow Menenius doesn't believe that all is already lost for Coriolanus. Menenius must compare the political failure to a wound so that Coriolanus can understand it, which is ironic since the wounds he received in battle were his original qualification and political currency.

Coriolanus says he wishes that the common people were barbarians, not Romans, so he could kill them, bragging that he could take on forty of them at once. Menenius says he wishes he could fight with the two tribunes, but Cominius says the situation has already gotten too far out of hand. He explains that it's foolish, not manly, to fight when the odds are so terrible, and tells Coriolanus to leave before the wild crowd returns. Menenius plans to use his wit to settle the people and salvage Coriolanus's political career, and Coriolanus and Cominius exit.

Even though Coriolanus hates the common people, he still recognizes them as civilized Romans and therefore will not kill them, suggesting that Roman-ness might come before class distinctions. Cominius explains an important distinction between masculinity and violence, suggesting that being violent alone doesn't make one manly. Instead, one must fight a righteous and winnable battle to be manly.

As soon as Coriolanus walks out, a patrician says that he has ruined his fortune. Menenius explains that Coriolanus's "nature is too noble for the world." He would not even flatter the gods to be granted their powers, let alone the people. "His **heart**'s his mouth": whatever he feels or thinks he immediately must say, and when he's enraged, he expresses himself without any fear of death. A noise indicates that the rabble is going to reenter, and Menenius questions what went wrong and why Coriolanus could not "speak [the people] fair."

Coriolanus' stubbornness can be viewed as the utmost nobility and an adherence to strict, classic Roman values. This trait makes Coriolanus heroic, but also un-relatable, and it is possible that this is one of the reasons he is so often disliked by audiences. Menenius perfectly captures Coriolanus' lack of language ability with the "heart's his mouth" analogy and the comment that he couldn't "speak" the people into agreement. Coriolanus' only use of language is brutal honesty. He's incapable of editing his speech to reflect something not in his character, and he cannot use language as a tool.

Brutus, Sicinius, and the mob reenter, looking for Coriolanus, whom Sicinius calls a "viper that would depopulate the city and be every man himself." Menenius tries to begin a speech, but Sicinius cuts him off, insisting that Coriolanus will executed at the Tarpeian rock, a deed which he says will be done with "rigorous **hands**." Coriolanus has resisted the force of the law, and therefore will be subjected to the harsh law of the public power which he denies. A citizen calls out that Coriolanus will learn that the "tribunes are the people's mouths" and the people are the tribunes' "hands."

Sicinius' comment suggests that Coriolanus wants to kill all of the citizens and be the only person in Rome. Menenius has already demonstrated his ability to calm the crowd with words at the beginning of the play, but here the tribunes prevent him by speaking over him. The citizens reinforce their power dynamic with the tribunes (and the city) by reiterating the body politic analogy in which the tribunes are mouths – they voice the opinions of the people – and the citizens are hands – they carry out the will of the tribunes.

Menenius is finally able to get a word in, asking the tribunes and the people not to call for slaughter when they should only seek a moderate punishment. He says that he knows the Consul's worthiness as well as his faults. Sicinius responds in shock that Menenius still thinks that Coriolanus will be made consul, and the people all cry out "no!" Menenius begs for a few words, and a little bit of time to speak. Sicinius agrees, but he tells Menenius to "speak briefly," since they are in a hurry to kill the traitorous Coriolanus. To banish him would be dangerous, and to keep him in Rome would bring the death of the tribunes and the people, so the only solution is to kill him.

Menenius tries to subtly save Coriolanus' career by calling him Consul, but the tribunes are too attuned to the language-based political game, so they refuse to let this comment slip by unnoticed and make sure to limit how much Menenius is allowed to speak. The people's outcries reinforce the way that the tribunes harness the power and (literal) voices of the people for their own political power.

Menenius, though, takes the position that it would be extremely un-Roman for the city to be so ungrateful to one of her deserving citizens. Sicinius responds that Coriolanus is a "disease that must be cut away," but Menenius runs with this analogy, saying that Coriolanus is a **limb** that has a disease. Cutting off this limb would be deadly to the body, and curing the disease within the limb would be simple. Furthermore, he maintains that Coriolanus has done nothing to Rome to warrant death. He's killed Rome's enemies and lost his own **blood**, all for his country. Killing Coriolanus would permanently mark Rome with shame. Sicinius disagrees, and Brutus claims that Coriolanus only loved his country enough to receive the benefits of its honor.

Sicinius inverts the analogy used by Coriolanus in which the tribunes are a diseased, "multitudinous tongue" that must be ripped from the body of Rome to save it. In Sicinius' analogy, Coriolanus is the diseased limb that must be cut off from the body (killed).The dismemberment imagery – breaking off of body parts – reflects the fragmentation in Rome itself. Menenius' counterargument is based on the ideals of Rome and the idea – one that the citizens themselves admitted – that it's wrong to be ungrateful to someone who has done such a great service and received so many wounds for the city.

They continue speaking of Coriolanus metaphorically as a **limb**, calling him a foot that no longer functions and must be cut off from the body to prevent infection from spreading. Menenius interjects, asking for one more word. He says that acting too swiftly in rage often leads to mistakes being made. Coriolanus must be given due process of law, or a faction that loves Coriolanus might revolt and create civil war in Rome.

While the rioting people were once the foot ("toe") of Rome, now Coriolanus is characterized as the mutinous, diseased foot. Both sides disagree on who is really infected, but they agree that the fragmentation in the city could legitimately cause civil war and the destruction of Rome, heightening the stakes of the political drama.

The tribunes aren't yet convinced, but Menenius reminds them that Coriolanus was "bred [in the] wars since he could draw a sword," and he is poorly educated when it comes to language. Menenius offers to get Coriolanus and bring him to somewhere where he can face legal justice. A senator urges the tribunes to agree to this, since otherwise **bloody** infighting in Rome is highly likely. The tribunes agree to meet Menenius and Coriolanus at the public marketplace, though if Coriolanus doesn't show up, they'll continue hunting him with the mob.

Menenius' "one more word," namely mentioning the fact that without justice war will break out, is enough to spare Coriolanus and buy him another chance. This ability to use language so effectively in such a short amount of time highlights Coriolanus' contrasting inability to use language, even in his lengthy impassioned speeches. Menenius also reinforces the idea that Coriolanus was raised in war, and uses his language ineptitude as an excuse for the outrage Coriolanus just caused.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

In his house, Coriolanus speaks with a Roman noble. Coriolanus says that no matter how the tribunes and common people torture or kill him, he will always think of them and act towards them in the same way. He wonders what his mother will think of his behavior, since she usually called the common people underlings and "things" created to buy and sell, to gather in congregations, to yawn, and to look up in silent awe when someone of a higher class (like Coriolanus himself) speaks about peace or war. Volumnia then enters, and Coriolanus says he was just talking about her. He asks why she wishes he would have been milder, and if she would have wanted him to be false to his own nature. He says he'd rather "play the man I am."

Coriolanus reinforces the idea that he is unshakable in his values. Volumnia, like her son, dehumanizes the lower class and thinks of them like a mob whose purpose is to defer to the patricians. To Coriolanus, playing politics means acting like something he is not, which is therefore lying. That he would rather "play the man" he is, though, suggests the theatricality even behind being a hero or being one's true self. Even when he is sticking to his steadfast Roman values, he's still only acting, an irony given an extra level by the fact that Coriolanus is a character played by an actor on stage.

Volumnia says she would have had her son assume his position of power smoothly by hiding his true views about the common people until he was officially named consul. Coriolanus says "let them hang" in reference to the people, and Volumnia agrees, adding "and burn too." Menenius and Roman Senators then enter Coriolanus's house, and Menenius immediately begins scolding Coriolanus for being too rough; he must return to the people and fix everything. One senator, though, says that there is no remedy, though not fixing the situation might cleave Rome and create a civil war.

It's clear that both mother and son have contempt for the common people, but in the political sphere Volumnia is more pragmatic. Though Menenius has skillfully prevented Coriolanus from facing execution at the hands of the mob (by evoking a possible civil war in Rome), he seems overly optimistic about salvaging Coriolanus' political career. Again, the danger of Rome fracturing into civil war is brought up to heighten drama.

Volumnia counsels her son, saying she has the same grievances with the common people that he has, but she also uses her anger to her advantage. Menenius says that Rome requires the medicine of Coriolanus stooping to the "herd." He must return to the tribunes and repent what he has spoken, but Coriolanus says cannot repent. Volumnia then tells him "you are too absolute." Usually one cannot be too noble, she says, but in certain dire circumstances Coriolanus can be.

Rome is once more described as a diseased body in need of healing, but instead of an amputation, Rome requires Coriolanus to do the only things he cannot do: change in his values, act like something he is not, bend to the will of the common people, and apologize. In saying Coriolanus is "too absolute" and too noble, Volumnia echoes Menenius' comment that Coriolanus is "too noble to the world." They admire his idealist adherence to Roman virtues, but find that too strict an adherence is politically impractical.

Volumnia reminds Coriolanus of his philosophy that honor and strategy grow together in war. Why, then, does he refuse to combine honor and strategy during a time of peace? In war Coriolanus often uses deception, seeming like he is something he is not, for the benefit of his strategy. Volumnia questions why he cannot do the same thing and deceive others during peace just like he does in war?

Volumnia's criticism points to some of the irony in Coriolanus "playing" himself, suggesting that he simply prefers war to politics. She reasons that he might use deceptive military tactics, which she equates to political posturing. A possible way to save Coriolanus' virtue might be to argue that in war, even while being deceptive, one's intentions are always genuine and clear: to win and to kill. Even deceptive violence is honest in that way, but politics requires outright lying and concealed intentions.

Coriolanus asks why Volumnia is forcing this point, to which she responds that Coriolanus must now speak to the people. He must not speak his own words or from his own **heart**, but rather with memorized words he will be given that have absolutely no relation to what he truly thinks and feels. Such politicking, she says, is no more dishonorable than taking a town with gentle words instead of risking his life in a **bloody** battle. Volumnia herself would conceal her true nature ("dissemble") if her friends and her success were at stake and she could do so while remaining honorable. She says that she speaks for his wife, his son, the senators, and all the nobles, while Coriolanus would rather frown and curse the citizens than flatter them in order to gain power and therefore gain a position to keep Rome safe.

Like a campaign manager or stage mother, Volumnia wants to feed words directly to her son. She doesn't want him to speak from his heart, but Menenius has already said that Coriolanus' mouth is his heart, suggesting already that Coriolanus will fail. Again, she takes the pragmatic approach and appeals to Coriolanus' sense of duty to Rome. Not only can Coriolanus maintain his honor (which he values above his life), but he can also gain a position to keep Rome safe. In contrast, he's already been told (and seen) that the city is fragmenting, and without a solution it might fall to civil war.

Menenius continues prompting Coriolanus to "speak fair" to the citizens, which, he believes, might still calm the rabble and restore Coriolanus's hopes of becoming consul. Volumnia hands Coriolanus a cap and gives him detailed instructions about how to hold it and wave it and how to deliver a proper speech. He should tell the common people that he is their soldier, and that, having grown up in wars, he lacks "the soft way" of language, which he should admit would be a good skill for him to have. He must "frame [himself]" a man of the people forever. Menenius confirms that if Coriolanus does as Volumnia instructs, he will surely win the people's hearts, pardons, and **voices**. Volumnia tells Coriolanus to listen to them, even though she knows he would rather follow his enemy into a fiery pit than flatter him.

Still acting as campaign managers and advisors, Menenius and Volumnia tell Coriolanus almost exactly how to speak and act. He needs to alter ("frame") or present himself as something that he is not: a soft-spoken admirer of the common people who is sorry for everything else he has said. They want him to admit he lacks the "soft way" of language, but, ironically, since he does *lack that skill, he won't be able to apologize for it or communicate how they instruct him. Volumnia has the political acumen to be a politician, but her desires and ambitions are foisted upon her son.*

Cominius enters Coriolanus's house and reports that he has been to the marketplace. He says Coriolanus needs to gather supporters and defend himself calmly, or not show up at all, since the people are extremely angry. Menenius, Cominius, and Volumnia all agree that Coriolanus will be fine if he can speak fairly and "frame his spirit." Coriolanus questions whether he must really speak a lie that his heart cannot bear. He agrees to do it, but he notes that if he only had his **body** and his life to lose – "this mold of Martius" – the people would grind him to dust and throw him into the wind. He agrees to go to the market place, saying they've instructed him to play a part that he'll never be able to act convincingly.

The key words here are "calmly" and "fairly." Coriolanus must defend himself, but also reform ("frame") himself into something he is not – a politician instead of a soldier. In agreeing to do what the others want and conceding that being deceptive in battle is the same thing as dishonest politicking, Coriolanus becomes shaken and defeated, but also humanized. He seems for a moment to lose his heroism and his new title, referring to himself only as "this mold of Martius," a fragile human. "Mold" refers to body, but also recalls the framing imagery used by Menenius and Volumnia.

Cominius reassures Coriolanus that he will be prompted on what to say. Just like Volumnia first made her son a soldier years ago, she now hopes to make him perform a new part. He agrees he must do it, and he calls out for his disposition to be replaced with the spirit of a harlot and for multiple **body parts** to be replaced. He'll let his "throat of war" be turned into a pipe with a **voice** like a "eunuch." "The smiles of knaves" will enter his cheeks and "schoolboy's tears" will cloud his vision. His tongue will be replaced with a beggar's and his embattled knees will bend as he bows to beg. After all of this, he says that he will *not* do it, since he doesn't want to stop honoring his own truth and, by acting badly, make himself base.

In order to play this role, Coriolanus must cease being Coriolanus, so he describes his own body being torn apart and replaced with that of someone else. In saying his "throat of war" will be replaced with a eunuch's vocal chords, Coriolanus shows how he views the transition from warfare to politics to be emasculating. This point is reinforced when he says that he'll have the tears of a "schoolboy," showing him reverting from man to boy. After figuratively mutilating himself and posturing like he's instructed, he shows that he can't keep up such a ruse for long by immediately going back on his decision.

Volumnia responds that it's Coriolanus's choice, and that to beg him would be more dishonorable than for him to beg the people. She welcomes the ruin that will come to everything, and says she'll "feel" (suffer for) his pride, but will not fear the danger he causes by being so obstinate, since she mocks death just as well as he does. He can do whatever he wants. She reminds him, though, that his bravery came from her: he "suck'st it from [her]." His pride, on the other hand, is his own.

Volumnia shows herself to be just as bold and formidable as her son. Her intense maternal image, which recalls her comment about Hecuba breastfeeding the Trojan warrior Hector, shows her taking ownership over Coriolanus and his bravery. However, she only takes ownership and responsibility over his good *accomplishments.*

Coriolanus tells his mother to be content, agreeing to play the part, speak the people into loving him, and return beloved by everyone in Rome. He tells Volumnia to commend him to his wife, and promises to return as consul, or else they should never trust his ability to flatter again. Volumnia exits, and Cominius warns Coriolanus to answer mildly, as the tribunes have prepared even harsher accusations than before. Coriolanus says even if they invent accusations against him, he'll respond in honor, but Cominius stresses that he must do so mildly. Everyone departs for the public marketplace.

Coriolanus finally agrees to use political speech as a tool to manipulate the common people, but he doesn't seem to trust what everyone stresses to him: that he has to speak "fair," "soft," and "mild." He agrees to respond with honor and attempt to flatter, but he has already shown that he cannot flatter, that he lacks the "soft way" of language, and that he cannot obscure his true feelings for very long.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

Brutus and Sicinius enter the Roman Forum, planning how they will keep Coriolanus out of power. Their plan is to claim that he wants the power of a tyrant, and if that doesn't work, they will press him about his hatred of the people and question why the spoils from war have not been distributed. A Roman Aedile enters, reporting that Coriolanus is on his way, accompanied by Menenius and the supporting Roman senators.

The main concern of the tribunes remains their own power, not the best interests of the common people. They will go to any lengths to discredit and enrage Coriolanus.

The aedile, as instructed by the tribunes, has catalogued all of the **voices** against Coriolanus. He's now instructed to tell the people to yell out in agreement with whatever sentence Sicinius ultimately gives Coriolanus, be it a fine, banishment, or death. The people are to keep shouting until the sentence is executed. The aedile then exits to prepare the citizens. Brutus plans to enrage Coriolanus, who he thinks is not used to being contradicted and is unable to rein himself in once "chafed." Coriolanus "speaks what's in his **heart**," and what he really thinks is exactly what the tribunes need in order to get rid of him.

The common people are depicted as being without opinions of their own; their only role is to yell as a mob in agreement with the tribunes meant to represent them. The tribunes rightly predict that Coriolanus is easily enraged, and he lacks the ability to control himself once his true opinion has been unleashed. They know exactly what Menenius has previously said: Coriolanus' mouth is his heart, and he lacks the ability to conceal his hatred of the commoners.

Coriolanus, Menenius, Cominius, and other Senators enter. Aside, Menenius reminds Coriolanus to be calm, and Coriolanus begrudgingly agrees. Out loud, he calls for the gods to protect Rome and keep the peace. The aedile reenters with the citizens, whom he instructs to listen to the tribunes. Coriolanus asks if this public sentencing will put an end to the situation, and Sicinius demands that he must submit to the people's **voices**, obey the officers, and agree to whatever punishment they see fit for him. Coriolanus says he is content, and Menenius makes sure that the people notice, reminding them that Coriolanus has done military service and has received **wounds** for his country. Humbly, Coriolanus calls the wounds "scratches."

This scene is a political spectacle for the common people, but Menenius doesn't realize that they have already been instructed to agree with the tribunes and that Coriolanus' cause is hopeless. Coriolanus at first does play the part and agrees to listen to the people's opinions, something he has dismissed all along. Once again, wounds are used as political currency and as Coriolanus' qualifications for office.

Menenius continues reminding the citizens that Coriolanus speaks like a soldier, not a citizen. Therefore, they should not take his "rougher accents" as anything malicious or filled with hatred; it's just the way that soldiers speak. Coriolanus asks why people who earlier gave "full **voice**" to name him consul have now revoked the approval, but Sicinius says that the tribunes will be asking the questions, not him. Coriolanus agrees to answer, and Sicinius accuses him of contriving to take tyrannical power, for which he is "a traitor to the people." Coriolanus, furious, responds "How Traitor?" and Menenius reminds him of his promise to be mild, but Coriolanus immediately shouts for the common people to burn in hell. He curses Sicinius for calling him a traitor, and he says that even if the tribune were supported by millions, Coriolanus would still call him a liar.

When Menenius speaks for Coriolanus it goes smoothly, but as soon as Coriolanus begins to speak himself, the tribunes are able to best him. The tribunes don't even need to turn to their fallback plan of mentioning the spoils of war, since by simply calling Coriolanus "traitor" they attack his Roman values and immediately trigger an outraged response. Even if Coriolanus truly intended to speak mildly as instructed, he is far too committed to his ideals to stand for being called a traitor, and he's unable to curb his language to reveal anything but his deep hate for the tribunes and their supporters.

Sicinius asks the people if they're paying attention, and they all cry out "to the rock!" Sicinius quiets them, and he says that they've seen and heard Coriolanus enough to sentence him to death. Brutus cuts in to say that since Coriolanus has done good service for Rome – at which point Coriolanus chides him for knowing nothing of service. Menenius reminds Coriolanus that he promised Volumnia to be mild, and Cominius tries to calm him, but he will not be calmed. He says that even if the tribunes order his death, exile, or any kind of torture, he will not buy their mercy with even a single word.

Menenius tries to invoke Coriolanus' family bonds and the promise Coriolanus made to his mother, but at this point his passion for an idealized Rome and refusal to be characterized as a traitor is much greater than any obligation he feels to his mother. He also continues to demonstrate his hatred of language. Just like he loves Rome more than himself, he hates words more than he loves his own life.

Sicinius continues his sentencing, saying that since Coriolanus has often hated the people and tried to revoke their power, he will be banished from Rome on pain of death. The people all cry out in support for the banishment. Cominius tries to speak, reminding the tribunes that he himself was once consul and can show the **wounds** he has received for Rome. He intends to plead for Coriolanus, but Brutus and Sicinius interrupt, saying that Coriolanus has already been sentenced. The people all shout that "it shall be so!"

Cominius' wounds are not enough to counteract Coriolanus' sentence, but it's possible that Coriolanus' own wounds (and the threat of civil war upon his execution) are what lead the tribunes to decide on banishment instead of death. As instructed, the citizens simply echo the opinions of the tribunes by yelling them out, perfectly fitting the role of "voices." This is ironic, since the tribunes are supposed to voice the opinions of the people, not provide them.

Coriolanus responds, calling the people a "common cry of curs." He says he hates their breath (**voices**) like the stench of "rotten fens," and he cares for their love like he cares for rotting, unburied carcasses. He cries out that he banishes the people and their uncertainty. He hopes that they are shaken by every rumor and that their enemies are empowered, and he's glad that they'll keep the power to banish those who would defend them, so that their own ignorance will lead them to become captives to some other nation that takes over Rome.

Ironically, Coriolanus' characterization of the citizens' breath as "rotten fens" (swamps) is reminiscent of the tribunes, who called the voices of the citizens "stinking breath." Coriolanus points out the ungratefulness and the foolishness of the people by pointing out that in addition to the threat of civil war, Rome also faces external threats, and he is their number one defender.

Hating Rome because of the people, Coriolanus turns his back on the city. He says "there is a world elsewhere," and he exits along with Cominius, Menenius, and the other Roman senators. The people and tribunes rejoice that their enemy has been banished, and they decide to follow Coriolanus out of the city and curse him as he begins his exile.

The constant references to Coriolanus' aloneness have culminated in his exile from the city of Rome. "There is a world elsewhere" is a final rejection of the city from the ultimate idealist Roman, showing how far he has been alienated.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Outside a gate of Rome, Coriolanus is saying farewell to Volumnia, Virgilia, Menenius, Cominius, and the young nobles of Rome. He tells them to leave their tears, asking for a brief farewell. "The beast with many **heads**" has banished him. He asks his mother to show her ancient courage, and to demonstrate the precept that she always taught him: everyone can deal with commonplace events, but true character is tested during extreme circumstances. Virgilia cries out "O heavens!" and Coriolanus tries to calm her. Volumnia cries out for typhus to strike all of Rome, but Coriolanus says that he'll be loved when he is missed.

It's fitting that a man who hates words would wish for a short goodbye. Again, Coriolanus characterizes the common people with the analogy they hate the most. In her sorrow, Volumnia curses Rome, but she won't be completely turned against the city by her son's banishment, showing that the connection to home can outweigh even a familial bond.

Coriolanus tells his mother to go back to the spirit she had when she said if she were the wife of Hercules, she'd have done six of his tasks herself to save him some of the work. He tells Cominius not to be sad, and says goodbye to his wife and mother. He tells Menenius not to cry, and asks his general (Cominius) to teach the women how to be stern in the face of horror. Coriolanus claims he must go alone, "like to a lonely dragon," and promises his mother that he'll be exceptional.

Part of Coriolanus' goodbye revolves around the notion that the male soldiers should instruct the women on how to deal with adversity, though Volumnia is already characterized as extremely bold. Coriolanus' aloneness is emphasized in his exile, and so is his heroic transition from man to something more than man – in this case a "lonely dragon."

Volumnia tries to convince Coriolanus to take Cominius with him until he gets settled, and Cominius says he's happy to go, especially since it will be difficult to locate Coriolanus if the banishment is ever repealed and he is completely alone in the world. Coriolanus denies Cominius's company, though, and asks for everyone to come with him to the gates and smile when they say goodbye. He promises that they'll still hear from him. Menenius says if he were seven years younger he'd accompany Coriolanus into his exile, and they all leave to prepare for Coriolanus's departure.

Coriolanus seems to embrace his solitude in exile, as if this makes him more heroic and honorable, and he opts to head out from Rome without the company of his longtime military companions. It's also notable that only the men offer to go with him; his family doesn't seem to even consider the possibility of abandoning Rome, suggesting that they are only his family as far as they are his Roman *family.*

ACT 4, SCENE 2

Sicinius, Brutus, and an aedile enter a street in Rome. Sicinius instructs the aedile to tell the citizens to go home, since Coriolanus is gone, and the nobility who have sided with him are now upset. Since they have shown their power, they now must seem humble; the aedile should tell the people that "their great enemy is gone." The aedile exits, and Volumnia, Virgilia, and Menenius enter the street. Sicinius wants to avoid them, since Volumnia is apparently mad, but she notices the tribunes. She shouts that she hopes the gods reward their love with praise, and asks the tribunes to leave. Virgilia says that they'll probably stay, which she wishes she could say about her husband.

The savvy tribunes recognize how the nobility side with Coriolanus. For this reason, they banished him instead of killing him, and it's for this reason that they must be careful after the banishment not to push the patricians too far. The tribunes show they are masters of acting, which is what is required in the political sphere, by pretending to be humble. Virgilia seems emboldened by her husband's exile, cursing the tribunes for their obstinacy.

Sicinius asks Volumnia "are you mankind?" to which she responds that her father was a man. She calls Sicinius a fool and asks if he had the cunning to banish a man that "struck more blows for Rome" than Sicinius has spoken words. She says she wishes her son were in Arabia with a sword in hand and Sicinius's family in front of him. Sicinius asks what then, and Virgilia responds that Coriolanus would "make an end of [Sicinius's] posterity."

Sicinius seems to question Volumnia's legitimacy by pointing out her womanhood, but she responds by saying that even the feminine comes from and has traces of the masculine. While Coriolanus failed in the realm of language, Volumnia reminds the tribunes that Coriolanus is far more skilled in the field of war than they are in the field of politics. Virgilia continues showing new confidence in threatening Sicinius' family. Despite Sicinius' sexist remark, Shakespeare's women here show extreme power and boldness in their femininity.

Volumnia laments the banishment of her son, especially given the **wounds** that he received for Rome. Menenius tries to calm her down, and Sicinius says he wishes that Coriolanus had continued being noble rather than undoing his own career. Brutus echoes this wish, but Volumnia calls them out, saying it was the tribunes who "incensed the rabble." She tells the tribunes they have banished someone who is far better than they are, and the tribunes decide to leave, saying that they don't want to be berated by someone who has lost her wits.

A common sexist criticism of women in Shakespeare's time (and still today) is that they lose their wits and have no control over their emotions. The tribunes use this stereotype to dismiss Volumnia, but they seem foolish in doing so since audiences (and everyone onstage) know that the tribunes really "incensed the rabble" as she suggests.

After they exit, Volumnia prays that the gods have nothing to do but enact her curses, and she wishes she could meet the tribunes once a day to "unclog [her] **heart**" and yell at them. Menenius asks if she will **eat** dinner with him, but she responds "Anger's my meat. I sup upon myself." She tells Virgilia to follow her and to stop crying. Instead, Volumnia says, Virgilia should lament in anger like the goddess Juno. They all exit.

While Coriolanus' heart is his mouth, Volumnia knows how to edit what she says, thereby clogging her heart up. Volumnia takes eating imagery to the cannibalistic level in saying that she subsides on anger and is so angry that she will eat herself. Invoking the goddess Juno is a perfect inversion of the stereotype of the hysterical woman, suggesting a theme of female empowerment.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

On the road to Antium, a Roman named Niancor and a Volscian named Adrian meet, recognize, and greet each other. Adrian asks for news of Rome, saying he has a note from the Volscian state to deliver. Niancor says that Rome has experienced insurrections of the common people against the patrician class. Adrian says the Volscians believed this turmoil was still ongoing, and had hoped to attack Rome in the midst of the chaos. Niancor responds that while the main drama of the insurrection has passed, it could easily be rekindled, since the nobles are so upset about the banishment of Coriolanus and are therefore likely to try to remove power from the people and the tribunes. The state is almost ready for civil war to break out.

This conversation between spies brings back the notion that the political landscape is filled with espionage, and it reminds audiences that Rome faces the threat of invasion and war as well as the internal threat of civil war. The two spies reinforce the fragmentation between the classes in Rome.

Adrian thanks Niancor for the information ("intelligence") that Coriolanus has been banished. Niancor believes Aufidius will probably fare well in the coming war now that Coriolanus will not fight for Rome. The two leave for Rome together, planning to discuss the strange events that have been taking place in the city. Niancor is thrilled to hear that the Volscian army is prepared to attack Rome when it is weakened by division.

Coriolanus' military skills are so significant that his absence might sway the coming war in the Volscians' favor. As pointed out by Coriolanus in his speech before entering exile, the internal divisions of Rome also make it more susceptible than ever to an outside attack.

ACT 4, SCENE 4

Outside Aufidius's house in Antium, Coriolanus is disguised in "mean apparel" with his face covered. He calls Antium a "goodly city," but says that he is responsible for creating its widows. Therefore he has disguised himself, so that the wives and children of men he's killed in war do not kill him. A citizen of Antiun enters, and Coriolanus asks if Aufidius is in Antium. The citizen responds that Aufidius is **feasting** with the Volscian nobles in his house that very night. When Coriolanus asks where Aufidius lives, the citizen points out that they are right outside his house. Coriolanus thanks the citizen, who then departs.

Though Coriolanus was essentially banished for refusing to pretend he is something he isn't, his banishment now necessitates that he puts on a disguise. His connection to his rival Aufidius is so strong that upon banishment Coriolanus immediately seeks him out.

Alone, Coriolanus wonders at the "slippery turns" of the world, which turn the closest of friends, whose two **bosoms** seem to have one heart, into the bitterest enemies. Likewise, they will turn the greatest foes, whose hatred has kept them up dreaming of murdering each other, into dear friends. He now hates his birthplace and loves his former enemy town. He decides to enter, thinking that if Aufidius kills him it will be justice, and if Aufidius spares him he will fight alongside the Volscians.

Coriolanus is so enraged by his banishment that he now rejects his Roman-ness. By virtue of the classic idea that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," Coriolanus hopes to turn his intense military rivalry with Aufidius into a military partnership. Of course, given their rivalry and Coriolanus' ideals, he would also be happy if his rival decided to kill him instead.

ACT 4, SCENE 5

Music plays in the house of Aufidius. A servant enters, looking for wine, and then exits. Another servant enters, looking for a person named Cotus, and then exits. Coriolanus enters and comments on Aufidius's "goodly house", saying that the **feast** smells good. The first servant enters again and asks what Coriolanus is doing there, telling him to leave. The servant exits, and Coriolanus feels that he doesn't deserve any better of a greeting. The second servant enters, and he also asks Coriolanus what he is doing there. He calls Coriolanus riffraff and tells him to leave. Coriolanus refuses, and then the first and third servants enter and question who he is, what he is doing in the house, and why he will not leave. One leaves to inform Aufidius that a strange guest has entered the house.

The lower class in Antium is contrasted with the citizens of Rome. Here, these servants happily do their jobs while the nobles eat (instead of rioting for more food of their own). Coriolanus is in a disguise, so he appears to be in a lower class than even the servants. He feels he deserves no special greeting because the servants don't know who he is, and if they did they would probably have given an even worse greeting.

Another servant asks Coriolanus where he lives, to which Coriolanus responds under the sky, and in the "city of kites and crows." The servant asks if that means he lives with foolish birds too, but Coriolanus says no, since he doesn't serve the servant's master. He beats the servant away, and another reenters along with Aufidius, who asks where the strange guest is. Aufidius asks why the stranger has come, what he wants, what his name is, and why he won't speak. Coriolanus removes his face covering, and says that if Tullus doesn't recognize him yet, he'll be forced to reveal his name, one that is "unmusical to the Volscians' and harsh in sound to [Aufidius]."

Coriolanus' explanation of where he lives means both that he is homeless (since he has been banished) and that he used to live in Rome, which he characterizes with birds of prey. This wordplay is a bit unexpected, since Coriolanus hates language, a fact reinforced by his refusal to speak to Aufidius at first. Here Coriolanus shows he at least in part understands the power of his name. Despite the fact that they have fought numerous times, Aufidius doesn't recognize Coriolanus by his face.

Aufidius again asks Coriolanus's name, noting that he has a grim appearance, a face fit for commanding, and a "noble vessel." Coriolanus tells Aufidius to prepare to frown, asking if he still doesn't recognize him. Aufidius still does not, so Coriolanus says he is Caius Martius, who has done great harm to the Volscians and to Aufidius personally, and has therefore been surnamed Coriolanus. For all of the danger he has faced and **blood** he has shed for his ungrateful country, his only reward is that surname, which is a memory of the hatred that Aufidius should bear him. Of his former life, Coriolanus says, "only that name remains." The cruel people have "**devoured**" the rest of him, and by the "**voice** of slaves" he was exiled from Rome.

While Aufidius doesn't recognize Coriolanus, he is able to recognize nobility and military prowess in Coriolanus' bearing. Coriolanus knows that his surname is to the Volscians a reminder of all the things he has done, but since "Caius" and "Martius" connect him to Rome and to his family (and to his humanity), and since he has become disjointed from both, he is now only Coriolanus, the more-than-human soldier. Though the people were afraid of being devoured by the patricians, Coriolanus himself has been devoured by them.

These extreme circumstances have brought Coriolanus to Aufidius's home, he says. He hasn't come to try and save his own life, since if he was afraid of dying he would have avoided Aufidius above everyone else. Instead, he's come out of spite for those who banished him. If Aufidius has a **heart** for vengeance, he should make Coriolanus's misery serve his own purpose, using Coriolanus's desire for revenge to aid in his own. Coriolanus will help Aufidius because he is willing to fight against his "cankered country" of Rome. If Aufidius isn't interested in this proposition, then he should just cut Coriolanus's throat, especially given their fierce rivalry throughout the years.

Coriolanus reveals his desire for revenge against Rome, hoping that a common enemy will make Aufidius accept him and end their rivalry. His willingness to turn on his home so quickly is surprising, but it also makes sense given that the city he loved more than himself rejected him. He is now only a soldier, and he sees violent revenge as his only option. Calling Rome a "cankered country" brings back the imagery of disease, suggesting that Rome is still fragile and divided, and therefore vulnerable to attack.

Aufidius cries out "O Martius, Martius," and says that each word that his enemy speaks has removed more and more of his former hatred. Aufidius would not believe the god Jupiter any more than he believes the "all-noble Martius." He asks to wrap his **arms** around Coriolanus's body, which he has usually fought against. They embrace, and Aufidius grabs his sword and claims that he now loves Coriolanus as "hotly and as nobly" as he used to battle him. Aufidius says that though he loves his wife, he is more enraptured to see Coriolanus now than when he first carried his wife across the threshold.

Though Aufidius calls him "Martius" instead of "Coriolanus," the Volscian general is extremely pleased to see his Roman rival. This reunion shows the intense bond between soldiers, which Aufidius says is even more strong than the marriage bond with his wife. Saying that he loves Coriolanus "hotly" suggests a possible sexual connotation to their masculine bond. This reunion also echoes some of the imagery used when Coriolanus and Cominius met on the battlefield earlier in the play.

Aufidius tells Coriolanus that he has amassed an army, and he originally intended to fight Coriolanus or die trying. Coriolanus has beaten him a dozen times, and since then Aufidius has dreamed nightly about fighting him. He claims that even if they had no other quarrel with Rome than Coriolanus's banishment, they would still be willing to attack the city. Excitedly, Aufidius tells Coriolanus that he must meet the Volscian senators who are here for dinner and to discuss Aufidius's plan to attack Roman territories. What's more, he tells Coriolanus that he can lead half of the army against Rome to enact his own revenge, since he knows best his country's weaknesses and strengths. Before they'll plan their attack, though, Coriolanus must meet the Volscian nobles. The two men exit together.

That Aufidius dreams nightly of Coriolanus adds more intensity and sexual undertones to their relationship. Aufidius emphasizes that Coriolanus needs approval from the Volscian nobles, showing that like Coriolanus, he values the class structure. As quick as Coriolanus is to turn on Rome, Aufidius seems to immediately trust Coriolanus, even offering to provide him with half of the Volscian army. This comfort and trust might stem from the fact that Coriolanus is so inept at concealing his true intentions.

Two servants comment on what a strange altercation just took place. One says that he intended to beat Coriolanus, but he suspected that Coriolanus's ragged clothing didn't accurately indicate his character. The other comments how strong Coriolanus is, and they both claim they knew by his face that there was something more to Coriolanus than just a poor wanderer. They say that Coriolanus is the "rarest man in the world," but debate if he is actually the greatest soldier.

Upon learning that the strange, disguised intruder was Coriolanus, the servants all claim they knew him to be of a higher class. There is no evidence of class struggle in Antium, and it could be argued that the servants are common people looking for reasons to believe that the patricians truly are superior to them.

The third servant enters, bearing news. The servants all discuss Coriolanus's history with Aufidius, and how Aufidius has been outmatched. Outside of Corioles, Coriolanus bested Aufidius and could even have eaten him if he were "**cannibally**" inclined. The third servant continues with his news, saying that the Volscian senators instantly accepted Coriolanus, and that Aufidius treating him like a "mistress," touching his hand like it was a sacred relic. Half of Aufidius's troops have been reassigned to Coriolanus, who plans to attack Rome the following day. They wonder how Coriolanus's friends in Rome will react, and they are excited for war, which they think is better than peace.

Coriolanus' military skills are so great that a servant thinks he could have literally devoured Aufidius. That Aufidius treats Coriolanus like a "mistress" continues to add sexual tones to their homosocial bond. Another difference between Roman plebeians and Volscians is that the Volscians can easily make up their mind: they think war is better than peace. Coriolanus and Volumnia both criticize the Roman citizens for not knowing if they want war or peace.

ACT 4, SCENE 6

In a public place in Rome, Sicinius and Brutus discuss Coriolanus. Sicinius says that they haven't heard anything of him, so they need not fear him. There is little likelihood of his banishment being revoked, since things have calmed down and gone so well since his exile began. Menenius enters and is greeted by the tribunes, who comment that Coriolanus isn't missed much in the city. Menenius says that all is well, but it could have been better if only Coriolanus were willing to compromise. He has no idea where Coriolanus is, and neither do Volumnia or Virgilia.

The dramatic irony here is that the tribunes (and everyone else in Rome) have no idea that Coriolanus has just joined forces with the Volscians, but the audience does. Menenius seems to grant the notion that things are better now that the tension has settled, though he still wishes that Coriolanus could have shaken a little in his values.

Some citizens enter, and they praise the tribunes, who respond that they wish Coriolanus had loved the people as well as they do. The citizens then leave, and Sicinius notes that it is a much happier time now that citizens aren't running in the streets in confusion. Brutus believes Caius Martius was an excellent officer in war, but also overcome with pride and too ambitious for tyrannical power. Menenius disagrees, but Sicinius thinks that if Coriolanus had been named consul he'd already be a dictator by now. Brutus believes Rome is safer without Coriolanus around.

Rome seems more stable with Coriolanus gone and the citizens currently satisfied. While Brutus once planned to accuse Coriolanus of tyranny as a political tactic, he now seems to really believe that Coriolanus wanted to be a dictator. The belief that Rome is safer without Coriolanus is dramatic irony, since the audience knows that Coriolanus is about to invade Rome.

An aedile enters and announces that there is a slave (who's now imprisoned) who reports that the Volscians have gathered two armies and entered Roman territory with the intent of starting another war. Menenius guesses that Aufidius has heard of Coriolanus's banishment and been emboldened to attack by it. The tribunes think the report cannot be true, assuming that the slave is spreading a rumor, but Menenius says it's very likely that the Volscians have indeed gathered new armies. A messenger then enters, saying that the nobles are gathering in the senate house. Menenius urges the tribunes to be reasonable before passing judgment, but they believe the report to be impossible and tell the messenger to whip the slave in front of the people.

While the tribunes are expert politicians, they know little of war. At the same time, they know that a looming war just after Coriolanus' exit would make them look bad, so they are less inclined to believe that the reports are true. In ordering the slave to be publicly whipped, the tribunes demonstrate the selfish, rash decision-making for which Coriolanus criticized them before his banishment. The dramatic irony is still palpable, since the audience knows the reports are true.

The messenger, though, says that the slave's report has been confirmed, with the addition of even more terrifying information: Coriolanus has joined with Aufidius, and the exiled Roman now leads an army against Rome seeking revenge. Sicinius and Brutus believe the news at once, but Menenius says it's unlikely, since Coriolanus and Aufidius are mortal enemies. A second messenger then enters and calls Menenius to the senate. He reports that Coriolanus's army is associated with Aufidius, and has ravaged all Roman territories in its path.

Now that Coriolanus is involved, the tribunes and Menenius switch sides, each wanting to believe what fits his preconceived notions. Finally the dramatic irony is settled, as the characters receive the information that the audience has known for the entire scene. Given Coriolanus' military excellence, it's unsurprising that his Volscian army has been so successful in the Roman territories.

Cominius enters, and sarcastically tells the tribunes that they have done good work, helping to "ravish [their] own daughters." Menenius repeatedly asks for news, but Cominius keeps berating the tribunes. Menenius asks Cominius if Coriolanus is really fighting alongside the Volscians, and Cominius responds that Coriolanus "is their god; he leads them like a thing made by some other deity than nature." Menenius then echoes Cominius's sarcastic comment, telling the tribunes they have done good work in creating this situation. Menenius and Cominius fear that Coriolanus will destroy Rome. Roman territories are revolting or perishing in Coriolanus's wake.

Cominius' sarcastic remark (and its intense familial imagery) suggests that the tribunes have brought about their own (and Rome's) downfall by banishing Coriolanus. Cominius describes how fully Coriolanus has transformed from human to something more, as he is now a "god" or an unnatural "thing." He is so powerful that he threatens to destroy the entire city.

Menenius thinks they are "all undone," unless Coriolanus shows mercy. Cominius wonders who will ask for this mercy, since the tribunes and the people certainly cannot, and even his close friends will seem like enemies if they beg for mercy, since they will ask just like enemies would. Menenius agrees, and continues chiding the tribunes, who Cominius says have brought a "trembling" beyond help to Rome, the likes of which has never been seen before.

Cominius points out some limitations of language: context and desperation. There is little that any of Coriolanus' friends could say in begging for mercy that would sound different than what his mortal enemies would say. Again, Coriolanus is described as a force of nature with "trembling."

The tribunes try to avoid blame, but Menenius says that the nobles loved Coriolanus, but, cowardly, they gave way to the tribunes and the common people, who shouted Coriolanus out of the city. Cominius fears they'll soon shout him back in, since Aufidius is acting as an officer to Coriolanus. Rome needs to mount a desperate defense. A mob of citizens enters, and Menenius chides them for banishing Coriolanus, who is now coming in a fury. He calls them fools, and says that if Coriolanus burns the city into one coal, the Romans will have deserved it.

Menenius here echoes Coriolanus' notion that the nobles were cowardly to acquiesce to the demands of the common people. As voices, the citizens both literally shouted Coriolanus out and used their votes to banish him. Menenius believes that Rome will deserve its destruction because it will be self-inflicted—the result of both stupidity and un-Roman ingratitude to its most noble, heroic citizen.

The citizens all claim that when they banished Coriolanus, they thought it was a pity, and they only did it because they thought it best. They say that Coriolanus consented to the banishment, but the people didn't really want it to happen. Cominius cries out, "you're goodly things, you **voices**!" Menenius again says they have done good work, and they exit. The tribunes tell the citizens to go home and not to fear, since Menenius and Cominius stand to profit from believing the reports that Coriolanus is returning. A citizen cries out that he always said they were in the wrong when they banished Coriolanus, and another agrees. The citizens exit. The tribunes are unhappy with the news they have learned, and they pray it is not true. They head for the Capitol and exit.

The citizens once again live up to the stereotype that they are extremely fickle. First they voted for Coriolaus, then they retracted those votes and banished him, and now they are claiming that they didn't really want to banish him at all. Enraged and terrified of the threat to Rome, Cominius takes up some of Coriolanus' language and calls the common people "things" and "voices." The tribunes try to calm the people by saying that the reports might be false, but Menenius and Cominius certainly do not profit because of the reports, since they are also in danger.

ACT 4, SCENE 7

At a camp near Rome, Aufidius talks with his Volscian Lieutenant, asking whether the soldiers are still liking Coriolanus. The lieutenant doesn't understand what "witchcraft" is in Coriolanus, but all the Volscian soldiers are completely obsessed with him, even more than they are with Aufidius. Aufidius says he can't help this without undermining their current campaign, noting that Coriolanus has a prouder bearing than he suspected when they first embraced. At the same time, he recognizes that Coriolanus is constant, and so he excuses what Coriolanus cannot change.

The lieutenant thinks that Coriolanus' popularity is witchcraft, possibly because the Roman is not well spoken, but also because he has slayed so many Volscians. Aufidius is practical, and he knows that he has to wait to compete with Coriolanus until they have captured the city. He at once acknowledges Coriolanus' firm nobility and accuses him of being slightly prideful, suggesting that there might be some truth both Coriolanus' claim to honor and the tributes' claim that he fights for pride.

The Volscian Lieutenant thinks it would have been in Aufidius's better interest not to join with Coriolanus and to attack Rome on his own, or else to leave the battle entirely up to Coriolanus. Aufidius sees what the lieutenant means, but he assures him that though Coriolanus seems to be fully committed to the Volscian cause, and though he "fights dragonlike" and is extremely successful in battle, Aufidius can still accuse Coriolanus, and he plans a **bloody** reckoning.

Again Coriolanus is characterized as a dragon, a powerful, solitary creature. Since Aufidius has failed in hand to hand combat so many times, he is now using subtle (political) tactics to defeat Coriolanus.

The Volscian Lieutenant asks Aufidius if he thinks Coriolanus will capture Rome, and Aufidius responds that everyone yields to Coriolanus. He has the nobility of Rome on his side, the tribunes cannot fight, and the people will most likely repeal Coriolanus's banishment just as swiftly as they enacted it. Aufidius thinks Coriolanus will take Rome "by sovereignty of nature."

Aufidius also recognizes how fickle the Roman people are. His comment that Coriolanus will take Rome "by sovereignty of nature" suggests an elitism akin to that of Coriolanus, where the higher classes are simply given control by the natural order of things.

Aufidius continues: Coriolanus was a noble servant, but could not hold on to his honors either due to pride, poor judgment, or his constant, unchanging nature. For a little of each of these reasons he was feared, hated, and eventually banished. But Coriolanus is noble enough to prevent people from talking about his faults, and the interpretation of one's virtues is up to one's contemporaries. There is no greater memorial for power, Aufidius says, than a public platform. When Coriolanus wins Rome, Aufidius plans to win against him shortly after.

Aufidius is slightly outmatched on the battlefield by Coriolanus, but he greatly overmatches his Roman rival in the political sphere. He's able to perfectly recapitulate why Coriolanus was banished, but he also recognizes the value of nobility. And while Coriolanus believes the battlefield is the end-all, be-all of power, Aufidius believes that a public (political) platform is where true power lies.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

In a public place in Rome, Menenius, Cominius, Sicinius, and Brutus discuss Coriolanus. Menenius refuses to go beg Coriolanus for mercy, even though he was like a father to Coriolanus, since the soldier refused to hear Cominius speak. Only one time did Coriolanus use Cominius's name, and he would not answer to "Coriolanus" or to any other names. He has become "a kind of nothing, titleless," until he makes a new name in the fire of Rome's burning. Menenius chides the tribunes for causing the downfall of the city. Cominius tried to petition for mercy, but Coriolanus denied him, saying pleas for mercy are futile from the state that had banished him. Even the appeal of his close friends cannot stop Coriolanus from attacking the city. The tribunes beg Menenius to go to Coriolanus, believing his words will be more effective than any Roman army.

Coriolanus said that only his new name remained, but now he has moved beyond any human identifier. He's beyond human, but he's also "nothing" since his entire identity was tied to Rome and now he stands poised to destroy it. He is also preventing his friends from speaking to him, since he doesn't like to operate in the sphere of language, but the tribunes (who aren't military strategists) believe that regarding Coriolanus, Rome's language skills are more useful than its army.

Menenius doesn't want to go to Coriolanus, and he is afraid that he might fail, but he thinks that Coriolanus will listen. He guesses that Coriolanus had not eaten when he refused to hear Cominius. Without **food**, he says, humans get cold **blood** and are likely to be unforgiving, while well-fed humans have a better temperament. Menenius plans to watch Coriolanus till he has eaten before going to meet him. Brutus assures Menenius that he'll be successful, and Menenius leaves, but then Cominius immediately says that he *won't* succeed. He describes kneeling before Coriolanus, who faintly said "rise" and dismissed him "with his speechless **hand**." Afterwards Coriolanus sent a letter promising not to yield. Cominius thinks the only hope is that Volumnia and Virgilia are able to convince Coriolanus to spare Rome.

Menenius' emphasis on food and temperament recalls all of the food imagery in the play and the hunger of the citizens. However, even after the citizens were given free corn they turned on and exiled Coriolanus, so Menenius is overly hopeful about the effect that being well-fed will have on Coriolanus' mood. Coriolanus is done with words and speaking, evidenced by his single-word answers and his "speechless hand," which threatens to destroy Rome. Cominius' hope rests on the notion that Coriolanus' female family can re-humanize him and get him to change his mind.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

Menenius approaches the Volscian camp outside of Rome, where he is greeted by two members of the Volscian watch. They ask him what he is doing there, and tell him to leave. He says he has come to speak with Coriolanus from Rome, but they do not let him pass, since Coriolanus does not want to receive any more guests from Rome. One watchman tells Menenius that he'll see Rome in flames before he gets the chance to talk to Coriolanus. Menenius tries using his name to get him admittance, hoping that Coriolanus has mentioned him, but the watch says that his name has no meaning there.

Coriolanus has become title-less, and even other names that hold weight in Rome become meaningless around him. Coriolanus doesn't want to change his mind and he doesn't want to speak; all he desires is to make war and get revenge. The watchmen's threats heighten the tension and drama of the scene, underscoring the potential that Coriolanus might really burn down Rome.

Menenius keeps pressing, saying the general is his "lover." He has been like a book of Coriolanus's good acts, chronicling his deeds and constantly praising him. But the two members of the watch continue refusing him, despite his pleas, saying that Coriolanus will not see anyone, and Rome should prepare itself for fires and executions. The watchmen begin threatening Menenius if he doesn't leave, and then Coriolanus and Aufidius enter, asking what's the matter. Menenius tells the watchmen that now they'll see that he cannot be kept from his son Coriolanus. He believes that Coriolanus's reception of him will lead to a cruel punishment for the guards who denied him for so long.

The continued threats continue heightening the drama. Menenius really has been an advocate for Coriolanus, and "lover" adds to the strong homosocial bond Coriolanus had with Menenius before the exile. Rather than sexual undertones, this relationship carries a paternal quality, especially since Menenius calls Coriolanus his son. His expected greeting from Coriolanus, though, shows that he overestimates the strength of this bond, or underestimates how far Coriolanus is from being his usual self.

Menenius then greets Coriolanus, calling himself his father, Coriolanus his son, and beginning to weep. He says Coriolanus is preparing fire for Rome, but his tears might be water to put that fire out. He explains that he's been pushed to meet Coriolanus as the only one who might convince him to pardon Rome.

Menenius' tears and emotional response to reuniting with the man he thinks of like a son shows how stereotypically feminine traits can bleed into masculine familial relationships.

In response, Coriolanus only says "away!" and claims that he knows no wife, mother, or child, and he's working for the Volscians now. Though he also wants revenge on Rome, the power to pardon Rome and stop the attack lies with the Volscians, not him. The fact that they know each other doesn't help Menenius, since Menenius failed to defend Coriolanus before his banishment. Coriolanus sends Menenius away, but also gives him a letter that he has written because they were so close. He will not speak another word, he says, before briefly introducing Aufidius and then exiting.

After being banished, Coriolanus said that his old names were gone, and now so is his new one. In refusing these names and turning his back on the city, Coriolanus has also become disconnected from his Roman family, so he rejects them as well. Coriolanus shows that his loyalty is to the patricians and the class structure above all else, since even after leaving Rome, he now remains steadfastly devoted to Volscian nobles. Coriolanus will exchange written words with his friends, but not spoken words.

The two members of the watch taunt Menenius, but he responds that he doesn't care, telling the Volscians to do their worst, and exits. One watchman says that Menenius is a noble fellow, but the other says that it's Coriolanus who is noble, calling him "the rock, the oak not to be wind-shaken."

Coriolanus is further characterized as both unmovable in his values and as something more than human. He is so heroic and steadfast that he becomes a rock or a strong oak tree.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

Outside of Coriolanus's tent in the Volscian camp, Coriolanus talks with Aufidius, saying that tomorrow they'll set their army on the walls of Rome. He asks Aufidius to report to the Volscian lords how well he has been doing. Aufidius agrees that Coriolanus has done well to ignore the suits and pleas of Rome, even refusing to have private conversations with his friends. Coriolanus explains that Menenius, whom he "with a cracked heart" sent back to Rome, loved him like a father. He believes Menenius was sent as Rome's last defense, but he only offered the conditions which Coriolanus previously denied. Coriolanus will hear no more suits from the state or from his friends after this.

Again Coriolanus shows that even in exile, and even as a nameless, heroic, military machine without a family, he still serves the ruling class. Coriolanus recognizes the paternal relationship between himself and Menenius, but it's not strong enough to override his political allegiance to the ruling class or his personal vendetta against Rome. Though they are friends, Coriolanus views Menenius through a military lens and sees the conversation only as an official negotiation of terms.

Some shouting in the distance makes Coriolanus question if he'll have to break the vow he just made, and Virgilia, Volumnia, Valeria, and young Martius enter attended by servants. Coriolanus says that his wife is in front, and then "the honored mold wherein this trunk was framed," his mother, holding the hand of his son. He tries to rid himself of affection. Virgilia curtsies and makes "dove" **eyes**, and Volumnia bows (like Mount Olympus pleading to a molehill), and young Martius has a look that is extremely difficult to deny. But Coriolanus says he will not be like a baby goose; he'll act like a man who is author of himself and has no other family.

Many Shakespeare plays include figurative language describing fathers as sculptors to their daughters, depicting the formative, patriarchal, creator / created relationship between fathers and daughters. The depiction of Volumnia as a mold or framer of Coriolanus inverts this typical relationship and imagery, and Coriolanus reinforces the majesty of his mother by comparing her to Mount Olympus. To remain a hero and to remain steadfast, he must continue to be isolated and separated from his family.

Virgilia greets Coriolanus, and he says that her **eyes** are not the same as he saw in Rome, which she attributes to her sorrow. Coriolanus compares himself to a "dull actor" who has forgotten his part. He calls Virgilia the "best of his flesh," and asks her to forgive him—but not to plead with him to forgive Rome. They kiss, and he says the kiss is "long as [his] exile, sweet as [his] revenge." He then solutes "the most noble mother of the world" by kneeling. Volumnia tells him to rise, and then she kneels to him. He's surprised that she'd kneel to her chastised son, and raises her up.

Coriolanus' line calling himself a "dull actor" is meta-theatrical, since it is spoken by an actor on stage. Coriolanus could not play the political part required of him, and since his banishment he cannot play himself (because his identity was so tied to Rome), so now he is no one. He's at his most heroic and his most dangerous, but he's completely without identity. The irony of asking for forgiveness while demanding not to be asked for it is not lost on Coriolanus.

Volumnia says, "thou art my warrior; I [helped] to frame thee," and asks if Coriolanus knows Valeria. Coriolanus does recognize her, and then Volumnia presents young Martius, whom she says is a miniature of his father who will eventually look just like him. Coriolanus prays that his son is noble, incapable of disgrace, and a good soldier. Volumnia has young Martius kneel, and she says that he, herself, Valeria, and Virgilia are now suitors to Coriolanus. Coriolanus responds that before they ask, they should remember that he has sworn not to acquiesce and will not dismiss his Volscian soldiers or go back to Rome. He doesn't want to hear that he seems unnatural, and doesn't want them to try to calm his rage and desire for revenge with reason.

Volumnia continues to invert the traditional father / daughter dynamic by saying that she "framed" Coriolanus. She emphasizes the ownership she feels over her son with the possessive "my warrior," which is contrasted with Coriolanus' hopes for his own son to become a soldier. Coriolanus doesn't want to engage with any language, especially with pleas to change his mind, since he is extremely attached to his stubborn adherence to Roman values. He would not compromise his values in order to pacify the citizens of Rome, and he won't do it now to spare them.

Volumnia knows Coriolanus has already denied what they will ask for, but they will ask anyway, so that if he truly says no, it will be because of his "hardness" rather than because they didn't ask. She begins by telling him how unfortunate she and Virgilia are, since while they should be overjoyed to see Coriolanus, due to the circumstances they are weeping and shaking with fear in reuniting with him. They fear "the mother, wife, and child" will have to see "the son, the husband, and the father tearing his country's bowels out."

Volumnia shows how Roman identity is woven into the familial relationships and identities of each family member. They are as much Roman as they are Coriolanus' family. Thus, in confronting him, they confront a paradox. Since he is currently so anti-Roman, he is at once their family member and not their family member.

Coriolanus requests their prayers, but Volumnia says they cannot pray. They are bound to their country as well as to Coriolanus, so they must either lose Rome or lose Coriolanus. Either Coriolanus will be led through the streets of Rome in shackles, or Coriolanus will destroy Rome and receive accolades for shedding the **blood** of his wife and child.

Volumnia further explains the paradox she faces: they are equally tied to Coriolanus and to Rome, so they are completely powerless and unable to act. Even praying would violate either familial obligation or Roman duty. The women can't save Rome without ruining Coriolanus, and Coriolanus can't win without destroying his family and home.

Volumnia herself will not wait to see how the war turns out. If she cannot persuade Coriolanus from attacking the city, his first steps towards conquering Rome must be to tread on his "mother's **womb** that brought [him] into this world." Virgilia echoes that he'll have to tread on her womb, which brought forth young Martius, too, and young Martius says he will not be tread on, planning to run away until he is old enough to fight. Volumnia clarifies that they are not asking him to destroy his honor by destroying the Volscians instead of the Romans. Instead, they hope that he reconciles peace between the two. War is uncertain, but if he conquers Rome, his name will go down in history along with curses, since he'll have destroyed his own country.

It could be argued that by forcing Coriolanus to tread on their wombs, Volumnia and Virgilia draw a parallel between the citizens' ungratefulness for Coriolanus' wounds. To trample the mother that brought him into the world would be extremely ungrateful and dishonorable, just as it was dishonorable for the citizens to banish the hero who fought for them. Young Martius already shows his father's warlike spirit and sense of honor.

Continuing her lengthy speech, Volumnia repeatedly asks why Coriolanus will not speak to her, invoking both Virgilia and young Martius to help her convince him. She claims that "There's no man in the world more bound to [his] mother," yet he allows her to beg like this without showing any respect. She speaks of how frequently she has sent him to war and seen him come home, and says he can deny her request, but if he's not honest he'll be punished by the gods for failing to oblige his duty to his mother.

Volumnia's repeated requests for Coriolanus to speak reinforce the fact that he cannot *speak and has no special language ability. Her assertion that Coriolanus is the man closest to his mother in the world is often used in psychoanalytical / Freudian readings as evidence for the over-intense relationship between Coriolanus and Volumnia.*

Coriolanus turns away, and Volumnia instructs Virgilia and Valeria to kneel with her to shame him. They kneel, and Volumnia says they'll go back to Rome and die with the rest of the city. When they rise, she says of Coriolanus "this fellow had a Volscian [for] his mother, his wife is in Corioles," and his child only looks like him by chance. She then claims she'll be "hushed" until Rome is on fire, and only then will she speak again.

Volumnia resolves the paradox and the split of duty between family and Rome by saying that they are dependent on the other. If Coriolanus is not a Roman, then he must not be their family member. After making this profound rejection of her son, Volumnia begins a powerful silence, leaving a vacuum in which Coriolanus is finally forced to speak.

Silently, Coriolanus holds his mother by the hand, and after the pause, he cries out "O mother, mother! What have you done!" He calls out to the heavens and tells Volumnia she has "won a happy victory to Rome," a victory that is "most mortal" to her son. He accepts his fate if it will come, and he tells Aufidius that he wants to make peace. He asks his former rival if he would have done anything different were he in the same position, and Aufidius simply says that he was moved by the scene. Coriolanus says Aufidius can come up with the terms of the peace, and decides to go back with him to Antium.

In the powerful silence, Coriolanus realizes that he really doesn't have the power to destroy his city and his family. In becoming reconnected to his family, he becomes reconnected to Rome, and he becomes once again humanized and therefore vulnerable. He's no longer an unfeeling thing or a heroic god; he's a man with a worldly connection to his family. "Most mortal" shows that Coriolanus knows his decision to spare Rome will probably cost him his life.

Coriolanus then rejoices with the women, saying that they'll drink together and that the women deserve a temple built for them based on the peace they have created. Aufidius, meanwhile, says in an aside that he's glad Coriolanus has compromised his honor by being merciful, since he hopes to use this to his advantage in his old goal of defeating Coriolanus.

Coriolanus is no longer an unfeeling war-machine, and the women have replaced him as the play's heroes. Aufidius immediately sees that he can capitalize on Coriolanus' mercy and his relationship with his family, both of which equate to vulnerability.

ACT 5, SCENE 4

Menenius and Sicinius are talking in a street in Rome. Menenius thinks there is only a slight chance that the ladies (especially Volumnia) will be able to save Rome, but he believes it won't happen. Sicinius doesn't understand how Coriolanus has changed so quickly, and Menenius compares it to the transformation from a caterpillar to a butterfly, only Coriolanus has "grown from man to dragon." Sicinius knows that Coriolanus loves his mother dearly, but Menenius reminds the tribune that Coriolanus loved him, too, but still denied him; Coriolanus probably has no memory of his mother now.

This scene is filled with dramatic irony, since the Romans are terrified but the audience knows Coriolanus has agreed to spare the city. Menenius outlines Coriolanus' transition from a man to a heroic, unfeeling, more-than-human thing, again characterizing Coriolanus as an isolated dragon—but audiences know this transformation has just been undone.

"When he walks, he moves like an engine," Menenius says about Coriolanus, and he is like a "thing made for Alexander." He's even become like a god, lacking only an eternity and a heaven to sit in. Menenius believes there is no more mercy in Coriolanus than there is milk in a male tiger. Menenius thinks that in banishing Coriolanus they disrespected the gods, so the gods disrespect them in turn by bringing Coriolanus back to Rome to break their necks.

It's ironic that the most complete depiction of Coriolanus as a godly, merciless, machinated hero comes after *Coriolanus has been re-humanized by Volumnia and his family. This contrast makes Coriolanus seem more heroic at the height of his powers, and it makes his fall seem all the more tragic.*

A messenger enters, telling Sicinius to run home if he wants to live. The plebeians have captured Brutus and swear that if the Roman ladies aren't successful in convincing Coriolanus to spare the city, they will give Brutus "death by inches." Another messenger then enters with the good news that the ladies have prevailed, and the Volscians have dropped the attack. Trumpets celebrate the news and signal that the ladies are returning. Menenius comments that Volumnia "is worth of consuls, senators, patricians, a city full." They all go to meet and praise the Roman women.

"Death by inches" means torn apart piece by piece. Ironically, the ones who took advantage of the fragmented body of Rome and called for the dismemberment of its foot (Coriolanus) are threatened with literal dismemberment. As Coriolanus falls from hero to mere human, Volumnia receives the praise of utmost honor and heroism.

ACT 5, SCENE 5

In a street in Rome, a senator praises Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria as they pass by with other lords, calling Volumnia the "patroness, the life of Rome!" He says the people should strew the street with flowers for these women, and undo the banishment of Martius. Everyone cries out, welcoming the ladies back to Rome.

Volumnia has become a new kind of Roman hero in place of her son, and she seems able to preserve her humanity (unlike Coriolanus) in her heroism due to her femininity. The loss of Coriolanus' heroism is reflected in the loss of his new surname, as he is called "Martius" again.

ACT 5, SCENE 6

In a public place in Corioles, Aufidius enters with some attendants. He instructs them to tell the lords of the city that he has arrived, and says that they are to gather the patricians and common people in the marketplace to hear him speak. The attendants exit, and some Volscian conspirators of Aufidius's faction enter. One asks about Coriolanus, and Aufidius describes him as a man poisoned and killed by his own charity. They plan to gauge the mindset of the people before continuing with their plan, knowing that whosever survives will inherit all of the people's love.

Aufidius demonstrates that though Coriolanus can beat him on the battlefield, he also has oratory and political skills that far outmatch Coriolanus. While Coriolanus hates the people, Aufidius recognizes them as a source of power (and danger). He has already said that the true showcase of power is a public platform. Now that Coriolanus has ended the war, he has lost his advantage to Aufidius.

Aufidius believes he has a good cause to attack Coriolanus. He advocated for Coriolanus, who in turn flattered all the Volscians and Aufidius's friends, changing in his nature as he was never known to do before. One Volscian conspirator notes how "stout" Coriolanus was when standing for consul, which caused him to lose the position. Aufidius explains that when Coriolanus was banished for this stoutness, he showed up on Aufidius's doorstep, presented his throat to be slit, then joined Aufidius.

It's ironic that Coriolanus was banished because he refused to bend, pretend, flatter, or change his nature in Rome, and now he's being attacked for doing those very things in Antium. It's possible, though, that Coriolanus didn't really change his nature, and Aufidius is only saying that he did because he hates Coriolanus so much.

Aufidius says that he then let Coriolanus take on responsibility and gave him whatever he wanted, till ultimately, he treated Aufidius like a follower or a mercenary, not a partner. After all of this, when the army was poised to take Rome, for a few drops of women's tears ("which are as cheap as lies") Coriolanus "sold the **blood** and labor of their great action." For this, he will die, and Aufidius will renew his glory in Coriolanus's fall.

Aufidius also values wounds and blood as a commodity, and he is outraged that Coriolanus would exchange something so valuable for valueless tears (women's opinions, in his view), which he thinks of like Coriolanus thinks of public opinion.

Drums and trumpets sound, signaling that Coriolanus has entered the town. A Volscian conspirator notes that when Aufidius entered his home town he was met with silence, but Coriolanus receives earsplitting noise. Another says that fools whose children Coriolanus killed are now tearing their throats shouting to give him glory. The third conspirator says that Aufidius should strike before Coriolanus has the chance to express himself or move the people. The Volscian lords of the city enter, greeting Aufidius and saying that they received his letter and believe that Coriolanus's behavior (making peace when the Volscians easily could have defeated Rome) was inexcusable.

While the tribunes wanted Coriolanus to speak to the Roman people to damn himself, the Volscian conspirators worry that if he does speak he'll be able to get the common people on his side. What Coriolanus really cares about, though, is the opinion of the nobles, who reveal they already agree with Aufidius. The conspirators point to the irony that the Volscian citizens are praising Coriolanus even though he murdered their family and friends, again emphasizing the fickle nature of the public's opinion.

Coriolanus enters with the Volscian people behind him. Coriolanus hails the Volscian lords, saying that he has returned still hating Rome and still under their command. He led the armies "with **bloody** passage" all the way to the gates of Rome, and has brought home spoils equaling more than a third of the cost of the war. He has made peace with Rome that is honorable to both sides, and he hands the peace offering to the lords. Aufidius, though, tells the lords not to read it, saying they should tell the "traitor in the highest degree" that he has abused them.

Coriolanus claims he is unchanged, since he still hates Rome and still gives his allegiance to the Volscian nobles, but he demonstrates a waiver in his values by agreeing to peace when, throughout the play, he has repeatedly said he prefers war. Aufidius knows the perfect way to infuriate Coriolanus, and he uses the same word that the tribunes did to set Coriolanus off in Rome: traitor.

Coriolanus is shocked, saying "Traitor? How now?" and Aufidius says, "Ay, traitor, Martius." Again, Coriolanus responds in brief confusion, just repeating "Martius?" Aufidius then launches into a speech, calling his rival Caius Martius, refusing to grace him with the "stolen name" of "Coriolanus" in the very city of Corioles. Aufidius tells the Volscian lords that Coriolanus betrayed the state for the Roman tears of his wife and his mother, breaking his oath. Coriolanus cries out "Hear'st thou, Mars?" and Aufidius responds "Name not the god, thou boy of tears." This is enough to set Coriolanus off. Enraged that Aufidius called him "boy," Coriolanus tells the Volscian lords that Aufidius is a lying cur who bears many **wounds** inflicted by Coriolanus himself.

Ironically, Coriolanus is a traitor, both to Rome and to Antium, since he fought against Roman armies and killed his own people, but ultimately refused to do the bidding of the Volscian nobles. Aufidius' refusal to use Coriolanus' surname shows that Aufidius understands the power of naming. By un-naming Coriolanus, Aufidius emphasizes the humanity and newfound vulnerability of his rival. The two have before now had a mutual respect, and an intense manly and homosocial bond formed their fierce rivalry. Therefore, Aufidius offers the ultimate disrespect and insult in calling Coriolanus "boy."

A Volscian lord tries to speak, but Coriolanus cries out "cut me to pieces!" He's still furious that he was called "boy," and so he brags that "like an eagle in a dovecote" he "fluttered" through all the Volscians in Corioles, capturing the city all alone. Aufidius asks if the lords will be convinced by Coriolanus's "unholy" bragging about the shameful battle in Corioles that he only won by sheer luck.

Like with the tribunes, this fragmentation – all the different body parts mentioned in the play underscoring the political divide in Rome and Coriolanus' divided obligations – culminates in words of literal dismemberment. Coriolanus brags about his new name and the heroic deeds behind it, emphasizing both his might and his solitude, but he doesn't understand that in doing so he's only giving the Volscians more reason to despise and murder him.

The Volscian conspirators yell that Coriolanus should be killed, and the Volscian people begin crying out in agreement, shouting that he should be torn into **pieces** for killing their family members. Another Volscian lord tries to calm them, saying that Coriolanus is noble and deserves a judicious hearing for his latest offence, but Coriolanus draws his sword, saying he wishes that he had six versions of Aufidius or Aufidius's family members there to kill. Aufidius cries out "insolent villain!" and the conspirators shout "Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!" The conspirators draw weapons and kill "Martius," who falls to the ground.

The common people screaming to kill him and a lord calling for justice echoes the scenes in which Coriolanus was nearly executed and finally banished in Rome. Again Coriolanus draws his sword, but the Volscian lord's words aren't enough to calm the crowd and the Volscian citizens and conspirators take action where the Romans didn't. When he dies, the stage direction lists him as "Martius" instead of "Coriolanus," showing that Aufidius was successful in un-naming Coriolanus, and reinforcing the idea that the godly, heroic Coriolanus became the vulnerable, Roman, Martius once more, which ultimately meant his undoing.

Aufidius stands on Coriolanus's **body** and addresses the Volscian people. The Volscian lords, meanwhile, lament the **bloody** deed, asking Aufidius not to stand on the body. Aufidius assures the lords that when they fully understand what a danger Coriolanus was to them they will rejoice that he has been killed. Aufidius offers to explain himself before the senate and continue as a noble servant of the Volscian state.

Aufidius shows that he possess the deadly blend of language and action. He was able to use language to incense the people and turn them on Coriolanus, but he knew when to act, preferring to ask for forgiveness after the fact instead of asking for permission first.

One Volscian lord says that they should mourn for Coriolanus, whom he calls the most noble corpse ever put into an urn. Another lord says that Coriolanus's own impatience takes some of the blame of his death away from Aufidius. Aufidius's rage has now subsided, and he is struck with sorrow. He says that he and three other soldiers will bear the **body**. Though Coriolanus has made many widows and killed many sons in the city, he will be remembered as noble. Everyone exits, bearing the body of Coriolanus, as a death march plays.

Coriolanus retains his nobility, but not his life, and while he valued honor above life itself, it's tragic that the great, godly hero ends the play as a corpse bound for an urn. What made Coriolanus vulnerable was his reconnection to his family and Rome, and therefore to his humanity, but it was also his strict adherence to classic values and his refusal to bend or back down that got him banished and ultimately killed in Antium.

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