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PLACE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *CORIOLANUS*: THE INTERSECTION OF GEOGRAPHY, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT: *Coriolanus*, the last of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies (1608), continues to draw on the poet's fascination with Rome and the Mediterranean as places. In this paper, I will explore the impact of Rome on the characters of *Coriolanus* from three perspectives: place as an incarnation of values, as an internal cognitive and emotional map, and as a nest of belonging.

KEYWORDS: *Shakespeare's Roman tragedies, cultural geography, Shakespeare's Mediterranean, Shakespeare's mothers and sons, ancient Rome and early modernism, psychoanalysis and Shakespeare's heroes, women in early modern drama, homoeroticism in Shakespeare's warrior heroes*

Coriolanus, the last of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies (1608), continues to draw on the poet's fascination with Rome and the Mediterranean as places. This allure is apparent in his three earlier tragedies set in Rome: *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Julius Caesar* (1599), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606), as well as in the poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and the final romance *Cymbeline* (1609). Coppelia Kahn suggests that Shakespeare recognized connections between ancient Rome and Britain (Kahn 1997:14). He had access to chronical histories of England, such as Raphael Holinshed's, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577), Geoffrey of Monmouth's, *The History of the Kings of England* (1136), as well as Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579). Shakespeare could find in such texts claims that Britain and Rome share ancestors in the figures of Aeneas, the founder of Rome, and his descendant, Brutus, said to be the founder of Britain. Other reminders of the Roman presence in England include the old Roman Wall that marked the city limits of London, and Hadrian's Wall, which was the northern military boundary of the Roman Empire in the second century CE.

For Shakespeare, Rome mirrors early modern England's political struggles and human dilemmas. As Robert Miola writes, Shakespeare recounts

stories of Rome and the Mediterranean that embody heroic traditions. He does so “by combining various sources, reworking the political motifs and exploring thematic implications of three Roman ideals: constancy, honor, and *pietas*,” which means showing high regard for parents, the state, and gods (Miola 1983: 16). Roman history permeated British culture and education. Beginning in elementary school, young Britons studied Latin texts and Roman codes of conduct and systems of thinking in the classics of Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, Livy, Terence, Seneca, Plautus, Horace, Marcus Aurelius, and others. Their ideals, however, were not always realized, as Miola notes: “Rome is a noble place of high heroic deeds and honor as well as a sordid center of selfish scheming and political infighting.” (Miola 1983, 64).

In order for Shakespeare to look deeply into the mirror Rome affords, he selected transformative periods in Rome’s 1000 years of history when it was the preeminent power in the Mediterranean. Each of the four Roman tragedies deals with one profound moment in that history. While *Coriolanus* is Shakespeare’s final Roman tragedy (1608), it dramatizes events from the earliest time frame in the 6th century BCE. The play begins after a youthful Caius Marcius Coriolanus emerges as a fierce warrior in the revolt against the last Tarquin king. With the fall of the monarchy, the Roman Republic rises. At the other end of the time frame is *Titus Andronicus*, his first Roman tragedy, 1592. This play portrays the decadent Roman Empire in the fifth century CE in its final days of imperial decline. In between are two plays that deal with other monumental turning points in Roman history. *Julius Caesar* treats the events of 44 BCE, when Brutus, a descendant of Britain’s legendary founder, leads a group of senators to assassinate Julius Caesar. This event hastens the collapse of the Roman Republic and leads to the short-lived Second Triumvirate as the new form of government. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Second Triumvirate falls apart. When Antony takes up with Cleopatra and loses the war with Octavius (in 31 BCE), Rome becomes an Empire with Octavius Caesar (a.k.a. Augustus) as its emperor.

These dramatic shifts in Rome’s systems of government from monarchy to republic to empire offer a way for Shakespeare to write about the politics of power and legitimacy. In the late 16th century, the British were uneasy about the continuity of the monarchy. Queen Elizabeth, the Tudor Virgin Queen, was over 50 years old and without husband or child when Shakespeare began writing the Roman tragedies in the 1590s. She died in

1603 before Shakespeare completed them. Thus, Shakespeare's Roman plays mirror Elizabethan times, for the plays deal with leadership and crucial transmissions of power in the state. The questions that alarmed the Romans are the same questions that haunt Shakespeare's plays. Political transitions in Rome provoke timeless questions when citizens fear survival: Will Rome fall apart or continue to be the center of the Mediterranean universe? Will I hold onto what I have or lose it? How will this change in politics hurt me?

These issues of survival, identity, and power that accompany the political shifts carry with them hopeful ideals as well as betrayal, conspiracy, and death. Shakespeare's Roman tragedies reveal the fragility of political forms and the temptations of power and its abuse that may undermine them. He dramatizes in the play these issues in conversations of individuals and families who are tragically entangled in the political outcomes.

Indeed, one can summarize *Coriolanus* as a duet of interlaced conversations. The first concerns the suitability of Coriolanus for the elected position of consul, the highest leadership office in the democratic Roman Republic. The second conversation is about the terror of Coriolanus as an enemy waging combat against Rome. Everybody in the two dominant social groups in Rome participates in these discussions. In Acts 1, 2, and 3, Cominius, the outgoing consul and head of the army, and Menenius, powerful senator, lead the aristocrats who are small in number to support Coriolanus because they believe his astonishing military contributions have earned him the highest leadership position in the Republic. In contrast, the tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, corral the plebeians or common people who are the majority population into opposing him because of Coriolanus' undisguised contempt for the commoners, and their fear that if elected consul, Coriolanus would rescind their voting rights and the power of the tribunes. The conversations flow in all the public places of the city and in the interior spaces of homes in Acts I and 2. Then at the end of Act 3, threats of violence and sedition inflect the conversations that result in charging Coriolanus with treason and banishing him. Enraged, Coriolanus denounces the plebeians and tribunes. He becomes the thing he was charged with, Rome's traitor, by joining the Volscian army led by Aufidius to wage war upon his former country. In Acts 4 and 5, conversations in Rome are about the terror of Coriolanus as an enemy and its catastrophic implications for the continuity of the Republic. Fearful Romans send Cominius and Menenius

as emissaries to placate Coriolanus and dissuade him from warfare, to no avail. Coriolanus refuses to speak with them. Only one conversation ensues and it precipitates the tragedy ending the play. In Act 4, Volumnia appears in the enemy camp with Coriolanus's wife and young son. Kneeling before her son with great presence, Volumnia commands the attention of Coriolanus and sets the terms of their discourse. Rather than political matters of the state, Volumnia conducts a moral discourse on the duties a child owes to a parent and sways her son to mediate a so-called honorable peace between Romans and Volscians. When Coriolanus grants his mother's suit, he seals his tragic future. He has betrayed publicly both Romans and Volscians. In the end, his descent from warrior/hero to traitor/corpse is complete. Aufidius and his soldiers butcher Coriolanus in the wild barrens between Rome and the Volscian city of Antium, outside the boundaries of civilized life.

The result is profound suffering and death. As Geraldo de Sousa observes, "[t]ragedy ruins lives, rips families apart, shatters foundations of houses; reduces aspirations, dreams, and ambitions to a smoldering heap of ashes (de Sousa 2010: 21)."

In this paper, I will explore the tragic impact of Rome as a place on the characters of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* from three points of view, based in part upon the distinctions of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan:

- Incarnation of values
- Map of mind and heart
- Nest of belonging

Incarnation of Values

A "place" is a space that receives the imprint of human values, argues cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. More than simply a location, place "incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people" (Tuan 1979: 387). The connotations of this incarnation intensify the importance of aspirational values and their embodiment in the material forms of the city of Rome, in the organization of its streets and its open spaces in plazas and squares, such as the Forum, as well as in closed spaces in public buildings like the Senate, where policy decisions touching everyone are deliberated, and, finally, in the intimate spaces of private homes. In *Coriolanus*, these places incarnate the spirit of Rome and its Republican values, particularly

the right of every citizen to have a voice in negotiations involving the problems of the state. Moreover, the concept of incarnation also connotes redemption or deliverance from deadening beliefs and practices that impede the creation of a civil society. The design of streets, plazas, and buildings make Rome an inviting place to meet and talk with other citizens about things that make civilized life possible. In daily life, citizens --rich and poor--walk the streets and squares of Rome and see around them the material signs of a Republican form of government, such as the Senate and the Forum. Material culture embodies what Rome stands for and the values that its people are willing to defend and die for. Civil discourse is the freedom to hear and be heard, to listen to others and express one's agreement or disagreement in public spaces. It is the heart of democracy. Rome differs from Volscian places. In Act 4, Coriolanus in disguise enters the Volscian city of Antium, the home of Aufidius. His house is a garrison where characters assemble to discuss the next war. The aspiration of Aufidius' for dominion over his neighbor Rome reflects a singular ambition to extend his autocratic power. No one raises questions: why fight Rome, why live under an autocracy, why not consider other ways of organizing and governing a society? Questions that pervade everyday conversations in Rome do not surface in Volscian places. The house of Aufidius is also a space of conspiracy where Coriolanus invites his sworn enemy Aufidius to join him in making war on the city that has rejected him.¹

Other places in the play are what anthropologist Victor Turner calls "liminal space," that is, space that lacks the imprint of values and aspirations. Such spaces are "betwixt and between" the systems of social and moral order established by the Romans for their cities (Turner 1967:182). These are non-incarnate space --isolated hinterland void of landmarks of civilization--houses, streets, legislative buildings, plazas or squares, which invite conversations, questions, and debate about serious matters of life.

The play opens on a street in the middle of bustling Rome where plebeians gather for conversation. They congregate and exchange perspectives on public issues, such as the current grain shortage and the impending election of a new consul. Some plebeians are angry and some grimly carry staves, clubs, and other weapons as they prepare to confront the senators, who are all noblemen. The plebeians express their fears that the food crisis will push them into starvation. Their requests to buy grain at a negotiated price go

unheeded by the nobility. The grain crisis has affected the two classes of society differently. The plebeians complain they are dieing while aristocrats are flourishg: "if they [patricians] would yield us [plebeians] but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely (1.1.14-16: All quotations from the play are from Greenblatt 2016). :When Menenius, a senator and Coriolanus' closest family friend, appears among the mob, he engages the plebeians in conversation to forestall violence . At first, he doesn't take their concerns seriously. He admonishes them not to blame the patricians but the gods. When the plebeians dismiss this as nonsense, he attempts an analogy. Rome is like a human body. The senators are the belly, the storehouse of the body, and they provide the sustenance to ensure the body's survival. The plebeians are the remaining corporeal organs. The food comes into the belly first, which sends "it through the rivers of your blood, / Even to the court, the heart, to th'seat o' th'brain, / And and send it through the crakes and orifices of man...(1.1.126-28)." The citizens listen politely but ignore the analogy as irrelevant to the famine. Then Coriolanus appears, angry that the plebeians are complaining again, indignant that they are in Rome and have been enfranchised, resentful that they make demands for social welfare but do nothing to contribute to the development or safety of Rome. They are "...dissentious rogues...scabs...curs... (1.1.153-156)." He commands them: "Go get you home, you fragments (1.1.212)." They are broken things, like shards of clay pots, useless, and they should retreat to their homes where they can hide from the enemy who threaten to burst through Rome's gates. He scorns them as a species apart from the patricians, and who ought not to be accorded rights such as suffrage or free food from the government.

Despite his disdain for the plebeians, Coriolanus receives their support for consulship. The two tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, however, who are seeking to control the consulship, stir up the crowd, reminding them of Coriolanus' hatred for them and claim his intention is to abolish their right to have a voice in government were he elected, and would take away their right to have tribunes represent them in the senate. In Act 3, tribunes and plebeians confront Coriolanus and several senators in the street. Knowing that the aristocratic senators fear the plebeian majority, Sicinius issues this veiled threat: "What is the city but the people?"² (3.1.200). The implication

is that since the plebeians are the majority population, they can unleash class warfare and sow chaos in Rome any time they are unhappy.

In contrast to the threat of citizen violence in the Roman street is the actual bloodshed of war between Romans and Volscians fought in the liminal space between Rome and Corioles as well as inside the gates of the Volscian city. In the Roman camp after the initial victory, Cominius honors the central character in the play by conferring an agnomen -Coriolanus--his third name--to honor his brilliant military prowess. The nickname is derived from the place name of the enemy city of Corioles that Coriolanus single-handedly vanquished. That place name has meaning for Romans because it expresses their esteem for courage in battle and pride in victory; it also elevates Coriolanus' aristocratic status to hero in the social hierarchy. He becomes a larger-than-life warrior whose combat achievements merit honor. When he is renamed Coriolanus, both he and the city take on new identities. Place and person have become one, interchangeable in the social identity of Caius Marius. His new name signifies his negation of the identity of Corioles as the free city of the Volscians and its absorption into Roman dominion. The defeated city of Corioles also symbolizes the unrelenting force of Rome and its aspirations for extending its dominance throughout the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Coriolanus's new identity places him in Rome's upper tier of power, in line for the position of consul, the preeminent leadership rank in Rome.

Map of Mind and Heart

This act leads to another notion of place: the character's interior map. Yi-Fu Tuan's term for mental map is spatial ability or having a perception of motion in space (Tuan 1977:68). I would suggest that place here is a state of mind and heart, a cognitive and emotional map to navigate the problems of a social environment. My conception of the map of mind and heart is different from Tuan's, for it answers the questions, colloquially expressed: Where are you? Where do you stand or place yourself with respect to this or that issue? How do you feel about it? The answers to those questions reveal a character's perspective on Roman values, aspirations, and practices.

Coriolanus's internal map is dedicated to defending the Roman state and its values and institutions, but it is a flawed map according to his mentor

and the commander-in-chief of the army, Cominius. When Cominius attempts to praise his astonishing combat, Coriolanus tries to halt the acclaim for his singular defeat of the enemy. Later, when Cominius again praises Coriolanus when he nominates him in the senate for consul, Coriolanus flees the chambers. unable to be still and receive the acclaim and gratitude for his bravery.

Cominius insists: "Rome must know / The value of her own (1.9.20-21)." He instructs Coriolanus in the value of rituals, explaining that lauding valor is not intended to flatter or corrupt the warriors, but to inspire in the people a devotion to the Roman state and a sense of belonging to the supreme power in the Mediterranean. Thus, the whole society can understand what Rome values and what is important for maintaining the Republic. Cominius gently scolds Coriolanus: "You shall not be / The grave of your own deserving (1.9.19-20)."

Yet, for Coriolanus, his martial achievements, so apparent to others, are "nothings monstered" (2.2.74); that is, repulsive, even grotesque distortions of what really happened. Unable to accept a compliment, or indeed to experience value in his achievements, Coriolanus insists that praise causes him pain: "I have some wounds upon me, and they smart to hear themselves remember" (1.9.28-9). No action—however extolled by witnesses -- makes him feel worthy. Coriolanus disdains his military actions as impotent gestures that make little difference in the world. They do not remove the pain of living nor solve the problems that cause suffering.

The unworthy place he has assigned himself shows up dramatically when he must perform a supplication ritual in Act 2,2. After having received the support of the aristocrats for consulship, the next step in the electoral process is to secure the approval of the plebeians. He must appear humbly in the white robe of a supplicant in the main square in Rome, a tradition that all previous candidates for the consulship have observed. Then, he must ask kindly for their voices or votes. He must also reveal the wounds he has incurred in defense of Rome. These actions would signify his respect for the common people and acknowledge their importance to Roman society. However, this is an insurmountable task for Coriolanus. This appears to him a thoroughly shameless act because it signifies to him he must beg something from people he despises as well as lie about what he

thinks of them. Such an act would be a violation of conscience. Giving words to those thoughts would confirm him a liar, for he believes none of them.

In contrast, the plebeians understand that a person's humility is grounded in his contingent status in the world. They are certain that human beings cannot control their own destiny, especially the final destiny of death. The common people recognize that they are at the mercy of powerful conditions of life, like famine, disease, politicians, and the state. To be humble is to admit one's vulnerability in the face of the unfathomable and uncontrollable forces in the universe. The plebeians want to see for themselves that Coriolanus can be humble and share their belief that vulnerability is the quality that makes people human. They at first accept Coriolanus' rough temper. Speaking at the Forum a group of them exercise their democratic right of free speech and support him: "He hath done nobly sir and cannot go without each man's honest voice...Therefore let him be consul: the gods give him joy/and make him good friend to the people...Amen, Amen.—God save thee, noble consul 2.3.125-129)." Coriolanus's internal map, however, dooms him. It prevents him from recognizing the plebeians' suffering humanity and the tribunes' self-serving treachery. It guides him to a negative assessment of the plebeians and himself, placing both in the same category of those unworthy of Roman citizenship. This is an error of judgment, which ultimately turns the plebeians against him and leads to his banishment from Rome in Act 3.3. In the end, Coriolanus will contest the plebeians' order of banishment by declaring his own rejection of Rome. When he steps outside the city gates, he moves into liminal space and into the arms of Rome's enemy, Aufidius. When the plebeians banish Coriolanus from Rome, he shouts back disdainfully "I banish you" (3.3.120), and leaves the plebeians and tribunes with his curse: "[May] your enemies, with nodding of their plumes, / Fan you into despair" (3.3.123-25). And finally, he declares: "There is a world elsewhere" (3.3.132), yearning for a place where he will be accepted. He departs Rome shaken yet insisting that he is choosing this exile rather than being victimized by the tribunes and plebeians.

Nest of Belonging

The third notion of place in the play is what Yi-Fu Tuan calls a nest or the space of intimacy and nurture that offers coherence in an insecure world. A

nest is not a retreat from the world, not simply a place for fledglings that do not yet know how to fly, nor is it a sanctuary, a place of asylum. Instead, the nest is a space of encounter between people awake to the here and now, the exigencies of the moment. It is a space that offers a deep connection. Yi-Fu Tuan describes it as a connection “that glows in moments of rare exchange and awareness” (Tuan 1977: 141). The nest is a place of belonging that intensifies the pulse of life and can be found in a home or in the heart of another.

The deepest irony in the play is that Coriolanus finds a space of intimacy neither in his mother's house nor the senate house, nor in the streets of Rome, but on the killing fields of battle in combat. In Act 1, on the battlefield, he is euphoric after battle with the Volscians. There he is most dynamic and even feels an affinity toward the enemy. As Cominius observes in the Senate when he nominates Coriolanus for consul:

He was a thing of blood, whose every notion
Was timed with dying cries; alone he entered
The mortal gate of the city, which he painted
With shunless destiny; aidless came off,
And with a sudden re-inforcement struck
Corioles like a planet.²² (2.2.106-11)

Combat, for Coriolanus, is a dance with death. He strikes the besieged city of Corioles like an asteroid crushing the earth. He moves with the dynamism of nature, like a planet, a thing of blood, an elemental, natural force, transcending the human. Perfectly coordinated, each part of his body moving in harmony, he is a thing of beauty, cutting his enemies to death. He amazes those who see him. In war, Coriolanus finds his place in the world, the site where he belongs. And in that place, he is most alive to the people and the circumstances around him, rapt in the action, thrown into danger, with the threat of death always upon him. He is connected, at home on the battlefield in a way that he never feels in the civil places of political negotiation and discourse. So engaged is Coriolanus' fighting that he uses the trope of sexual love to express the power war has to compel him. After the battle, Coriolanus yearns to embrace Cominius, the commander of the army and outgoing consul, and confesses that he finds making war as

intoxicating as making love. It galvanizes his energy and devours his attention, and he is thrown into rapture by his performance in battle:

Let me clip ye
In arms as sound as when I woo'd, in heart
As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
And tapers burn'd to bedward! 23 (1.6.29-32)

If Coriolanus feels most animated on killing fields, then the question is, why. One has to look to his mother's influence for an answer. What kind of home did Volumnia create for her son? Rather than a nest of protection and nurturing, Volumnia's house is a familial military academy where she teaches her version of the Roman code. With great pride, she asserts her parental priority: "I had rather had eleven [sons] die nobly for their country / Than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" 2 (1.3.21-22).

Honor, "his good report," means more to Volumnia than her son. Without courage in battle, she suggests, Coriolanus would not have her love. While she has been successful in raising an astonishing soldier, she has failed in other important ways as a mother, ways that become clear after Coriolanus becomes the prime candidate for consul. She has extolled the virtue of courage while neglecting the three complementary classical virtues -- prudence, temperance, and justice. She has mothered the preeminent combatant for Rome, but failed to nurture a man who could enact prudence or right judgment, not only on the battlefield but also in other domains of life; a man who could show temperance or moderation in speaking and action, and extend justice in supporting what is due to another human being as a natural right. The four competencies ideally work in concert with each other in the suite of classical Roman virtues. The play makes clear that courage is insufficient to make a political leader or, for that matter, to guide a human being. Coriolanus lacks a complete Roman education. With only fortitude to recommend him as the head of state, it is obvious to everyone that he does not know how to lead other vulnerable human beings in an imperfect world. It is evident that he is unable even to recognize the humanity of ordinary people or acknowledge the fate he shares with them --mortality.

Volumnia's parenting has shaped Coriolanus' mental and emotional map of Rome. What matters more than anything for Coriolanus is courage. It is,

he believes, the singular basis of human identity and worth. Honor accrues to those who have the valor to fight and even die for a Roman victory over enemies. Only those who share this nobility of purpose, Coriolanus supposes, earn the right to a place in Rome.

In the first scene of Act 4, as he is bidding farewell to his mother after having been banished from Rome, Coriolanus has an insight into his mother's philosophy of Roman virtue. Coriolanus is talking to his about courage in confronting adversity and shares his understanding of what she passed on to him when he was a boy: "You were used to Load me / With precepts that could make invincible / The heart that 'conn'd them" 25(4.1.9-11). What Coriolanus remembers from childhood is Volumnia's teaching that courage leads to invincibility. Early in the play in Act 1,3,, she communicates not only to Coriolanus, but also to his wife and his closest friends, that the paramount virtue in life is courage and it is the foundation of all other virtues. Summoning courage leads to more than success and fame. It is the threshold to invincibility. While such an assertion is obviously hyperbole, Coriolanus carries it with him from childhood, as if it were an amulet that could ward off defeat and ultimately death. For all his extraordinary martial gifts, Coriolanus is child-like in his acceptance of his mother's assertion, as if such a state of being were attainable or even desirable, for to live invincibly is to live untouched by loss, failure, defeat, and pain that are inexorably a part of life and learning.

Moreover, while the tribunes and the crowd of commoners, mistakenly call Coriolanus proud, Coriolanus feels he is unworthy, despite his prowess in battle. When he stealthily maneuvers his way into the Volscian headquarters, Coriolanus finds his twin in Aufidius. They talk of combat where opposites disappear. The highest pleasure in life for them occurs in the place of greatest danger – where annihilation of self is always imminent. These great warriors, Coriolanus and Aufidius, are unencumbered by categories of male and female, life and death, love and war, danger and safety. As Aufidius says: "[I]...Dreamt of encounters "twixt thyself and me; / We have been down together in my sleep" 26 (4.5.122-123). When Coriolanus steps over the line separating friend and enemy, Roman and Volscian, self and other, all those borders disappear into the frenzy of the fight. Both men live for the rapture of hand-to-hand combat where they experience the merging of body, mind, action, self and other, in ways unimaginable in ordinary life.

Although the two men share a common passion for combat, they are very different in their relationship to place. Aufidius wants to deconstruct the power relationship with Rome and expand his territory by conquering that place and subjecting it to his authority. In contrast, Coriolanus' life project is to protect Roman civilization. He has little enthusiasm for expanding his power over the state other than in supporting it through military action. Why, then, does Coriolanus leave Rome and join Aufidius? First, because he feels betrayed by his country. He wants revenge for the dishonor of the charge of treason when he has always embodied the highest ideal of the Roman citizen-- to die in service to Rome. Second, because he knows that he has an ally in Aufidius who shares his hatred and offers the chance to conquer the enemy that has nearly decimated Volscian society.

In Act 5, Coriolanus in camp in the bush with Aufidius and the Volscian army awaits battle against Rome. In that borderland, Coriolanus grasps the horror his home life has been. The world his mother had created in her dwelling was a nest of terror that is enacted for the last time in this deserted space. Before the fight, Roman emissaries enter the Volscian camp and attempt to dissuade Coriolanus from attacking Rome. Coriolanus remains unmoved and silent. They leave and then in Act 5, scene 3, his mother enters with his wife and child. Volumnia tries to reason with Coriolanus to spare Rome and sign a peace accord that she claims honors both Romans and Volscians while avoiding bloodshed. She talks about justice, prudence, and temperance. Her arguments are elegant and appeal to his mind and heart. She tries to enlist Coriolanus in her plight: if she cheers for him, she says, she cheers for the destruction of Rome. Yet if she cheers for Rome, then she cheers for the annihilation of her son. The choice is clear. In that context of the double negative, she makes her proposal: peace with honor. He turns her down: "Tell me not / Wherein I seem unnatural: desire not / To allay my rages and revenges with / Your colder reasons" 27 (5.3.83-86). Volumnia begs for mercy: "For we have nothing else to ask, but that / Which you deny already: yet we will ask" 28 (5.3.89-90).

When entreaties fail, Volumnia intimidates Coriolanus, bitterly charging that he has never taken care of her even though she devoted her whole life to him Fiercely. Her demand is that filial duty requires that he give her what she wants: "Thou hast never in thy life / Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy" 29(5.3.160-61).

With Aufidius and his army as witnesses, Volumnia shames Coriolanus by her accusations of his failures as her son and as a man and a Roman. She further charges that throughout his life he's always been a disappointment to her and that the gods will curse him for his hard heart. If he refuses mercy, she threatens to do to him what Rome has done: abandon him, banish him from her mind and heart, from her maternal bond, severing the genetic connection forever. Stunned, Coriolanus relents and grants his mother what she wants, betraying his bond with Aufidius, dishonoring him and the Volscian army. When he shows mercy, Coriolanus steps into the glare of betrayal. Realizing all is lost, he falls to his knees, an atavistic lament rising from his throat. It is the groan of pain, sounding like the cry of a wounded child, hopeless, abandoned by its mother:

O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do open.

The god's look down, and this unnatural scene

They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!

You have won a happy victory to Rome;

But for your son, --believe it, O believe it,

Most dangerously you have with him prevailed

If not most mortal to him. But let it come. 30 (5.182-189)

In his agony, Coriolanus' world shatters New meanings of his past, present, and future expunge his heroic identity: Coriolanus is a traitor to Rome as well as to Aufidius; Coriolanus is a dishonorable and unworthy son; Coriolanus soon will die ignominiously for his betrayal of Aufidius. Coriolanus will lose all the forms of life he has come to love--his place in Rome, his place as a hero, his place in his family, his place in his mother's heart, his place in history, his place in life.

In the end it is Volumnia rather than Coriolanus who emerges as the hero of Rome. All glory goes to her, for she has brokered the peace "with honor" between Romans and Volscians. In Act 5, scene 5, the Senate celebrates her a hero, and this glorification draws her out of the shadows and into the glow of the Republic, endowing her with what was always most important to her—honor. "Behold, our patroness. The life of Rome!/Call all your tribes together, praise the gods, /And make triumphant fires 31(5.5.1-3)

(?)Once her son served her renown with his courage; now he makes a gift of mercy to her which becomes an act of self-immolation. War is avoided, Rome is saved, Volumnia is celebrated, but now Coriolanus has no place. Banished from Rome, he knows he has betrayed the trust of Aufidius, and he will pay for it with his own death

After the peace settlement, Coriolanus returns to the Volscians with one thin shred of hope that he can find a place with them in Act 5:

Hail, lords! I am return'd your soldier,
No more infected with my country's love
Than when I parted hence, but still subsisting
Under your great command. 32 (5.6.70-74)

This paltry chip with which he bargains for his life — an honorable peace—is valueless. Aufidius and a gang of military advisors encircle him. Coriolanus speaks about peace and honor, but he meets the same charge that both Romans and his mother uttered: traitor. The accusation provokes his anger and he draws his weapon in a futile act to fight Aufidius and his gang. Aufidius cheats, however, and instead of a heroic match—single hand-to-hand combat -- his warriors surround and butcher Coriolanus in Act 5, scene 6.

The final pathos in the play belongs to Coriolanus. He is the one man who has yearned all his life to do honorable things in the eyes of his mother and Rome; in the end he find himself disgraced and pushed out of civilized society, rejected both by his homeland and by the Volscian land he adopted, and, most crushingly, distained by his mother. All the victories Coriolanus achieved for Rome have been deleted; what's left is a ruin. Coriolanus dies in isolation, profoundly unaware of his power as a warrior and his worth as a human being. He was unable to recognize the humanity and glorious heroism in himself. He discounted all his military maneuvers, astonishing things that evoked fear and wonder from others in combat from battleground to battleground, from places of death and mayhem where he emerged victorious. And now, at the end of the play, he dies alone, an exile in liminal space, without the imprint of culture and human values, condemned for treason by his fellow Romans as well as the enemy

Volscians. Coriolanus is marooned without a place in the world, without a home, a map, a sense of belonging, a nest. He has no place to go, no grounded identity, no hope for the experience of intimacy, of being exquisitely alive and bonded to others. We are left to wonder whether his final action of returning to Aufidius is a desperate hope for reincorporation into society or an act of assisted suicide.

Indeed, as Steve Mentz argues, in his study of Rome and the sea, the lure of Rome “promises different truths about humanity and the world.... [Shakespeare's Roman plays] write Rome as opaque, inhospitable, and alluring, a dynamic reservoir of estrangement and enchantment” 33 (2009:10). The places Coriolanus inhabited were more opaque and inhospitable than he suspected. He thought he understood Rome. He imagined he could force those places inside and outside of Rome to yield to his vision of life. What he didn't know was these places were powerful, living environments with complex histories and negotiated boundaries, crowded with people who had suffered bitterly. He was unaware that humanity's pain shaped the horizon of possibilities and the forms of action that could build or corrode his kinship with others.

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Endnotes

1. Another place of influence is Volumnia's house that I will discuss later in the section on Nest.
2. I am indebted to Susan Shapiro for drawing the connection between Shakespeare's quotations and the appearance of this idea extensively in

the Graeco-Roman world. It appears in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 7.77.7 ("A city is its men not its walls or ships empty of men," and Aristotle, *Politics* 1276a, "A city is not defined by its walls," and Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 7.11.3, "The Republic is not its Walls."

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