Shakespeare’s Coriolanus:
a tragic hero in the Sophoclean mould

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the striking analogies between Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and Sophoclean tragedy: in determinant features of substance and style and in the unique individuality of the tragic hero.

There are seven chapters, of which the first is synoptic and expository. Chapter II and Appendix I present documentation and analyses of the currency of translations of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* of Sophocles throughout the sixteenth century, and the familiarity of these works in Europe and England during Shakespeare's lifetime.

The third chapter investigates the genesis of the concept of the heroic individual in Homeric epic and Sophoclean tragic drama, and identifies the relevance of the concept to a particular perception of Coriolanus. This perception includes the understanding that the tragic hero lives his life according to assumptions derived from the Homeric-Sophoclean prototype: that his archetypal nature and conduct exemplify an essentially intuitive, non-rational demand for absolutes, and consequently resist judgement in terms of more reasonable criteria.

The personality of the tragic hero is investigated in Chapters IV to VII, relative to the predicament embodied in his ambiguous relationship with the non-heroic community. His commitment to conduct which is commensurate with his personal *areté* confirms his unsuitability to, and incompatibility with his world: he cannot compromise his self-assertive individuality, and society misunderstands and censures his passionate resolve and temperament. Criticism of the tragic hero, based on conventional or questionable morality, fails to comprehend that the excesses of his temperament are elemental and indispensable attributes of the quintessential heroic personality.

The hero's harsh aggression, and the lack of accord, understanding, and reliable communication between him and the community determine the irreconcilable clash of opposing ethical principles, which results in his moral and physical isolation, his complete exclusion from society and sympathy.

The tragic hero may lose his life, but is morally triumphant. The tragedy exemplifies the inadequacy of human nature, yet recognizes man's potential to nobility; an authentic and lasting testimony to that which is most tragic yet most impressive in human aspiration.
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CHAPTER I
The principal arguments of the thesis
1. Mode of procedure

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* manifests striking and significant similarities to Sophoclean tragedy; the protagonist, too, is remarkably akin to the great archetypal tragic heroes of Sophocles, most specifically to Ajax and Antigone. These statements posit a greater degree of familiarity with the tragedies of Sophocles than Shakespeare could be expected to have derived in grammar school from standard academic exercises in the study of the classics. Although specific details of Shakespeare's reading are limited, such familiarity with Sophoclean drama would be feasible if translations of the tragedies were prevalent and known during Shakespeare's lifetime. Sears Jayne notes that Shakespearean scholars have led the way in the 'vigorous scholarly investigation' of the English Renaissance, and suggests that 'one might assume that all the known primary sources of information about the period had long ago been exhausted'. Despite this, Jayne admits that 'present-day knowledge about Elizabethan reading is extremely uneven'.

This thesis will establish that the tragedies of Sophocles, and especially the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, were widely available in translation during Shakespeare's lifetime, and will present documentation to that effect in Chapter II and in Appendix I. Chapter III will suggest briefly to what extent *Coriolanus* deviates from other tragedies in the Shakespearean canon, with particular relevance to the present reading. An examination of the manner in which the drama corresponds to Sophoclean tragedy in the determinant elements of austerity and concentration of concept, of expression, and of characterization is included in Chapter III. The chapter will also indicate the distinctive Sophoclean integration of opposing features, forces, and principles: the static and the dynamic, the heroic and the everyday, the absolute ideal and the imperfect reality, and will identify the manner in which this particular perspective is relevant to the present perception of *Coriolanus*. In addition, the distinguishing characteristics of the archetypal tragic hero and their peculiar applicability to Coriolanus will be exemplified. In order to achieve simplification of expression, the heroic protagonist is referred to throughout as the 'hero', irrespective of gender.

A perception of Coriolanus as a Sophoclean tragic hero necessitates an
understanding that he lives his life according to the absolute, heroic, immoderate assumptions derived from Homer. An illustrative investigation of the personality of the Sophoclean hero will be presented in Chapter IV, with particular reference to Ajax and Antigone; Coriolanus is viewed in the light of this unique heroic identity, and is closely compared with his Sophoclean counterparts. His heroic individuality is shown to place him in inevitable conflict with his community: he cannot compromise his independent, archetypal nature, and the community misunderstand and censure his passionate resolve and temperament.

Sophoclean tragedy assigns a central, pivotal significance to the personality of the hero, with explicit consideration of his role in, and relationship to, his community. Chapter V will show the fundamental lack of both understanding and communication between the heroic character and the ordinary, and how this is particularly applicable to Ajax, Antigone, and Coriolanus. A more detailed analysis of the non-heroic community, and of the parallels between the communities of Coriolanus, the Ajax and the Antigone will be presented in Chapter VI. Because he resolutely refuses to adapt or conform to accepted mores, and defines his own conditions for self-fulfilment, the Sophoclean hero exists in an environment of reciprocal incomprehension and antagonism. His heroic temper and stubborn, self-assured faith in his own integrity and ability alienate him within his community. He suffers a characteristic isolation and death, which will be examined in Chapter VII, and will be shown to have substantial relevance to the tragedy of Coriolanus.

In order to perceive Coriolanus to be reminiscent of Sophoclean tragedy in style and substance, and Coriolanus to be a tragic hero in the Sophoclean mould, conventional evaluations and expectations of both play and protagonist must be reconsidered. Terry Eagleton states: 'All literature is "intertextual". A specific piece of writing thus has no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly . . . generating a hundred different perspectives'. This latitude of possibility allows unobstructed scope and perception. Wolfgang Iser considers that a certain amount of indeterminacy is, in fact, a necessary and fundamental aspect of the literary and/or dramatic

Chapter I
experience, for 'if texts actually possessed only the meaning brought to light by interpretation, then there would remain very little else for the reader. He could only accept or reject it, take it or leave it.'

2. Coriolanus, play and hero

Coriolanus has traditionally been judged to be one of Shakespeare's least popular, most abstruse plays. Like the hero, the tragedy has proved to be resistant and tough, defying simple comment, and provoking a great divergence of opinion. Even critical recognition of the singular merit of the play inevitably includes comment on the antipathy aroused by the hero: 'the last of Shakespeare's tragedies . . . Coriolanus has . . . only in the last fifty years . . . emerged from the shadow of the "great four" to win acclaim for its own "admirable peculiarities" . . . It has seemed to modern critics a masterful but forbidding play, from which the unsympathetic character of the hero alienates audience and reader alike.' Censure of Coriolanus, commonly considered to be insufferable and unsympathetic, makes him the tragic character who has aroused most hostility from his critics over the years: 'Coriolanus is the least likeable of Shakespeare's tragic heroes . . . No modern audience . . . can readily take to such a man.'

Kenneth Muir suggests that the poetry of Coriolanus 'qualifies our moral judgements . . . [that it] often enlists our sympathies for a character we should otherwise dislike.' An assessment of a drama, or a sense of admiration or aversion for a character, however, need not necessarily accord with a set of values which the reader or audience may espouse in life. Indeed, if too close a parallel is drawn to conditions or circumstances in real or in contemporary life, if the 'gaps of indeterminacy' are filled in so that the text appears to be nothing more than a 'mirror-reflection of . . . real, verifiable factors', then, Iser contends, the text must lose its 'literary quality' (p. 128). Margot Heinemann considers that an attempt to 'annihilate distance, fill in the gap, gloss over the differences' would be counter-productive to the full appreciation of a Shakespearean drama. She states: 'if the director shows ONLY what the past has in common with our own time, he will represent human nature and the past itself as timeless and unalterable, and our present
social arrangements and behaviour as fixed and inevitable. A justification, therefore, of the tribunes' machinations in Coriolanus as 'the lawful and customary tricks of the political trade', as 'the conduct of public affairs during a popular election', or as 'good, sound electioneering', represents a specifically political, even a limiting viewpoint. Even if this viewpoint were indeed valid for all time and all politicians as it may well be, it fundamentally denies the tragedy the 'powerful contrast to our own time' which Brecht considers all Shakespearean drama should be shown to represent (Heinemann, p. 215).

The present perception of Coriolanus as an archaic hero may be, in point of fact, as restrictive as an essentially latter-day political understanding, but it removes the drama from the familiar, and emphasizes rather than glosses over the differences. The classical apprehension presents Coriolanus as a tragedy and a hero not especially relevant to our own time, but nevertheless embodying a tragic perception of the grandeur of heroic aspiration and the inadequacy of human nature, which is pertinent to all eras. The concept of an archetypal hero, who possesses qualities and attitudes which are no longer applicable, reasonable, or indeed principled in terms of today's society, makes accustomed reactions of approval or disapproval, sympathy or aversion, inappropriate with respect to the drama. The heroic extremes of temperament cannot be judged with reference to more acceptable, prudent modes of conduct or attitudes of mind, which are foreign to the essentially intuitive, non-rational heroic demand for absolutes.

In the present context, therefore, Coriolanus is to be understood within the framework of a particular perception of tragedy and of the heroic identity. If his principles and conduct are compared with, or referred to, modern social or political attitudes, he must inevitably emerge as the embodiment of an ungenerous aristocrat, 'for whom the masses have no status at all, who has a blind contempt for the common man and is impatient of any claim to consideration or fair dealing put forward by persons not of his own class' (Palmer, p. 255). A specific view of Coriolanus as a Sophoclean tragic hero precludes this interpretation. As such, and committed to those fixed, absolute moral principles and modes of conduct which derive from the heroic – albeit unenlightened – Homeric archetype, Coriolanus resists judgement in terms
of a more moderate code of ethics. His passionate self-esteem and arrogant conduct, distasteful from an evolved, egalitarian socio-political standpoint, are based on precepts which pre-date and therefore make irrelevant more democratic conclusions. The cult of the hero depends on a resolute faith in the irreproachability of his own integrity, and a consequent expectation that others should demonstrate similar principles. Coriolanus's aristocratic bearing, from this perspective, proceeds from an inherent, essentially apolitical superiority - his heroic *areté* - and an intolerant contempt for those who fall below his ideals of truth, honour, courage, and integrity. A practical, realistic political apprehension runs counter to this specific perception.

A consideration of Brecht's version of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and two critical commentaries on the work will indicate the extent to which the drama - or indeed any drama - can be perceived or modified to embody different aspects, intentions, or emphases. Ronald Gray considers that Brecht's re-writing of *Coriolanus* is blatantly political: he states that Brecht removes all 'traces of nobility . . . to leave only the . . . bloody warmonger.' Indeed, as in his version of the *Antigone*, all the 'subtlety [is] removed by Brecht's single-minded rewriting'\(^9\) Brecht ignores the personal issues inherent in the situations which both Sophocles and Shakespeare present in contexts which encompass, but do not exclusively pursue, the political. In so doing, Brecht eclipses and disregards the full scope of the private tragic circumstances and bases of the original dramas. Brecht's typically 'flexible . . . multi-faceted' Shakespearean pronouncements prompt Margot Heinemann to remark on the pointlessness of 'trying to construct a single, closely co-ordinated, fully consistent argument out of . . . [the] rich material of his criticism.' She quotes Brecht's own view of Coriolanus as 'a patriot. . . . Only the tremendous events shown in the play turn him into a deadly enemy of his country.' Unlike Gray, Heinemann considers that Brecht, in fact 'resists the temptation to make Coriolanus a wholly unsympathetic or contemptible militarist.'\(^11\) It is significant that even Brecht's adaptation of *Coriolanus* arouses some of the diversity of opinion that the original drama provokes.

Thus, a specific recognition of Coriolanus as a classical hero in a setting

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which is not exclusively political, would necessitate the laying aside of conventional value-judgements in order to see him, as Shakespeare portrays him, and as Kenneth Muir concludes him to be, as 'something more than the valiant, proud, intolerant, choleric, impolite and treacherous patrician he seems at first to be' and, in fact as 'greatly superior' to all around him.\textsuperscript{12} In fact, even Palmer's consideration of Coriolanus as a political character within a drama which is 'more exclusively concerned with politics than any other play [Shakespeare] ever wrote' includes a paradox: 'Shakespeare is intent on persons, not on public affairs' (p. 308). Palmer states further: "Coriolanus" is not the dramatisation of a political thesis. It is not a play in which the supreme conflict is one of political principle' (p. 310). Accordingly, the present perception diverges from a purely political perspective and submits Coriolanus to an examination within the context of a classical, a Sophoclean tragedy; a tragic dramatization of heroic moral conflict. Only with the acceptance of critical criteria founded on archaic, even unwonted perceptions, can a sympathetic response to Coriolanus within this specific apprehension be effected, and the intrinsically distressing nature of his tragedy be fully realized.\textsuperscript{13}

Coriolanus falls within Shakespeare's tragic canon and is so designated in the first Folio of 1623,\textsuperscript{14} but it has been, over the years, differentiated from the four major tragedies. Although each Shakespearean tragedy is undeniably unique, Coriolanus has not generally been regarded as an equivalent dramatic achievement with others in the canon. Derek Traversi remarks that 'Coriolanus never satisfied the critics. Most of them have felt that it stands in some way apart from the main body of Shakespeare's work'.\textsuperscript{15} He concludes that it is, nevertheless, 'a very great play' (p. 58). Maurice Charney affirms that it is fortunate that Coriolanus is still not being compared with earlier tragedies 'to which it has little resemblance'.\textsuperscript{16} In general, the dissimilarity between Coriolanus and other Shakespearean tragedies, whether explicitly identified or not, the harsh atmosphere and arrogant hero, have led to adverse criticism about the drama and the protagonist, and thus the heroic stature of one of Shakespeare's most impressive and extraordinary figures has remained substantially unacknowledged.\textsuperscript{17} The tragedy stands apart from the
others in specifically identifiable qualities, and Coriolanus – play and hero – should rather be distinguished as a different species of the genus of Shakespearean tragedy. The play is in an unlike, not an inferior mode, and Coriolanus can be perceived as a hero in the classical Greek mould, most akin to the magnificent prototype heroes of Sophoclean tragedy.

The conviction of the distinction between Coriolanus and the other tragedies is more tenable if it is accepted that it was Shakespeare’s last tragedy. In the absence of irrefutable evidence to the contrary, Philip Brockbank maintains that: 'we may acquiesce in Chambers's necessarily tentative conclusion that the play "may have been produced early in 1608" and therefore suppose that it was Shakespeare’s final tragedy'. Thus the relationship of Coriolanus to the earlier tragedies may be viewed in terms of a movement in a new direction, although not necessarily admitting the implication of a progression. This is not to suggest that the play constitutes an advance or improvement in the evolution of Shakespearean tragedy, nor does it imply an achievement in Coriolanus of a specific objective or goal. It is rather that, as his most mature tragedy, it can the more easily be considered to embody a different stage of development, a conception of tragedy towards which – consciously or unconsciously – Shakespeare might have tended, or have been influenced. The tragedy could be regarded as an odd sport, a deviation from that which, after all, cannot be termed a homogeneous body of tragedy; alternatively it could be considered as an avant-garde example, even possibly a forerunner of European, specifically of the French neo-classical tragedy of Corneille and Racine.

The wide diversity of heroic characterization in the tragic canon indicates Shakespeare's intense interest in disparate tragic personalities. He presents an aged English king, a younger Scottish king, a youthful Danish prince, a displaced Moor, and three celebrated Romans, each portrayed at a different stage of the development of the Roman state and empire. If Coriolanus is accepted to be Shakespeare’s last tragedy, his return, after the diversity, to the well-spring of tragedy is more credible, coming as it does before Shakespeare completely abandons both tragic genre and mode of characterization. After Coriolanus he makes a sudden transition into the entirely new style and
matter of the four 'Romances', beginning with *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, in which he discontinues the method of developing characters from the inside, and of presenting logical patterns of behaviour and attitudes of mind.

The singularly tight, spare concentration of *Coriolanus* is neither evidence of a waning of Shakespeare's creative ability, nor is it a defect of the play, but is instead an artistic marrying of style and subject. The tautness of *Coriolanus* can be likened to the characteristic mode of Sophoclean tragedy, which is distinctively controlled and restrained, especially when compared with the exalted language, grandness of imagination, and superhuman concept of the earlier Attic, Æschylean drama. In the *Ajax*, and particularly in the *Antigone*, the Sophoclean style is most noticeably more severe and 'somewhat austere':

Compared with other of Shakespeare's tragedies there is, in *Coriolanus*, a noticeable narrowing of focus, a contraction of frame, which is pre-eminently an intense concentration on a single heroic figure. The scope of the drama is reduced and restricted, so that all action takes place in and around claustrophobic walled cities. Whether in Rome or in Antium the hero commands the stage. There is no other interest in the play: there is no sub-plot, there are no natural or unnatural forces or effects, no cosmic repercussions to enlarge the perspective, as there are in other Shakespearean tragedies. The protagonist constantly and completely dominates the drama as does no other Shakespearean tragic hero. He is the pivot on which every action and every discussion turns. Whether on stage or off, he is the sole topic of conversation, the sole focus of interest.

The contraction of arena in *Coriolanus* and the intensity of concentration on the hero can be compared with a similar reduction in scope and constriction of viewpoint in Sophoclean tragedy, as a defining element within the genre of Attic tragedy. The *Oresteia* of Æschylus spans generations, with extensive ramifications of action, an elaborate working-out of the familial curse, and the constant presence of superhuman forces; the focus is
wide-angled and the concept and scale vast. The trilogy presents exalted themes and moral questions, and an unseen world which is as genuine as the real world. The language is as elevated and as monumental as befits the whole dramatic conception. In none of the three plays is there an exclusive concern with a central heroic figure; neither Agamemnon nor Orestes is indisputably the hero of the first two plays. The issues of the whole are wide-ranging, and point away from an intense concentration on a single character or action.

It was Sophocles who originated the concept of the remarkable tragic figure in drama, a hero who is entirely responsible for his own actions and fate, rather than an extensive and multiplying sequence of influence, as portrayed by Æschylus. Sophocles concentrated Greek tragedy in form and content, reducing the trilogic form used by Æschylus to a separate, complete play which focuses attention exclusively on a single protagonist facing a unique critical situation, or a series of linked crises. The extreme preoccupation with the tragic hero is a determinant characteristic of all the extant plays of Sophocles, and is more closely paralleled in Coriolanus than in any other of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Coriolanus is at the very core of the tragedy, he embodies its essence. The portrayal of a central tragic protagonist whose conduct and endurance are the nucleus of, and raison d'être for the play, is a concept of tragedy not used in the interim between Sophocles and Shakespeare. Whether it was the spirit of Renaissance humanism, of individualism, or the publication of Attic tragedy, that was responsible, it was in Coriolanus that Shakespeare created a tragedy and a hero in the Sophoclean manner, in a form not used previously by him, nor by anyone, for two millennia. In order to substantiate a valid foundation on which to base this statement, evidence will be presented which establishes that translations of Sophoclean tragedy were indeed accessible and prevalent, if not familiar, during Shakespeare's lifetime; and that furthermore the Zeitgeist was in no way antithetical to concepts inherent in Sophoclean tragedy.21

Chapter I
3. The Sophoclean tragic hero

Although Sophocles was the first poet to dramatize the tragic hero, the concept was part of a long tradition of the heroic character, stretching back to Homer's portrayal of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Perhaps there was in Plutarch's account of *The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus* something of the traditional, the classical hero which stimulated Shakespeare's imagination and generated an intuition of analogy with the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*.[22] From a close comparison of the play with the source material, it appears that Shakespeare dramatized Plutarch's story with a deliberate resolution as to the presentation of the hero. The adjustments which Shakespeare made to the story, to the general mood, and to the character of Coriolanus dramatically portray a hero similar to, yet very different from, Plutarch's Martius: this, indeed, is a familiar Shakespearean procedure. There has been much commentary on the differences between Plutarch's account and Shakespeare's tragedy.[23] The accentuation of certain distinct characteristics, the suppression of others, and the adjustment of emphases or events, create in *Coriolanus* a drama and specifically a hero, imbued with a sense of tragedy which goes far beyond that of the source material.[24]

In the drama there is a systematic exaggeration of the confrontation between Coriolanus and all around him, whether Roman or Volscian, the presentation of a hero more essentially in moral, dramatic and tragic conflict with his society than that which Shakespeare found in his source. The dramatic conflict is born of an unwillingness or an inability of any member of any social class to comprehend Coriolanus's inherent nature, and a corresponding disinclination on the part of Coriolanus to moderate his conduct, or to temper his ugly antagonism towards the citizens.

The clash of the tragic hero with his society is a peculiarly Sophoclean characteristic: it is especially so when it arises, as it does in *Coriolanus*, not from the hero's lack of understanding of himself or of those around him, but rather the reverse. The Sophoclean hero's confident self-awareness and innate integrity set him apart from, and beyond the comprehension of his community: his understanding of his own absolute nature and of the inadequacies of his compatriots contributes substantially to the irreconcilable
and ultimately tragic conflict between them. Ajax, a heroic warrior, determined to remain constant to his sense of honour, is humiliated and betrayed by his world, which is unjust, imperfect, and untrustworthy. Antigone, heroically defiant, is condemned and ultimately dies for defending a moral principle which accords with her personal integrity but which is contrary to state law. The parallels with Coriolanus are too insistent to ignore.25

a. Heroic areté

Sophoclean heroes characteristically present specific and exceptional attributes. Coriolanus strikingly conforms to, and exemplifies, the typical heroic singularity and arrogant, hostile, larger-than-life characteristics of the archetype. The most distinctive feature of the Sophoclean tragic hero is the all-embracing concept of areté. The word has no exact equivalent in English, encompassing much more than integrity, and is perhaps best expressed as a comprehensive heroic distinction. This pivotal idea, the quintessential delineation of all heroic ideals and aspirations, was fundamental initially to epic poetry, and was revitalised in Sophoclean tragedy. The attribute of areté is an inherent condition and an absolute; it does not develop, nor does it adjust to meet changing situations. It is a standard of integrity of principle and conduct maintained as an immutable state of being, a constant in a dynamic and developing dramatic situation. For the true hero there can be neither indecision nor surrender without significant, critical compromise and consequent loss of heroic stature. Sophocles was the first dramatist to present the tragedy of a unique and dominating figure – the tragic hero – whose fate is not determined by outside forces, superhuman powers, or by a chain of causation, but whose decisions and actions emanate exclusively from his resolute dedication to his inner standard of areté.

Unique individuality is for Sophocles an ideal, not a defect; a necessary and integral part of the excellence of the true hero. The tragic protagonist is primarily a heroic individual, whose tragedy arises most essentially from his unswerving adherence to a personal code of integrity, and from the incomprehension of this by others:
AJAX: You’re a fool, Tecmessa,  
To think that I could change my nature now  
On your instructions.

ANTIGONE: Go your own way; I will bury my brother;  
And if I die for it, what happiness!  
Convicted of reverence —

Cor. Let them pull all about mine ears, present me  
Death on the wheel or at wild horses’ heels;  
... yet will I still  
Be thus to them. 26

Areté is both the core and the standard of the Sophoclean heroic, and  
fundamentally implies self-knowledge, a certainty and a confidence in self  
and standpoint. Antigone is from the first positive of her principles and her  
actions; she feels that Creon has no right to keep her from honouring her  
own brother, and there is no threat which will cause her to change her mind:  

He has no right to keep me from my own.  
... There is no punishment  
Can rob me of my honourable death.  

_Antigone_, ll. 48, 106–107

The Sophoclean hero never doubts the integrity of his viewpoint or his  
conduct; his decision and mode of behaviour are absolute and assertive, and  
no advice, intimidation, or coercion can effect a change of attitude. Antigone  
ever falters in her resolve, never weighs alternatives before reaching a  
decision, nor does she express any misgivings about her course of action. She  
defiantly tells Ismene to publish her decision 'to all the world', for she knows  
'where true duty lies' (ll. 94, 97).

Coriolanus has this distinctive and unvarying confidence in his own  
moral certainty. For him, as for Antigone, no punishment could be worse  
than a betrayal of principle. His individual ethic is his most intrinsic aspect of  
being; he never changes, indeed cannot change and remain himself.  
Coriolanus never doubts his assurance: he constantly resists all suggestions to  
be other than he is, fails in any attempt to be otherwise and prefers always to  
remain true to his nature, to be the man he is:

'Would you have me  
False to my nature? Rather say I play  
The man I am ...

Chapter I
Must I
With my base tongue give to my noble heart
A lie that it must bear? . . .
I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word

In contrast, Antony must assert his identity as if for self-confirmation: 'I am/Antony yet'. Hamlet in his perplexity questions whether he is a coward or a villain, and Lear doubts his identity completely: 'This is not Lear. . . . Who is it that can tell me who I am?' Only Coriolanus is not divided within himself, not with himself at war; he alone has no need to learn or develop, and cannot be influenced or changed. Other Shakespearean tragic heroes can be persuaded to a course of action or a mode of thinking: 'But screw your courage to the sticking place'; 'Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio'. They must be taught, or must suffer into an understanding of themselves or of the situation, as must King Lear, who 'hath ever but slenderly known himself:

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.'

The Sophoclean hero has a singular identity and an independent fate. The consequences of his inner, driving necessity set him apart from other men, and precipitate his isolation within and from the community. His destiny, always to be himself and not to jeopardize his essential truth, is of fundamental ethical import, and it is only by adhering strictly to this destiny that he is able to achieve and maintain his full heroic potential. Coriolanus manifests this typically Sophoclean quality of positive, immutable reliance on his own merit and identity: he exhibits true self-knowledge, and neither needs nor asks advice.

The hero's adherence to his intrinsic moral standards confirms his unsuitability to his world: neither the concept nor the reality – the mode of existence – of the heroic can be comprehended or accommodated by the non-heroic morality of the unexceptional everyday community. Sophoclean tragedy embodies a recognition that the essential nature of the hero pertains to, and yet transcends, the human. The Periclean age regarded man's inner being, his nature, as his essential self, his \textit{daimôn}. Heraclitus of Ephesus,
roughly contemporary with Sophocles, affirmed the prevailing conviction that a man's character, his most inherent essence, is a pre-eminent quality and, in the sense that his nature frames and directs his conduct, it is a compulsive destiny. Sophoclean heroes owe their integrity, their all-encompassing aretē to this inner daimôn, which in turn is the determining factor in their lives and deaths. Unlike Æschylus, Sophocles never affirms that gods or chthonian powers are responsible for his heroes' circumstances, their suffering, or their deaths. It is the heroic ethos, which for Sophocles is a kind of divinity, that compels all actions.

Ajax is criticized for having been refractory, 'we couldn't rule him while he lived' (1066), and Antigone's wilfulness is considered to be the cause of her downfall: 'you are the victim of your own self-will' (878). In both instances, self-will is regarded in the drama as a character flaw, but is in fact a manifestation of heroic integrity, the expression of which impels the heroes' inflexible conduct. In the light of this perception it is possible to understand Coriolanus's unique and driving necessity to be himself, to play the man he is, and to adhere at all times and against all odds to his innermost sense of integrity. It is not, as is so often suggested, because he is excessively proud or stubborn, 'too absolute' (III.2.39), but rather because he is driven from within to maintain his heroic standpoint.

The singularity of the Sophoclean hero and the perception that his unique individuality is attributable to an inner daimôn, accounts for implicit blurring of boundaries between the human and the non-human. Nevertheless, Sophoclean heroes are men, not gods. Anthropocentrism was basic to Greek philosophy, yet there is always a sense in which it was understood that the unique human excellence of Sophoclean heroes made them paradoxically more than human. The kinship of Coriolanus with the Sophoclean hero in this context is distinct and undeniable. No other Shakespearean tragic hero is so repeatedly nor so unmistakably referred to as, or compared with, the super-human or the non-human. He is 'a planet ... a god ... a thing ... a ... dragon ... an engine ... a kind of nothing'. These non-human or divine epithets are not evidence of his lack of humanity or of his hubris, but of the inability of the ordinary to comprehend his heroic

Chapter I
humanness. It is his heroic essence which sets Coriolanus apart, and which links him with the Sophoclean concept of the timeless and incorruptible significance of the heroic, a significance which confers a quality of permanence after death, a form of immortality through noble memory rather than divine characteristic.

b. Excesses of the heroic personality

Sophoclean heroes epitomize a concept of the ideal and the pre-eminent. They are as all men should be, or would be, in a world better and more heroic than this one: proud, confident, angry, and resolute, driven by an inner moral creed which is the source of their individuality and their excellence. They manifest the qualities and the excesses of temperament which are fundamental to the Sophoclean heroic, which cannot be considered to be fatal flaws or defects of personality, and as such, to be responsible ultimately for the central tragedy. The notion of a fatal flaw, the Aristotelian hamartia, is as inapplicable to Coriolanus as it is to the Sophoclean hero.

The hero's resolute sense of self and confidence in his own worth are typically described as pride and obstinacy. His vehement moral conviction of identity is misinterpreted as arrogance, but should rather be recognized for what it is; an unshakeable self-reliance. Ajax's 'boast' and Antigone's proud sense of 'where true duty lies', her bold defiance of Creon's edict, reveal both heroes' self-assured intuition of the manner in which they should behave. Antigone is accused within the drama, as she has been branded by critics, of being excessively proud and stubborn:

CHORUS: The Father of Heaven abhors the proud tongue's boasting;
   But he that, too rashly daring, walks in sin
   In solitary pride
   The over-obstinate spirit
   Is soonest broken . . .
   Proud thoughts do not sit well
   Upon subordinates.

CREON: Ill. 128, 367-368, 478-486

Her pride and stubbornness are heroic qualities, and it is Creon rather, who
exhibits these same characteristics as negative, non-heroic flaws: his 'stubborn will' is a 'fault' which he recognizes 'too late' (ll. 1268, 1271).

Coriolanus's pride, for which he is criticized almost universally – within and without the drama – is, like Antigone's, an aspect of his heroic areté. It is essential to recognize the distinction between pride which is an exaggerated opinion of self, an unwarranted arrogance, and pride in the Sophoclean heroic sense, which is a proper sense of worth and a deep understanding of conduct that is fitting, as opposed to that which would be unworthy or demeaning. Criticism of heroic pride is inappropriately based on comparisons with non-heroic standards, standards which are founded on everyday values and rules of behaviour, which have been formulated by and for those who lack the individuality, the courage, and the moral assurance of the heroic individual. These rules of behaviour have no application to the Sophoclean heroic concept.

Coriolanus's unique qualities and idiosyncratic conduct are more comprehensible if his peculiar affinity with the Sophoclean hero is taken into account. He is confident of his own standing, proud in the sense that he has observed with honour the demands of his heroic areté. Despite assertions within the drama to the contrary, he has no ambition, and never desires or demands accolades, office, or the trappings of success from others as evidence of his worth:

Bru. In this point charge him home, that he affects Tyrannical power.

... Caius Marcius was A worthy officer i' th' war, but insolent, O'ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking

III.3.1–2, IV.6.29–31

Cor. Know, good mother, I had rather be their servant in my way Than sway with them in theirs.

II.1.192–194

He never demands to have, only to be, affirming always that he does no more than any good Roman should or would do. He refuses rewards for his major role in the Roman defeat of the Volscians at Corioli, asserting with courteous
and unaffected modesty:

I thank you, General,
But cannot make my heart consent to take
A bribe to pay my sword. I do refuse it,
And stand upon my common part with those
That have beheld the doing.

I.9.36–40

Com.
Our spoils he kicked at,
And look’d upon things precious as they were
The common muck of the world. He covets less
Than misery itself would give, rewards
His deeds with doing them, and is content
To spend the time to end it.

II.2.122–127

Like the Sophoclean hero, Coriolanus recognizes that honour and nobility do not depend on recognition, reward, or adulation.

His extreme abhorrence of any form of flattery, or indeed of sincere praise, is emphasized throughout. From his first brusque 'Thanks', in reply to Menenius's inoffensive 'Hail, noble Marcius!', his every reaction to complimentary words is an off-hand dismissal or a terse change of subject:

Sir, praise me not;

... Pray now, no more;
... No more, I say.
...
... Your Honours' pardon.
I had rather have my wounds to heal again
Than hear say how I got them.
I.1.161–162, I.5.16, I.9.13, 46, II.2.66–68

His is not the reaction of a proud and arrogant nature which revels in praise, which tops all others in boasting (II.1.18), or which has ambitions for material or political rewards for valour. His extravagant dislike of 'acclamations hyperbolical' is accompanied by repeated evidence that he would rather undervalue his achievements:

I had rather have one scratch my head i' th' sun
When the alarum were struck than idly sit
To hear my nothings monster'd.
I.9.51, II.2.73–75

His pride is comparable with the typical and merited pride of the Sophoclean
hero, in the sure knowledge of his identity, integrity, and ability:

Mar. Within these three hours, Tullus, 
Alone I fought in your Corioli walls, 
And made what work I pleas'd. 'Tis not my blood 
Wherein thou seest me mask'd. For thy revenge 
Wrench up thy power to th' highest.  
I.8.7-11

AJAX: This is the last of Ajax, such a man – 
Yes, let me boast – 
A man whose equal Troy has never seen  
Il. 422-424

The labels of pride and ambition are applied to Coriolanus by those who fail to understand his heroic arrogance, who are inimical to him, who are untrustworthy or devious. The citizens resent his contemptuous attitude towards them and imagine that he is to blame for all their hardship: 'he's a very dog to the commonalty'. The tribunes fear that his martial successes must lead to his political advancement, and their consequent loss of status: 'Was ever man so proud as is this Marcius? ... He is grown/Too proud to be so valiant.' Aufidius, desiring Coriolanus's downfall, envies his popularity among the Volscian troops: 'He bears himself more proudlier,/Even to my person, than I thought he would'. Their opinions and evaluations are not corroborated in the drama, neither in Coriolanus's words nor his actions, and are generally disproved by his brusque reactions to any praise:

Pray now no more; ... 
I have done 
As you have done – that's what I can; induc'd 
As you have been – that's for my country. 
... 
I have some wounds upon me, and they smart 
To hear themselves rememb'red.  
I.9.13-17, 28-29

Even the patricians cannot understand the moral principles which compel Coriolanus's conduct, and fear that his forthright temperament must kindle revolt:

Men. Go, get you to your house; be gone, away. 
All will be naught else.  
2 Sen. Get you gone. 

Chapter I
Come, sir, along with us...
manhood is call'd foolery when it stands
Against a falling fabric. Will you hence,
Before the tag return?

III.1.230–231, 237, 246–248

His arrogant pride and unyielding temper are essential and significant aspects of his Sophoclean areté, and any adjustment in his nature is a spiritual and moral betrayal and must result, as Coriolanus well knows, in the sacrifice of his heroic stature. Debasing actions would necessarily corrupt his mind and thus his essential nature. He cannot accede to patrician pressure and play the hypocrite to the citizens lest he should, through the physical pretence, in not honouring his 'own truth . . . teach [his] mind / A most inherent baseness.' (III.2.120–123).

Coriolanus desires life and honour on his own terms, but encounters opposition at every turn, to which he reacts with the characteristic irascibility of his Sophoclean counterpart. He has been equally criticized for his ungovernable temper as for his pride. His easily aroused and uncontrollable rage particularly aligns Coriolanus with the Sophoclean hero, for 'they are all angry heroes'.

All heroic qualities are, by definition, exceptional and prodigious, and heroic anger is similarly exaggerated, imbued with the same vehement fervour as are all other traits of the Sophoclean hero, who is magnificent, excessive, larger-than-life in everything he says and does.

Ajax shows typical lack of self-control 'when the rage [is] on him', and curses with seemingly superhuman anger (I.339, 243). Yet it is not his rage, or his frenzied slaughter of the cattle, which are the paramount considerations of the tragedy. Sophocles chose to dramatize a version of the story which especially emphasizes Ajax's degradation in order that his innate nobility should be enhanced by the comparison:

the process by which this image is transformed and Ajax' disaster irradiated by his recovery of heroic strength . . . is the true action of the play. . . . Our repugnance at Ajax' conduct . . . counts for little in comparison with the . . . sustained and noble affirmation of the heroic in human life.36

Antigone is under attack throughout the play, and reacts with typically aggressive defiance in the defence of what she regards as an inviolable
prerogative: 'I know my duty, where true duty lies ... Leave me alone/With my own madness' (ll. 101, 105–106). Sophocles emphasizes the strength of character with which Antigone asserts her conviction of right conduct, not the open disobedience and stubborn resistance which the chorus and Creon criticize. Antigone is a 'true heroine ... a true woman, most tender-hearted, most courageous and steadfast; whose sense of duty sustains her in doing a deed for which she knows that she must die.'

Coriolanus's bitter contempt for the individuals and the mores of his society gives rise to characteristic, uncontrollable excesses of passion. His outbursts of rage are infallibly provoked by behaviour or demands which threaten to subvert his heroic standpoint or the well-being of the state. There is justification in the drama for Coriolanus's rage, his indignation and contempt, if not the scale of his outbursts: the cowardice and instability of the plebeians, the hypocrisy of the patricians, and the crafty machinations of the tribunes:

Cor. You shames of Rome! ... how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat!
I.4.31, 35–36

Vol. I prithee now, my son,
Go to them with this bonnet in thy hand;

Men. This but done
Even as she speaks, why, their hearts were yours;
III.2.72–73, 86–87

Cor. What is the matter,
That being pass'd for consul with full voice,
I am so dishonour'd that the very hour
You take it off again? ...
Thou injurious tribune!
III.3.58–61, 69

The passionate intensity with which he imbues everything he says and does is a characteristic of the Sophoclean hero, who knows no half-measures and accepts no bridle. Paramount in valour, whether on the battlefield or in an inflammatory social situation, he is unable to restrain his reactions.
4. The isolation of the hero within the community

Because the heroic nature is incomprehensible to the non-heroic there can be no communication between the hero and his community, for they share neither values nor mutual tolerance. Lack of understanding and of co-operation is the source of the conflict between the heroic character and the community, and of his isolation within, and from the community. He is unable to compromise any aspect of his areté, and society is unable to accommodate his unique qualities, his apparently abnormal, uncongenial standpoint and behaviour. The conflict, and the consequent isolation of the tragic hero are peculiarly Sophoclean characteristics.

The Ajax, traditionally the earliest of the extant Sophoclean plays, presents the first tragic drama of a hero opposed by, and opposing, all around him; misunderstood and maligned, he is isolated whether he is within or without the community:

AJAX: And now what must I do? Hated of gods,
Hated of all the Greeks, hated of Troy,
and of this very soil –

ll. 458-459

The Antigone is even more explicit in the dramatization of this tragic rift:

CREON: You are wrong. None of my subjects thinks as you do.
ANTIGONE: Yes, sir, they do; but dare not tell you so.
CREON: And you are not only alone, but unashamed.
...
CREON: This girl’s an enemy;
...
The one and only traitor in our State –
...
ANTIGONE: No friend to weep at my banishment.
...
No friend to weep at my departing.

ll. 507-509, 652, 655, 859, 882

Although the Sophoclean hero is inevitably in a situation of irreconcilable antagonism with all around him, there is, typically, in each of these tragedies only one character who comprehends the heroic nature, but whose virtue and understanding are not proof against the ill-will and the impercipience of the community. Tecmessa in the Ajax, Haemon in the Antigone, and Virgilia in Coriolanus embody qualities of good and of value, and although they are
unable to avert the tragedies, their undeviating devotion is reliable verification of the intrinsic worth of the protagonists.

The tragic hero's conflict and isolation within the community is a distinctive Sophoclean feature, but is not exclusively so. In general, Shakespeare's tragic heroes are presented in a situation of conflict, within themselves, and/or with those around them. This conflict must inevitably result in a sense of alienation from the community, if not in actual physical exclusion:

_Macb._ And that which should accompany old age, As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have;  

_Macbeth, V.3.24–26_

_Lear._ Here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak and despis'd old man;  

_King Lear, III.2.19–20_

None of the tragedies in the canon, however, makes as explicit the rift between the hero and his social milieu, nor his complete emotional and physical isolation, as does Coriolanus. Throughout the play Coriolanus's solitude is emphasized in the midst of teeming citizenry, constant turmoil and dissension. Throughout the play there is a near-obsessive insistence on his isolation:

_1 Sol._ He is himself alone, To answer all the city.  

_I.4.52–53_

_Cor._ Despising For you the city, thus I turn my back; There is a world elsewhere.  

... though I go alone, Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen –  

_III.3.135–137, IV.1.29–31_

Truly a 'lonely dragon', the characteristically Sophoclean paucity of soliloquies increases the impression of solitude, while the stage directions and dramatization are telling indications of his alienation from all around him. Coriolanus is separated from his compatriots and his enemies by a gulf of misunderstanding and ethical irreconcilability; his character, values,
qualities and interests are out of step with patricians and plebeians, Romans and Volscians.40

In five of the seven extant Sophoclean plays, the hero is designated 'apolis' or 'apoptolis' - city-less - which unequivocally emphasizes the fact that a major concern of the tragedies is the alienation, the dissociation of the hero from his city or society.41 Coriolanus manifests a similar perception of a hero who is isolated within, and excluded from his community. With specific relevance to the Greek connotation of political as 'pertaining to polis', a comparison of Coriolanus with two other Shakespearean Roman political plays shows that the word 'Rome' is used in Antony and Cleopatra thirty times, in Julius Caesar thirty-four times, while notably in Coriolanus, 'Rome' is used ninety-six times.42 More essentially, it is the unique nature of Rome as it is portrayed in Coriolanus which should be remarked. It is a most personal city: possessive pronouns relative to the city are numerous, synonyms for the city are constantly used, and Rome is commonly referred to as 'home':

Com. 'We thank the gods
    Our Rome hath such a soldier'.

Mar. induc'd
    As you have been - that's for my country.

Men. Hoo! Marcius coming home!

I.9.8-9, 16-17, II.1.99 43

The intimate, proprietary sense of close affinity between the citizens and their city is curiously at odds with the constant unrest, the disloyalty and violence, and above all, with the banishment of Rome's best citizen and saviour. His alienation within his community is reinforced by his banishment from, and of, Rome, and his subsequent adoption of, and then betrayal by Antium. He is throughout the drama utterly isolated from all around him, within, and ultimately outside his city.

In contrast, Antony chooses to leave Rome, to remain in Egypt with Cleopatra:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.

...
Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after.

I.1.33–34, III.11.56–58

Othello, although a foreigner in Venice, is a venerated, trusted servant of the state, a worthy military governor, and so not only fully integrated into his adopted home, but much respected. His alienation derives more essentially from within himself, from his romantic and therefore incomplete understanding of his own nature, his love, and the motives of others, than it does from his colour and exotic background. Othello may appear to be as isolated within his society as is Coriolanus, as devoid of sympathy or love—with the exception of Desdemona and Cassio—and even more the victim of malignant perfidy. However, neither Othello, nor any other of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is so publicly or so ceremonially repudiated and expelled from his community as Coriolanus is. There is not, in King Lear, in Macbeth, in Hamlet or Othello, the enveloping, widespread censure and antagonism that surrounds yet separates Coriolanus, the profound isolation and abandonment at his death.

Although there is no specific mob of hostile citizens in any of the four earlier tragedies, there are, in all of them, factions which openly or surreptitiously oppose the protagonist. Othello has, publicly, Brabantio's short-lived, offensive opposition to his marriage to contend with: 'O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?. . . such a thing as thou. . . Against all rules of nature' (I.2.62, 71, I.3.101). Iago's overwhelming malevolence is unperceived by Othello until too late, and he is therefore unaware of the formidable rancour levelled against him. Although his anguish and sense of betrayal concerning Desdemona are sincere, if unfounded, Othello experiences none of the general, public hostility that Coriolanus does. In Hamlet considerable ill will, deceit, and danger threaten the prince, and in Macbeth there is secret but active opposition to 'this tyrant. . . once thought honest' (IV.3.12–13). Neither play, however, portrays the uninterrupted, organized, collective antagonism and disapproval that assail Coriolanus, isolating him from all sympathy and benevolence.

King Lear's humiliation and exclusion from comfort and shelter is essentially a private, familial matter, although he is a king as well as a father.
His enforced ostracism is heart-rending and disastrous, but is not explicitly subject to public proclamation and popular corroboration. He is not the focus of mass animosity as Coriolanus is in his most distressing and humiliating moments, defamed and rejected by the citizens of Rome – and latterly those of Antium – who constantly form a hostile throng ranged against him. Opposition to Lear appears to repudiate him both as king and father as he is repelled from Cornwall's castle, and it continues in the succession and the domination of the new men. But, although active and strong, even triumphant, the opposition to Lear and his exclusion from sympathy are not total. He may be ousted from family and community, but at no stage is he completely deprived of at least one loyal, caring companion: he has the comfort of care and consideration from Kent, the Fool, Edgar and Gloucester, and, significantly, at the end, Cordelia's love, and much compassionate understanding.

Coriolanus, uniquely in the Shakespearean tragic canon, is isolated within his own world, devoid of compassion or succour in his exile. He is the victim of duplicity and treachery in Rome and again in Antium and is rejected from both communities, once in banishment, and the second time in death. He will always be constrained to seek a world elsewhere, a world more congenial and more appropriate to his heroic essence. Within the confines of the drama there is no such world and Coriolanus must always be excluded.

In Coriolanus, as in Sophoclean tragedy, the hero's relationship to all around him and even to place, is evidence of his alienation and so of his perilous predicament. Home, which should be a haven of peace and security, becomes threatening, if not fatal. The contrast between expectation and reality is borne out in Antigone's cry: '... my city, my home...' as she is led away to her death. She expresses a desolate, pathetic realization of her utter isolation within her own community:

O lordly sons of my city! O Thebes!
Your valleys of rivers, your chariots and horses!
No friend to weep at my banishment

Il. 941, 856–858

Ajax reveals a similar sense of desertion, of exclusion from benevolence by those who should be most supportive:

Chapter I
Hated of all the Greeks, hated of Troy...
The Greeks have done me nothing but ill.

_Ajax_, II. 457-458, 666

For Coriolanus, like the Sophoclean heroes, his city, his home, is never a place of refuge, of stability, or of harmony. The only love and understanding he gleans are encompassed in his precious moments with Virgilia, in her noble silence (II.1.166). Otherwise he is effectively at war, a focus of antagonism and discord, from the moment the play opens until the end. Whether battle is joined, or during the dubious peace, he is irreconcilably in opposition with Romans and with Volscians. Rome, even in the hiatus between external conflicts, is a field of open hostility. It is a city in which citizens are 'mutinous' and carry 'staves, clubs, and other weapons' and in which Caius Marcius, Rome's most glorious son, is considered to be 'chief enemy to the people' (S.D. I.1.1, I.1.6).

An arena of strife, antagonism, and aggression, Rome is a battleground potentially more threatening to Coriolanus than an enemy city might be; a bitter paradox, in which spurious peace is destroyed by the open hostility and treachery of the citizens. It is in Rome, specifically because he is the quintessential Roman, that Coriolanus is substantially more dishonoured and degraded than he is in Antium. Like Antigone's world, Coriolanus's world neither understands nor appreciates him; his nobility, like hers, is rewarded with isolation, with banishment, and ultimately with death. His adoptive city, an illusory second home and place of precarious asylum becomes, like Rome, dangerous, and finally mortal to him.

Surrounded as he is by antagonism, the Sophoclean hero strives always to be allowed to be himself, to remain true to his inherent moral principles. For him there is no punishment, not even the threat of death, which could be more intolerable or more degrading than being compelled to sacrifice his individual integrity by bowing to outside persuasion:

_Ajax:_

Honour in life,
Or honour in death; there is no other thing.
A nobleman can ask for. That is all.

_Ajax_, II.480-482

This is the creed which clearly defines the irresistible conviction by which the
Sophoclean hero lives; for him there can be no compromise, no reward which would be an acceptable alternative to the maintaining of his heroic integrity. Death is inevitable, and is indeed preferable if life within the community would challenge his right to assert his individual moral standards. He characteristically exhibits a supremely disdainful disregard for personal safety; death is a lesser menace than dishonour would be:

**AJAX:** Long life? Who but a coward would ask for it...?  
*Ajax*, I.475

**ANTIGONE:** I knew that I should have to die, of course,  
With or without your order. If it be soon,  
So much the better.  
*Antigone*, II.466–468

**Cor.** Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,  
. . . I would not buy  
Their mercy . . .  
Nor check my courage for what they can give  
*Coriolanus*, III.3.89–94

Coriolanus, like Antigone, endures intense pressure throughout the drama to surrender to the laws or customs of the community and to speak and act in a manner which he feels would be detrimental to his code of honour:

**ISMENE:** How could you dare, when Creon has expressly forbidden it?  
**ANTIGONE:** He has no right to keep me from my own.  
. . .  
Your way seemed right to some, to others mine.  
*Antigone*, II.47–48, 557

**Cor.** Why in this wolfish toge should I stand here  
To beg of Hob and Dick that do appear  
Their needless vouches?  
II.3.112–114

Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me False to my nature? . . . .  
Must I go show them my unbarb'd scone? Must I  
With my base tongue give to my noble heart  
A lie that it must bear?  
III.2.14–15, 99–101

The imputed self-destructiveness of the Sophoclean hero is born of his pride

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in his incorruptibility, his fierce, driving compulsion to effect his perception of right conduct. For him there can be no conceding, no middle road. The essence of his nature is intemperance rather than self-control, and he must live his life according to his own absolute standards, rather than feign to espouse laws or mores promulgated by the unscrupulous for the weak. Sóphrosyné is the Greek term for self-control, temperance, or sobriety, which has come to denote the virtue of moderation, the golden mean, and is a principle often maintained to have been endorsed in Sophoclean tragedy. It is in fact anathema to the Sophoclean hero, whose very extremes of temperament are fundamental to his heroic persona. In his virtues and his excesses, Coriolanus exemplifies the Sophoclean hero who recognizes no confines or obligations but the unbridled expression of his own individuality. Any code of mediocrity which threatens his essence is to be actively defied, whatever the penalty.44

5. The enduring noble memory of the heroic individual

Sophoclean heroes die violent, lonely deaths. The tragedy lies not in the fact of their deaths, but in the incongruity between their impressive moral and physical dignity, their unseemly treatment by their compatriots, and their ignominious mode of death. It is a characteristic and central Sophoclean notion that true heroic essence endures, an indestructible quality which cannot be destroyed by censure or death. All adverse judgements and criticisms levelled at the hero throughout the course of the drama are shown to be creations of self-deception, of rancour, or of moral insensibility on the part of his detractors.45 The conclusive affirmation of the hero’s moral stature and inherent nobility, despite insistence throughout the play to the contrary, is the approbation afforded at the end, after his death, by his former enemies:

ODYSSEUS: He was the bitterest enemy I had; and yet, Such though he was, I could not bring myself To grudge him honour, or refuse to admit He was the bravest man I ever saw, The best of all that ever came to Troy, Save only Achilles.

_Ajax_, ll. 1338–1343

1 Lord. Bear from hence his body,
And mourn you for him. Let him be regarded
As the most noble corse that ever herald
Did follow to his urn.

... My rage is gone,
And I am struck with sorrow ...
Though in this city he
Hath widowed and unchilded many a one,
... Yet he shall have a noble memory.

Coriolanus: V.6.142–145, 147–154

Sophoclean heroes go willingly, with prescience, to their deaths. For them
there is no sense of negation, no despair at the end; there is, instead, a form of
elation for, facing certain death they affirm and maintain their heroic
integrity:

ANTIGONE: Now you have caught, will you do more than
kill me?
...
Why then delay? There is nothing more that
you can say
That I should wish to hear, ...
I have given my brother burial.
What greater honour could I wish?

Antigone, ll. 498–503

The corroboration of their heroic status, the noble memory they are granted
posthumously, especially by erstwhile enemies, is the dramatist’s comment
on their worth.

Uniquely, among Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, and in common with his
Sophoclean counterparts, only Coriolanus is specifically guaranteed a noble
memory in the drama. For the others, only Hamlet is regarded as ‘likely ...
/To have prov’d most royal’ (V.2.389-390). Macbeth is allowed only a passing
denunciation: ‘Behold where stands /Th’ usurper’s cursed head (V.8.54-55).
Othello, stripped of command, is acknowledged to have been ‘great of heart’
(V.2.364). King Lear is pitied for having suffered so harshly and for so long:

Kent. Break, heart;...
The wonder is he hath endur’d so long:

King Lear, V.3.312, 316

It is only Coriolanus which concludes on the Sophoclean note of the lasting,
distinguished honour of the heroic: ‘Yet he shall have a noble memory’
(V.6.154).

Chapter I
CHAPTER II
The prestige and proliferation of translations of Sophoclean tragedy in the sixteenth century: the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*
1. The intellectual milieu of Shakespeare

The Elizabethan penchant for versatility of intellect, for the all-round scholar with maximum adaptability, was a most significant aspect of the Renaissance concept of knowledge. An attitude of inclusiveness rather than specialization demanded that Renaissance man should develop protean mental capacities and seek new intellectual and artistic experience. With the widespread reawakening to the primacy of the classics, it was predictable that creative artists during the Renaissance should turn to Greek and Latin models in an attempt to formulate views on the classical elements of theory and practice. The rebirth of classical learning resulted in 'a sort of passion for everything classical'.

Classical scholarship became the vogue, incorporating the conviction of the authority and integrity of the 'classical ideal', in the firm belief that from Roman and Greek artists Renaissance man could learn everything of any value. Classical models were esteemed as enduringly superior in all spheres: as permanent artistic ideals, and as examples of reliable human culture for all people of all times. Cicero, perennially studied and acclaimed during the Renaissance, confirmed that the Romans had respected the Greeks not only for their literary and artistic talents, but as the 'most human people'.

Shakespeare lived and worked in London among people who were scholars, actors, poets, and translators; people who were closely associated with the widespread resurgence of all available ancient classics, who would have followed with keen enthusiasm the multitude of translations, editions, and revivals of Latin and Greek works. 'Undoubtedly . . . [Shakespeare] . . . learned more about plays by living among players and playwrights than he did from any other source . . . We should not forget this mode of absorption when we think about Shakespeare's "reading".' This statement refers to a form of 'community of creativeness'; and it is relevant to consider the important aspect of the communal interchange of ideas and knowledge, with respect to general awareness of popular trends in classical renascence and learning. T.W. Baldwin comments on the importance of acquiring knowledge indirectly through 'absorption from others'. Living and working as Shakespeare did, in a milieu of classical fervour, it would have been unlikely
if he had remained unfamiliar with, or uninspired by, the names and works which were becoming increasingly known and popular. Rosalie Colie states that we should take the 'glorification of ancient culture as a given. Certainly, in literature it was a given: from the fifteenth century on, those interested in the new learning, (that is, the old learning restored) insisted on imitating . . .6

Imitation of Latin and Greek models, however, was by no means an unimaginative or mindless simulation, and, as Rosalie Colie observes, certainly was not 'a constraint on literary innovation in the Renaissance . . . [but was] . . . a factor for literary change and imaginative experiment' (p. 8). Works were newly created, derivative yet innovative compositions rather than mere translations or annotations of classical models. Giangiorgio Trissino's Sofonisba, the first published Italian tragedy, written in 1515, printed in 1524, and probably not acted until 1562, was planned on Greek rather than Roman models, indicating at the very least an acquaintance at that time with Attic tragedy.7 In 1585 Robert Garnier's Antigone, subtitled La Pieté, was not an unmodified imitation in French of the Sophoclean prototype.8 It is a bloody history of Oedipus and his family, and although the tragedy reflects a Senecan rather than a Sophoclean influence, especially in the first three acts, Garnier's contemporaries, including Ronsard, considered him to be a tragedian worthy of comparison with the Greeks.9

There were numerous editions of Garnier's tragedies; sixteen editions were published during the twenty years after the first complete edition was published in 1585, and more than forty editions are recorded within the thirty years from 1586-1616.10 Despite the Senecan influence in the first acts of Garnier's Antigone, the last two acts form an almost independent tragedy on their own, are written in a Sophoclean mode, borrow from most of his tragedies, and combine the tragic subject-matter of Oedipus at Colonus, Seven Against Thebes and the Antigone.11 Garnier's tragedy is based on one or more of the numerous translations of Sophocles's Antigone, in Greek, Latin or in French which were published at this time (see Appendix I, a, b, and c). There was, in literary circles in the latter part of the sixteenth century, an interest in and a knowledge of Attic tragedy, and Sophoclean tragedies were able to be known through the medium of the numerous translations

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which were then current.

Thierry Maulnier asserts, of Garnier's *Antigone*: 'C'est la tragédie de la Renaissance: c'est la renaissance de la Tragédie' (p. 11). Marie-Madelaine Mouflard emphasizes the importance of Greek tragedy to the works of Garnier. She states that Garnier had at this time a good choice of six original texts of Sophocles available, accompanied or not by Latin translations. In fact, excluding single editions of the *Ajax*, some forty-nine editions of Sophoclean tragedy were published between 1502–1584, before Garnier's *Antigone* was published. Seven of these were separate editions of the *Antigone*, of which one was published in Paris in a French translation, in 1573. Of the total forty-nine editions, some sixteen were published in Paris and one in Lyons (see Appendix I, c).

The influence of Garnier's works can be identified on writers in England: on Elizabeth Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, whose *Antonius* (1590), is a translation of Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578), and on Thomas Kyd, whose *Cornelia* (1595), is a translation of Garnier's *Corneille* (1574). These few examples of the effect of Garnier's plays - based on classical antecedents and published in Europe - on literary output in England, indicate that there was at this time an intellectual interchange between continental Europe and England.

The cultural reciprocity constituted a 'community of creative interests . . . [which] . . . was a European rather than an English phenomenon'. The Marian exiles travelled extensively and frequently throughout Europe, and were 'the first to break through the barriers of insularity which England . . . had been raising between herself and Europe since the end of the Hundred Years' War'. It was thus that, in the years from 1553-1559, the frontiers of England even more than today 'lay upon the Rhine' (C. H. Garrett, p.vii). As Englishmen continued to travel, their intellectual viewpoint was broadened, as was their familiarity with European vernacular languages. Letters written during the sixteenth century attest to the fact that Englishmen at this time travelled widely and obtained extensive education in languages, literature, and religion at home and abroad.

The 'continentalization' of English art and the general broadening of
intellectual horizons continued through the latter half of the sixteenth century, and into the early years of the reign of James I. Dissemination of learning was widespread and the trends which prevailed throughout Western Europe were unlikely to have ceased abruptly at the Channel. It is therefore logical, and essential, to consider England as part of continental Europe for the purposes of cultural and literary study; indeed to consider that 'Britain has never been an island except geographically'. Roman, Germanic and Norman invasions had made England a part of Europe, and ever since then, despite geographical disjunction, England has been inextricably associated with, and influenced by, the affairs of Western Europe. It is fundamental to recognize this connection: 'English literature, like England, belongs to Europe and its history has been determined by that connection. The history of our literature is the history of what happened when it came into contact with European tradition, the main current of which flows through Rome from Ancient Greece' (J.A.K. Thomson, p. 9).

In England, familiarity with the works of classical Greece and Rome commenced at school with the teaching of Latin and Greek, the reading of translations, and the learning by rote of large chunks of classical literature. The Attic tragedians were familiarly cited as examples of literary merit and theory, while under Edward VI the works of Sophocles were normal reading for undergraduates. Glynne Wickham notes further, that Attic plays were favoured over Latin counterparts as 'texts for reading if not for acting' (p. 80). After 1540, at Cambridge, Cheke's exposition of Aristotle, Herodotus, Sophocles, and Euripides attested to the fast-growing interest in Greek classics in general, and the Attic tragedians in particular. The works of Franciscus Portus, published posthumously by his son in 1584, contained in the Prolegomena to the tragedies of Sophocles a discussion of the relative merits of Sophocles and Euripides.

Classical works were studied in Greek, in parallel Greek-and-Latin translations, or in Latin. Knowledge of Latin was not at all exceptional, and in general those Elizabethans with even superficial education, who could read and write at all, could do so in Latin. It is significant that English literature developed in an ethos in which men could read, write and, not infrequently,
converse in Latin. It was naturally assumed that any works worth reading had been read in Latin, and apart from the Bible, most libraries and collections of books had 'almost nothing in English'. This situation applied equally on the Continent as in England; the vernacular was considered to be subordinate to Latin in the acquisition of knowledge or the exploration of classical literature. Montaigne expressed this view: 'to me Latin is . . . natural; I understand it better than French'.

Shakespeare's general education and his competency in Greek and Latin has been debated since the seventeenth century. Ben Jonson initiated the controversy in his dedication to Shakespeare in the First Folio of 1623, with his claim that Shakespeare had 'small Latine and lesse Greeke'. For three and a half centuries the questions consequent upon this statement have been discussed. Shakespeare's competence in Latin, his knowledge of Italian, French, and some Spanish is now generally accepted. He is known to have quoted and read Latin works of which there were no translations. The fact that the tragedies of Sophocles were probably not translated into English before 1615 is therefore inconsequential to the study of Shakespeare's possible knowledge of Sophocles. Much more significant and apposite is the evidence that Sophocles was regularly published from the beginning of the sixteenth century, translated into Latin from 1549, into French from 1573, while an Italian version of the Antigone, translated by Alamanni, was acted circa 1533.

Even if the perennial undervaluation of Shakespeare's ability in Latin and Greek were valid, this would in no way limit, or even prevent, his discerning response to, and understanding of, classical literature. Perception into the essence of a literary work does not necessarily depend on access to the original. An analogy may serve to illustrate the manner in which a receptive artist may absorb and benefit from another's work, without necessarily being familiar with the original. Wagner could neither understand nor read Greek, yet he was passionately responsive to classical Greek culture and mythology. His admiration for the Oresteia of Aeschylus, attested to in his letters to Nietzsche, was a potent and inspirational force in his music. Wagner's enthusiastic and perceptive response to the tragic drama was achieved
through the medium of translations, which enabled an access to the original that he would otherwise have been denied.\textsuperscript{26}

Since the publication in Berlin, in 1904, of \textit{Shakespeare's Books} by H.R. Anders, research into Shakespeare's reading has established that Shakespeare was a more prolific reader than was at first thought. A comprehensive account of the education he would have received has been fully investigated, and has been shown to have been, by modern standards, 'pedantically bookish'.\textsuperscript{27} In fact, the Tudor intellectual 'sky was higher and the horizons more distant than had been thought . . .', and the tendency to 'under-intellectualize' Shakespeare should be avoided (E. Jones, p. 5). It is now widely accepted that Shakespeare could not have lived and worked in a milieu of enthusiastic classical scholarship, and universal passion for knowledge while remaining oblivious to acclaimed masterpieces. Robert Grudin confirms this opinion in his observation that Shakespeare was not an '. . . isolated and untutored genius but rather an active and knowledgeable participant in contemporary intellectual concerns'.\textsuperscript{28} There is much critical support for this view. 'We must suppose . . . that Shakespeare read widely . . . with a keen exploratory interest in the intellectual world in which he moved and to which he contributed'.\textsuperscript{29} 'Shakespeare did not write in isolation . . . he was peculiarly sensitive to the intellectual tendencies of his age, in all spheres of thought'.\textsuperscript{30}

\section{The Attic influence}

Shakespeare's perceptivity to the classical trends of the age validates the supposition that he responded in his drama to the prevailing enthusiasm. The classical cast of \textit{Coriolanus}, if not the specifically Sophoclean character of the tragedy, has been noted. Muriel Saint Clare Byrne comments on the unique quality of the drama and categorizes \textit{Coriolanus} as 'the finest classical play in the English language', recognizing that 'the classical parallel forces itself upon us . . . [and] . . . the affinity with the classical method . . . [is] . . . a clue to be followed . . . [which] . . . leads at once to a consideration of the type of character presented . . . and the method used for presentation . . . .

Shakespeare's method in \textit{Coriolanus} places this play in a class apart'.\textsuperscript{31} Less
specifically, a few critics have considered that 'the Greek influence on Elizabethan drama' may have been too much neglected, or to have been 'greater than appears'.\textsuperscript{32}

In general, opinion has leaned towards the view that Elizabethan or Jacobean drama owed little, if anything at all, to classical Greek influence, that in fact 'there is not the slightest hint [of] any ... Greek influence'.\textsuperscript{33} There have always been classicists and literary critics who have been convinced not only of the implausibility of any link between Attic and Elizabethan or Jacobean drama, but more specifically, of the improbability of Shakespeare having any substantial knowledge of, and therefore obligation to, the Greek tragedians. Thomas Baldwin asserts that Whitaker's Greek catechism and the Greek Testament 'is where we should look for his toddling footprints, not in the Greek tragedians and what not!'\textsuperscript{34} J.A.K. Thomson takes an unequivocal stand in declaring that 'Shakespeare knew nothing of Sophocles ... [and it] ... is excessively improbable that there was some direct link upon Shakespeare from the Greeks'.\textsuperscript{35} The consensus of critical opinion appears to have inclined towards Arthur Rossiter's view that 'few Elizabethans reached any nearer to Greek tragedy than that found in Seneca ...'\textsuperscript{36} It is the intention of this study to challenge this claim, and to argue that Shakespeare not only possibly, but most probably knew Sophoclean tragedy, at least in translation, and that in \textit{Coriolanus} he demonstrates competent familiarity with the \textit{Ajax} and the \textit{Antigone}.

This assertion depends most fundamentally on the general availability of Sophoclean tragedy during Shakespeare's lifetime. After the acceleration of printing in the late fifteenth century, books became increasingly plentiful and popular, and cultural and geographic boundaries were further broken down. Transportation of books between England and Europe was effected by travellers, by scholars, and on ships which regularly carried books from Italian printing presses to London as ballast.\textsuperscript{37} The absence of public libraries was no obstacle to the widespread availability of books; at this time bookshops were abundant in London and were as readily accessible and as commonly frequented as are the bookshops and libraries of today.\textsuperscript{38}

Wide public knowledge of Greek classical works, and specifically of the

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tragedies of Sophocles, was advanced by the increasing numbers of translations of these works, and by the escalation of printing and publishing. From the beginning of the sixteenth century classical literature was published throughout Western Europe in Greek, and was translated into Latin, French, Italian, and other European languages. The accelerated availability of Greek classics in the original and in translation throughout Europe and England, and the continued cultural interchange enriched the English language and stimulated its literature.  

As early as 1423, Giovanni Aurispa returned from Constantinople, having acquired a collection of books, among which were six plays of Æschylus and seven of Sophocles. It was to be some eighty years until the plays of Sophocles were available in print in translation, but from then onwards the numbers of translations and publications establish their popularity. Glynne Wickham maintains that the 'final triumph of Greek tragedy over Latin was bodied forth in the performance of Orsatto Giustiniani's Edipo Tiranno ... in the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza on 2nd March 1585'. The text was published that year, with the explicit title page: "Edipo Tiranno di Sofocle ... in lingua volgare ridotta ..." (G. Wickham, p. 72). The performance was described enthusiastically in a letter by Filippo Pigafetta as 'la piu nobile tragedia che fusse composta gia mai, nomata EDIPPO il Tiranno ... di ... Sofocle. ... Di greco l'ha ridotto in volgare il clarissimo Signor Orsato Giustiniano ...'. Reawakened enthusiasm in Italy for classical Greek plays in translation soon spread to England. In France, too, the impetus towards vernacular translations of Greek drama gained momentum in the sixteenth century, and Garnier's Antigone was published in French in the same year as Giustiniani's Italian version of the Oedipus Tyrannus. The work of Jean Dorat, critic and translator, and the growing number of those in the field, 'opened the way to a body of Greek poetry previously almost unknown in France and other countries of Western Europe' (R. Pfeiffer, pp. 102-104).

The rapid proliferation of books and the prevailing non-exclusive attitude towards the acquisition of learning had a broadly two-fold outcome: scholars naturally sought out and studied the newly translated and published texts ever more avidly, and increasingly books acquired a significance which was
not confined, as it had been previously, to the more erudite sections of the population. 'It was a book revolution... texts... were recovered from oblivion, published on new-fangled presses, edited, quarrelled over and endlessly imitated'. Any attempt to determine specifically which books were read at this time must take cognizance of the fact that even the most comprehensive list of books published in Renaissance England cannot comprise a complete inventory of those books actually available and read in England. From catalogues of books held in private collections, it appears that Englishmen owned and read more books which had been published on the Continent, than had been published in England. Paulus Hentzner, who termed Oxford as 'famed Athens of England', notes that the Queen's Library in Whitehall was known to be well-stocked with Greek, Latin, Italian and French books; there is known to have been a copy of Sophoclean tragedy in Greek in James's library before he became King of England.

Although numerous Latin and Greek classical authors were translated into English in the period 1477–1620, there does not appear to have been at this time an English translation of Sophoclean tragedy. The lack of English translations of Sophoclean tragedy is, however, not an indication of 'how alien the art and ideals of Greek drama were from the temper of the age'. The intellectual dimension of Elizabethan or Jacobean England cannot be understood 'adequately in terms of its English works alone. It is one thing to know that there was an English translation of The Courtier published in 1561, but it is another thing to know that The Courtier in Italian was in England as early as 1530'.

With reference, therefore, to the availability of Sophoclean tragedy in England, it is most significant that many translations and editions of the tragedies had been published on the Continent since 1502, and that a Latin translation of the Antigone was printed in London in 1581. The publication of the play at this time in London, strengthened and corroborated by the evidence of frequent European publications, is of more significance than anticipatory reliance on the dubious possibility of an English translation. Translations and repeated publications of Sophoclean tragedy in Europe, in Greek, Latin, or the vernacular, are as relevant to the familiarity of the works.
in England, as English translations and publications would be. In order to endure and evolve, English literature needed to assimilate classical culture and this assimilation was effected through the medium of numerous and frequent translations. J.A.K. Thomson considers:

> It was from [the] translations and from the abundant information about Greek matters and authors in Latin literature that the average Renaissance student got most of his knowledge of ancient Greece. It was enough to awaken an intense curiosity. His instinct told him that a knowledge of Greek literature was the key that would unlock the richest treasures of ancient thought.

It matters not whether the key to this treasure-trove was through the original Greek or by means of translations. Thomson remarks further that 'nothing better shows the general interest of an age in the literatures of antiquity than the numbers and popularity of the translations from them'.

In addition to the translations and publications of Sophoclean tragedy, an insight into the current familiarity with the works can be gained from references to the tragedies in contemporary literature, and from reports of performances of specific or derivative plays. Ioachimus Camerarius, in an attempt to facilitate the understanding and teaching of Greek tragedy, proposed that the method of analysis used for comedy should be applied to tragedy: he comments specifically on *Oedipus Tyrannos, Oedipus at Colonus* and the *Antigone*. In a commentary on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, printed in 1539, Iodochus Willichus mentions Thomas Watson's translation of the *Antigone*, refers to the Latin translation of the complete works of Sophocles by Naogeorgus, printed with notes, and to 'Sophocles Aiacem Flagelliferum ex Homeri Odyssea . . .'. In 1586 William Webbe praised the 'many most profitable workes of the Tragedy writers: as of Euripides and Sophocles'. References in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* show similar acquaintance with Sophocles, and Meres specifically mentions Thomas Watson's translation of the *Antigone*. This translation is entered in the *Stationers' Register*: '31 July 1581 (Bp of London): “Aphoclis Antigone, Thoma Watsono interprete John Wolfe (Arber ii 398)”. Roger Ascham confirms that the Attic tragedians were a regular element in the school curriculum c. 1535, refers specifically to

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the *Antigone* of Sophocles, and states his own preference for Sophocles over Euripides. He also notes that Queen Elizabeth regularly read the tragedies of Sophocles.55

There is much contemporary evidence that Latin and Greek plays were regularly acted at the Universities as academic exercises, and were usually performed on state and other important occasions. From the mid-sixteenth century at Christ Church it was standard procedure that tragedies and comedies in Greek and Latin should be staged annually. Specific performances of both the *Antigone* and the *Ajax* of Sophocles are well documented. T.W. Baldwin mentions Thomas Watson's translation of the *Antigone* in connection with those tragedies which were performed in Latin at Cambridge before 1584.56 Queen Elizabeth is known to have travelled to Cambridge in August, 1564, but to have left before the fourth night of her stay, when she was to have seen a performance of the *Ajax*. The tragedy was 'according to Stokys, that "of Sophocles, entytuled Ajax flagellifer, in Laten"'.57 This might not have been identical with the play performed before James I in Oxford in 1605 (below), but both were obviously based on, if not in fact the Sophoclean tragedy. George Peele (c.1557-1596), dramatist and poet, as producer of pageants for the Lord Mayor of London, introduced into them classical features in drama for the first time. He is known to have admired Watson's 'sad Antigone' which was probably acted at Cambridge when he was reading Greek (J.T. Sheppard, p.131).

In his record of the visit of James I to Oxford in 1605, Anthony Nixon wrote: Tuesday, 27th August laste, Greek oration by Doctor Perrin to the king. A comedie in Latin after dinner . . . . Upon Wednesday at night after supper, there was a Tragedie set out by Magdalen Colledge men, acted before his Majestie in Christ-Church Hall . . . . The subject whereof was of *Ajax* and *Uliisses*.58 The play which was performed is confirmed by Sir Isaac Wake as having been an adaptation, if not actually the *Ajax* of Sophocles: 'AJAX FLAGELLIFER titulo ex Sofocle mutuato'.59 Wake verifies that this drama was indeed performed before the king and mentions a performance of *Enrico Quinto* (p. 128). Although not specified as Shakespeare's play, this raises the possibility of Shakespeare's plays having been presented on the same
occasions as those of Sophocles; in which case Shakespeare might conceivably have been present at such performances. Similarly, when Shakespeare's *King Lear* was performed at Christ Church on the same occasion as the *Ajax Flagellifer* of Sophocles, by the same company, it is reasonable to assume that if Shakespeare were not actually present, he would have known of the performance.

It is not fundamentally germane to this study whether Shakespeare read Sophocles in the original or in translation, whether he encountered the tragedies on the stage or merely in conversation. It is more significant that available evidence effectively sanctions the real probability that Shakespeare knew Sophocles.

To substantiate and establish the connection of Shakespeare with Sophocles we would need to weigh ... all alternative possibilities. But the issue immediately at stake is not whether this connection can be proven, but whether we should continue in Theodore Weiss's word, to 'allow' Shakespeare only to know very little of Greek drama, when this restriction is so much more to the discredit of his intelligence than to the credit of his genius.  

3. Translations and publications of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*

It is possible to estimate with a reasonable degree of certainty from the evidence of the numbers and frequency of translations and publications, the range of books read by the average educated Englishman during the Renaissance. According to a similar determination of the prevalence of their works, an analysis can be made as to whether, and which specific authors were generally known. It would then be a short and logical step from a general survey of which books and authors were popular during Shakespeare's lifetime, to a more specific consideration of the works he could have known. In the absence of the irrefutable evidence of authorial notes or statements about such reading or knowledge, relevant documentation and data about the prevalence of translations and publications of Sophoclean tragedy must suffice to support and strengthen a claim that Shakespeare could have known the tragedies in translation.
There is much evidence that the triumphs of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were not at this time lying in 'brown Greek manuscripts silent, unacted, little read, unknown', as they had been in previous centuries. Although some opinion has inclined towards the view that the Greek tragedians were 'too little known and too little available' to make any comparison with Shakespeare 'intelligent', it appears certain, however, that Ben Jonson understood and meant the implication of his tribute to Shakespeare in the Folio of 1623. Jonson juxtaposed Shakespeare's name with those of the Greek tragedians in the sure knowledge of the prestige and popularity of the Attic dramatists, and with determined intent to honour Shakespeare in the illustrious company, rather than to cast a slur on his intellectual reputation, as has generally been inferred:

\[
\text{And though thou hadst small Latine, and lesse GREEKE,}
\]
\[
\text{From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke}
\]
\[
\text{For name; but call forth thund'ring Aeschylus,}
\]
\[
\text{Euripides, and Sophocles to us ...}
\]

A general survey of the numbers of translators and translations of Sophoclean tragedy in the sixteenth century yields two significant facts: the translators were men not specifically of the intelligentsia, but from every walk of life, and the plays were obviously widely and generally acclaimed in order to warrant such frequent publications and translations. The translations present reliable, unambiguous, and historically substantiated evidence that the works which were translated and recurrently printed, significantly permeated the general \textit{Zeitgeist}.

In order to establish that the tragedies of Sophocles were available during Shakespeare's lifetime, that he could therefore have had access to those tragedies, the \textit{Ajax} and the \textit{Antigone}, which are relevant to this particular perception of \textit{Coriolanus}, authoritative documentation is submitted in Appendix I. From the data presented, the numerous and frequent translations and editions of the tragedies of Sophocles confirm that the \textit{Ajax} and the \textit{Antigone} were his most admired plays during the Renaissance. The evidence cited is only a representative – but nevertheless a conclusive – selection of translations and publications of the specific tragedies under consideration during the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century,

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as detailed in various libraries, collections, catalogues and bibliographical commentary. The translations and editions of those Sophoclean tragedies other than the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* have not been noted, with the exception of those observed in Appendix I, d.ii, as they are not particularly relevant to this investigation, although such additional evidence would necessarily add considerable weight to the contention that Sophoclean tragedy in general was known and popular during Shakespeare's lifetime.

The lists and analyses presented in Appendix I, c and d, are compiled from the data submitted in Appendix I, a and b. The analyses indicate determinable trends in the popularity of Sophoclean tragedy, and provide significant information about the countries and the languages in which the editions were published. Inferences drawn are based on classification which includes some suppositional data. Conclusions cannot therefore be exact, but for the purposes of this particular study the trends noted concerning the translations of Sophoclean tragedy are adequate for the confirmation of the popularity of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* during the relevant period.

An interesting phenomenon noted in Appendix I, c, is the publication in clusters of several editions in the same year, of the same or different plays. Four editions of the seven tragedies were published in Italy in 1518 in Greek; there were three published in 1530, of which two were editions of the *Ajax*, and one of the seven tragedies, and there were two in 1533, of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*. There were four editions in 1545, from Paris and Rome, including one of the *Ajax*, three of the seven tragedies in 1555, four in 1558, four in 1567, including one of only three plays, and four in 1568 from Geneva and Paris. In 1574 there were three editions of the *Ajax*, and in 1603 two editions of collections and one of the *Ajax*. The appearance of these groups of plays in the same year/s could be accounted for by the fact that the same editions might have been listed differently in various references. Alternatively, these cluster publications may reflect an increased local or general interest in a play or plays, initiated by the first editions, with further editions published in response to popular demand. Whatever the interpretation may be, the numbers and frequency of translations, the numerous cities and countries of origin, and the continual publication of

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Sophoclean tragedy in the period under review, are facts which credibly attest to the widespread popularity and availability of the plays.

Examination of the analysis of the numbers and frequency of the editions published, as presented in Appendix I, d.i, reveals a noticeable peak in the middle three decades, from 1540–1569, with thirty-four editions, as compared with fourteen in the previous three decades, 1510–1539, and seventeen in the following three decades, 1570–1599. This feature would be even more striking if the fact were taken into account that the eight editions published from 1560–1569 were actually published in only two years, 1567 and 1568. This observation suggests that there could have been even more publications than have been discovered, in the earlier years of the decade, 1560–1567. It is noteworthy too, that the popularity of the works, although slightly diminished, continued at least into the first decade of the seventeenth century, with six editions, three of which were of the *Ajax*, between 1600–1608.

Of the seventy-two editions of the works under review between 1502 and 1608, at least seventy were published prior to the most commonly accepted date of composition of *Coriolanus*. Of these, some fifty were entire collections of extant plays, selections and commentaries, some sixteen were predominantly single editions of the *Ajax*, and seven were of the *Antigone*. The discrepancy between the apparent total of these editions, seventy-three, and the recorded seventy-two publications noted in Appendix I, d, can be accounted for by the fact that the 1567 edition of these tragedies includes both the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*. It is notable that the *Ajax*, the most popular of the single plays published – and thus arguably the most popular Sophoclean tragedy – was first translated and published as an individual play as early as 1530 in Greek and in Latin separately. There were four single editions of the play in 1573 and 1574, and it continued to be popular at least into the first decade of the seventeenth century. The *Antigone*, the second most popular Sophoclean tragedy, with seven editions as an individual play published over the period studied, appears to have been most acclaimed in the early years of the 1540s. The first single edition was published in 1533, in Italian, an extraordinarily early vernacular translation.
In addition, there were ten separate editions of individual Sophoclean tragedies not particularly germane to this study which were published in the specific time period (Appendix I, d.ii). These are of interest only inasmuch as they further emphasize the prevalence of Sophoclean tragedy in general, and the comparative pre-eminence of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* in particular.

The analysis of the numbers and frequency of the various translations detailed in Appendix I, d.iii, shows a discrepancy between the total of sixty-six, and the total of seventy-two noted in the chronological list Appendix I, c: this is due to the fact that six editions, 1530, 1545, 1547, 1558, 1567, and 1568, are listed in the authorities consulted without specification of the language of translation. From the analysis of the language of translation, it appears that ten editions were published between 1502 and 1530 exclusively in Greek, with no evidence of any other language of translation during these early years. From 1534 Greek editions appeared intermingled with translations in parallel Greek-and-Latin, and Latin only. The numbers of Greek editions peaked between 1518 and 1530, and then again between 1540 and 1556, with nine and ten publications respectively. Of the total twenty-six Greek editions, ten were published in the first thirty years of the century and sixteen in the next sixty-three years. The fifteen editions of parallel Greek-and-Latin translations appear to have been published fairly regularly from 1533–1608, reaching a high point with four editions in the years 1567–1568, a decade or more later than the climax of the exclusively Greek editions.

Twenty-two Latin translations were published between 1530–1600, including four between 1541–1549, six between 1552(?)–1558, five between 1570–1576, and three between 1581–1587. There is no available evidence of Latin-only translations of Sophoclean tragedy in the 1560s, the apogee of the parallel Greek-and-Latin translations. As with the Greek translations, the majority of Latin editions published appeared during the 1550s, but the Latin translations seem to have been almost as popular in the 1570s as they were in the earlier decades. They were, significantly, much more evident during the latter half of the century than either the Greek or the Greek-and-Latin translations, with seventeen Latin editions published from 1550 onwards, compared with nine Greek and eleven Greek-and-Latin. From this analysis it

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appears that Greek translations were most popular at an earlier stage in the century, between 1518–1530 and 1540-1556, the parallel Greek-and-Latin translations slightly later, in the 1560s, and the Latin translations even later, between 1550–1576, but continuing in popularity into the last two decades of the century. This could be attributed either to a greater familiarity with and preference for Latin later in the century, as would be expected, or to the increased overall popularity of the plays, as attested to by the fact that twenty-seven editions were published between 1500–1549 and thirty-nine between 1550–1599.

With the exception of the remarkably early Italian version of the *Antigone* which was published in 1533, the chronological pattern of the frequency of modern language translations appears to parallel the progression noted above, of Greek to Greek-and-Latin to Latin translations through the sixteenth century. The majority of vernacular translations were published in the latter part of the century: in 1573, 1603, and 1608. This is consistent with an expected general progression in the popularity of Greek, to Latin, to vernacular languages. Modern language translations of those Sophoclean tragedies not specifically relevant to this study have also been considered, and a similar trend is seen to be significantly emphasized: of the total six vernacular translations published from 1531, four were published in the 1580s, in Italian (Appendix I, d.ii). The upsurge in the numbers of translations into the vernacular further confirms the continued and general popularity of Sophoclean tragedy in the latter decades of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century.

An analysis of the numbers of plays published in different countries (Appendix I, d.iv), is presented in a chronological progression which has been derived from the date of the first edition from each county: from Italy (1502), to Germany (1522), to France (1528), to Switzerland (1533), then the Netherlands (1541), Belgium (1570), and England (1581). The total numbers of editions published in each country reveals an interesting movement in an almost symmetrical parabolic curve, which peaks with the twenty-five editions published in France, from 1528 onwards. When the language of translation of these editions is taken into account (Appendix I, d.v), it is
significant that there is a similar progression through each separate country chronologically, as has been noted in the amalgamated chronological table, Appendix I, c, and as would be expected: from Greek, to Greek-and-Latin, to Latin, to vernacular translations.

Thus Italy, the first recorded country to publish Sophoclean tragedy, published nine editions, which were predominantly in Greek. Germany, which commenced twenty years later, in 1522, shows an increase in the total number of publications – twelve – although only eleven have the language of translation recorded. There is a continued preponderance of Greek editions from Germany, but there is, too, a slight increase in the numbers of Greek-and-Latin and Latin translations. From France, commencing in 1528, the total number of editions increases substantially to twenty-five, doubling those published in both Germany and Switzerland. The languages of translation from France show a definite trend from Greek, to Greek-and-Latin, with the majority of translations appearing in Latin.

In Switzerland, where the tragedies were published from 1533, there is a marked decrease in the number of Greek editions. Of the total eleven Swiss editions, only ten have been noted with language of translation. Compared with the eleven German editions recorded with the language of translation, which commenced earlier in the century, the swing in the Swiss editions from Greek to Greek-and-Latin translations is noticeable. For the rest, the Netherlands, Belgium and England, the majority of translations recorded were in Latin, which accords with previous observations.

Although data presented in Appendix I confirms the availability – and thus the popularity – of the Ajax and the Antigone of Sophocles during the latter half of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century, there is, as yet, no evidence to prove conclusively that Shakespeare read or knew Sophocles; there is, too, no evidence to prove that he did not. The data, therefore, constitutes a tenable foundation upon which to base the thesis that Coriolanus can reasonably be shown to have significant affinities with Sophoclean tragedy, specifically with the Ajax and the Antigone.
4. Shakespeare and Sophocles: critical juxtaposition

Although the connection between Shakespeare and Sophocles cannot unequivocally be 'proven' (Harvey, p. 270), a general correspondence between Shakespeare and Sophocles has been recognized by many scholars. The equivalence of status of the two dramatists has resulted in the yoking of the two names. The frequent association of Shakespeare and Sophocles in critical works may well be mooted to be casual, although the regularity of such connection would seem to preclude coincidence. Such critical juxtaposition could be attributed to the fact that Shakespeare and Sophocles are universally recognized as the twin dominating pinnacles of tragic achievement. Certainly the two eras in which they flourished have long been considered to be periods of analogous intellectual accomplishment, and are thus habitually compared or linked with one other, in order to delineate and emphasize the prestige of each. Such a facile explanation, however, merely identifies Shakespeare and Sophocles qualitatively, as being of equivalent lofty dramaturgic stature, while not necessarily taking into account any essential similarities or correspondences between specific works. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that such a recurrent and precise equivalence could have occurred to various scholars over centuries, beginning with Ben Jonson's accolade in the First Folio, if there were not at least some valid comparability, some features in the one which recall points of resemblance in the other.

Critical juxtaposition, however, should be based on distinctive parallels between specific tragedies and the respective protagonists, and should not merely relate to generalized analogies. The similarity between the works must be more fundamental than a superficial likeness founded on parallels in words or action in the plays being compared. Correspondences between artists and their work should be based on a realistic possibility of the one having knowledge of the work of the other, and of specific likeness between the works which can be shown to be intrinsic to the style, substance and essence of the drama, and the characterization of the protagonist. Shakespeare's suggested connection with, or obligation to, Sophocles cannot be based solely on those similarities in emotion or expression which often express commonplaces or clichés, and on their own can be considered no more than
intellectual or artistic coincidences. If additional evidence of a more
discriminating and factual nature can be led, to suggest an admissible stylistic
link between the two dramatists, then the verbal parallels – inadequately
convincing on their own – can be accepted as corroborating testimony of
relatedness.

There has been much speculation and a variety of hypotheses to account
for similarity between two artists, without necessarily postulating or seeking a
direct indebtedness of one to the other. Professor Una Ellis-Fermor suggests a
process of evolution, by means of which, when 'dramatic sense . . .[develops]
fully . . . no matter what be the race, age or the starting point, the final product
will always be essentially the same'. She considers that this evolution is the
'irreducible principle inherent in art . . .' and is implicit in 'the study of the
rise of Western European drama and its development from four sentences in
the Mass to a form which can be related in all essentials to that of the Greek
drama with which no contact had been maintained'. The essentials of
dramatic form are 'the inevitable expression of that dramatic sense which is
an indestructible part of the human imagination' (pp. 2–3). This would
appear to be an assumption of parallel development by equivalent genius,
irrespective of contact, or of any form of direct influence, and would be a
convenient conjecture in the absence of any evidence of the impact of one
artist upon another. In order to speculate upon such parallel development,
however, it would first be mandatory to exhaust as negative all possible roads
of contact or influence between the artists being considered.

A.P. Rossiter's concern is with the 'cultural continuities which exist
within and behind the stage for which Shakespeare . . . wrote', and he, too,
proposes a theory of evolution which, however, does not necessarily exclude
the possibility of direct contact or indebtedness as Professor Ellis-Fermor's
assumption appears to do. He suggests 'some theory of "tradition" or
"evolution" . . . [which] . . . is not a denial of the usually emphasized literary
influence, in terms of which the books the author read are held to be
important determinates of his own writing' (p. 11). Rossiter does,
nevertheless, deny the relevance or necessity of any direct link between the
Attic tragedians and Elizabethan dramatists: 'the importance of the primitive

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underlay of Greek drama does not depend on any direct derivation of the English from the Greek. He considers that the only Attic influence available to Elizabethans was that which was present in Seneca, thus implicitly discounting any direct impact of Sophoclean tragedy on Shakespeare (pp. 18-19). Senecan influence on Shakespeare, however, well documented and obvious at an earlier phase of Shakespeare's dramatic career, notably in Titus Andronicus, must reasonably be acknowledged to have stimulated tragedy of an essentially different kind from that of Coriolanus.

There are many generic and notable similarities of events, circumstances and expression between Shakespearean plays and those of the Attic tragedians, which may be attributable to coincidental analogies of heroic tragedy. Specific resemblances, however, between Shakespeare's Coriolanus and the Ajax and the Antigone of Sophocles are so striking that it is impossible to conceive that they could be accidental, attributable to due process of artistic evolution, or to 'unconscious memory'.

'Not all scholars are now . . . ready to dismiss Shakespeare's Hellenism as insignificant'. The documentation submitted in Appendix I establishes that Shakespeare had ample opportunity to be familiar with Sophoclean tragedy, and close examination will distinguish to what extent this familiarity could have impacted on Coriolanus. In mode, effect, and characterization Coriolanus can be essentially related to the Ajax and the Antigone, from which a specific intuition of the form, the capacity, and the concern of tragedy and the tragic hero derived. Typically, in his utilization of a source or influence, Shakespeare creates a work which — implicitly or more overtly — acknowledges obligation, but which is in addition, much more; something quintessentially his own, and therefore unique, while nevertheless evincing the fundamental and inspirational indebtedness.
CHAPTER III
Tragedy, and the genesis of the tragic hero
1. The origins of tragedy and the concept of the heroic individual

It is a moot point whether Elizabethan or Jacobean tragedy could have
developed into a full-grown genre from the various medieval theatrical
presentations, without the rediscovery of classical drama in the fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries, and the impetus provided by the Renaissance. The effect
of this dual stimulus is relevant in the consideration of Shakespearean
tragedy.

Each of Shakespeare's tragedies is unique, each draws on a different
historical background, utilizes diverse sources, opens new vistas. A universal,
comprehensive definition of Shakespearean tragedy – indeed of tragedy
generally – cannot be formulated, and a perception of Coriolanus as
dissimilar even within such a disparate body of drama does not necessarily
call into question the genre or merit of the tragedy. What the drama is, is a
delimitations on literature are 'only ideas of form, established by custom
and consensus', and each individual literary work has an intrinsic worth far
beyond its kind. The definition of a work of art according to genre or class
confers on that work a relevant and concomitant significance. In order to
comprehend fully any work of art, a broad-based opinion must be formed as
to the genre in all its possible aspects. The 'primacy of genres', mooted to be at
the basis of any well-grounded artistic examination and comprehension, is
presumed to constitute a 'valid approach to interpretation' and
understanding. In practice, however, although the appreciation of a work of
art demands attention to genre at a fundamental level, a full and perceptive
understanding requires consideration of much wider implications than a
narrow determination of kind might give.

The broad definition of Coriolanus as a tragedy is not in question, despite
diverse attempts to redefine its essence. It is the class of tragedy which is
under scrutiny, and which must be distinguished, if a valid interpretation of
intrinsicality is to be made. Coriolanus belongs most essentially to the
category of heroic tragedy, which Richard Ide suggests uses the style and subject matter of epic to convey the soldier-protagonist's heroic idealism. *Coriolanus* is, however, much more than a 'metaphor' and goes far beyond the limits of epic.4

Although Gombrich advocates the 'primacy of genre', Elizabethans in general did not attempt a firm distinction between tragedy and history, and their imprecise apprehension of tragedy was probably less restricting, less of an obstacle to understanding, than are some more inflexible efforts to define exact nature. It is useful to remember that during the Renaissance a 'literary kind ... [stood] ... for a kind of subject, a kind of content, literary and intellectual. ... a rigid system of genre ... never existed in practice and barely even in theory'.5 Precise determination of genre is an attempt to emphasize that a work written within a specific style or mode presupposes an implicit understanding between author and audience, which must therefore facilitate valid interpretation and comprehension. But this is appropriate only up to a point: no work of art can reasonably be expected to conform too exactly to confining guidelines. Each work of art is necessarily unique. Aristotle's attempts to define tragic effect and the tragic hero were largely unread, ignored, or misunderstood, in Shakespeare's time. No definition of tragedy could serve as a model for works of creative excellence; Alfred Harbage states: 'like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, Shakespeare proceeded without Aristotle's aid ... a fine rational discourse can derive from great Tragedy, but great Tragedy cannot derive from a fine rational discourse'.6

Thus it is that Richard Ide's description of *Coriolanus*, with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello*, as 'heroic tragedy', may accomplish a nicer distinction between *Coriolanus*, and *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, but it does not ultimately define the individuality of each tragedy, nor the inherent differences between those related under the blanket term. In his category of 'heroic' or 'mixed' tragedy, Richard Ide identifies the moral ambiguity of the hero's behaviour, and the nature of his conflict with society. When his behaviour does not coincide with 'society's consensus of what kind of behavior is appropriate, valuable, and acceptable ... [and he is] unwilling or unable to compromise [his] firm view of the world by bringing it in line with
consensus', conflict inevitably ensues (p. xii). This definition and explanation is acceptable to a limited extent only, for it neither probes nor elucidates the inherent differences between the particular tragedies, nor the significant diversity between the protagonists. Ide concurs, however, that each individual work within a genre is a special case, 'an original contribution to the genre' (p. xiii). As an original contribution, therefore, each work has to be re-defined and re-evaluated, in order that its unique quality may be fully perceived. Coriolanus is an atypical hero, even within the narrower confines of Ide's description, and an appreciation of the essence of his singularity lies at the basis of an understanding of his intrinsic nature and that of the tragedy.

The word tragedy derives most fundamentally from the ancient Greek tragōdoi, and therefore it would be logical to return to the origin of tragic drama – the Attic tragedians – to examine the nature of tragedy, and of the tragic hero in their dramas. An important pathway to the understanding of Greek tragedy, indeed of all tragedy, is through the examination of its enduring significance as art, and as a reliable record of human values and experience. Valid interpretation can only be achieved if there is some broad understanding of the dramatist's ethical and artistic intention. Only elementary, enduring, and largely immutable concerns such as integrity, loyalty, love, gratitude, and honesty or their antitheses can be expected to retain correspondence of perception across centuries and cultures. These are, in fact, the fundamental concepts with which all tragedy is concerned. Ethical considerations have always been to the forefront of tragedy: the characteristic concerns of Greek drama are those moral imperatives which are perpetual, and validity is achieved through the chronicling of ethical dilemma, specifically within the social situation. In every age the artist chooses to explore in his drama those ideas and philosophies of the time which interest him. Through the medium of drama these concepts are presented within the context of human protagonists in human situations.

Between the twelfth and ninth centuries, B.C., the Homeric poems achieved something akin to the form we know today. The final work was either transformed into an epic by an individual bard, amalgamated from many lays, or gradually evolved over a long period, inherited and
interwoven by many poets. However it was that this process occurred, c. 850 B.C., the *Iliad* developed into a work of incomparable beauty, which became the fountainhead and inspiration for Greek literature, and indeed for that of Western Europe. Homer was held in high esteem in ancient Greece: he had commentators as early as Theagenes of Rhegium in the sixth century B.C. Glorious heroes of the legendary past, depicted in the Homeric poems, inspired Greeks from the eighth century B.C., onwards. Since Homer, epic poetry in the guise of tragic drama has climax ed twice in the history of European literature: in Athens in the fifth century B.C., and in Renaissance England. The influence of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on all later Western literature and culture is immeasurable. Certainly in tragic drama, the significant debt to the fundamental heroic concept, in action and character, cannot be denied or disregarded.

The concept of the heroic is a cardinal notion of Greek culture. The idea, and the individual, emerged in Homer's *Iliad* and became one of the most enduring and influential contributions to Western art, if not to civilization. There are obvious differences between the traditional oral style of the *Iliad* and the more evolved dramatic presentation of Attic and later Western European, and specifically Shakespearean tragedy. At basis, however, the Homeric poem is a heroic tragedy, and as such subsumes the most essential characteristics of the genre. The tragic hero is portrayed in the most fundamental and unmodified form, and, notwithstanding the stylized mode and language, Achilles – the archetypal tragic hero – is an exemplar for, and compeer of, the greatest tragic heroes of subsequent heroic and tragic drama and literature. The Homeric concept and character of the hero developed into an inspirational and aspirational creed, which has remained central to the ideals of man and art. The expression of a manner in which to live and behave with excellence, whatever the circumstances, has never been surpassed. Three millennia since its inception, the portrait of the heroic has hardly changed in essentials from Homer's archetypal definitive exemplum.

The notion of the heroic and its evolution is bound up with the Greek obsession with humanism and individualism. Man and his potential provided the motivation and the theme for all Greek literature, just as the

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human body provided the starting point for all Greek sculpture. The tragic hero is man writ large, and from Homer onwards has embodied man's potential for excellence, a confirmation of his power. The sense of the heroic transformed ways of thinking. Primitive taboos and superstitions were more easily shaken off, as the belief grew that man was capable of prodigious achievements by his own effort, that he could elevate human potential, morally and physically, beyond the everyday. 'No Greek ever became a god and no true Greek ever gave up trying'.

The Greeks considered life in general to be exacting and burdensome, even calamitous, and the over-riding problem of how man could be noble, and live an uncorrupted life in such a world, was of vital ethical concern. The creation of the Homeric hero attempted an answer to the problem and the heroic concept epitomizes for all time the aspirations and ideals of men who would live a worthy life. The Homeric picture of the hero in his earliest and purest form is no idealized symbol, but is rather a vivid portrayal of the tragic hero besieged and enduring in a human drama which ranks with the greatest of Attic or Renaissance tragedy. Moral conflict in Western tragedy owes much to the conflict of objectives and dispositions in the *Iliad*.

The undeniable debt owed by Western European tragedy to the Attic tragedies must encompass and recognize that owed by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to Homer. Myths, epic stories, Homeric language and heroes in the poetry of ancient Greece formed a reservoir from which all Greek writers drew, a foundation on which they were able to build. The direct influence of Homer on Attic tragedy is indisputable: one-fifth of all Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedy, and two-fifths of Sophoclean tragedy derive from the Trojan cycle detailed in Homeric poetry. Depiction of the archetypal hero in the *Iliad* embodied 'an insolubly tragic situation, the tragic situation par excellence': the portrayal of the 'conflict between personal integrity and social obligation' became the focus of Attic drama, and especially of Sophoclean tragedy. Thus it is that Achilles's situation as the pivot of all action, the portrayal of a tragic hero of compelling inner excellence, and his predicament, became the sine qua non of heroic tragedy, incorporating the heroic struggle to maintain a standard of absolute personal integrity against an inadequate

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society.

The fundamental notion of the hero is integral to the concept of tragedy: 'Much has been written about the tragic character, but it has not perhaps been sufficiently noted that the tragic character is first the heroic character; it is so, at least in origin, and it remains consistently so in Sophocles'. E.M. Waith concurs that the heroic is intrinsic to the truly tragic, especially 'wherever tragedies portray men “better” or “greater” than ourselves'. Reuben Brower considers 'the tragic “in the fullest sense” . . . for European literature [to be] defined, not by Aristotle, but by Sophocles in the unflinching but exhilarating recognitions of Oedipus . . . Antigone . . . [and] Ajax'.

From Homer, the heroic and the tragic in the Achillean temperament and situation was enhanced from epic, to tragic drama. The Oresteia of Æschylus presents in trilogic form the tragedy of a particular house which spans generations. The family is polluted by a single sin and the tragedy manifests a deep concern with ancient religious law, which causes the family to be cursed from generation to generation until the pollution, or the polluted, is obliterated. There is no unequivocal main protagonist throughout the action: one or more of the chief characters could equally be deemed to be the tragic hero.

Sophocles dispensed with the trilogic form, developing and perfecting a form of tragedy complete in one play and essentially concentrated on a singular hero and his predicament. Six of his seven extant tragedies are entitled with the name of the central character, an indication that Sophocles – or someone unknown – recognized that the tragedies are focused on, and revolve around, the tragic hero. In the emphasis on the ethical, and the curtailing of the element of destiny, Sophoclean tragedy may be more easily related to Shakespearean, than to that of his near contemporary Æschylus. Man, not the gods, is fundamental to Sophocles, and his portrayal of the tragic hero is dependent on this anthropocentric view. The hero has no responsibility to the gods: his inescapable commitment is to himself. In Sophoclean tragedy there is no grand teleological design, no cosmic purpose or justice. All action, not only sinful action, can and does result in suffering: this fact contributes substantially to the tragic predicament.

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The reduction in the scope of the drama lays full responsibility for his actions and their outcome on the inherent nature of the tragic hero, and his self-determination. He is neither motivated nor influenced by any external force – by fate or the gods, or indeed, by other men – but is impelled to action by his own inextinguishable spirit, his *daimon*. All motive, decision and action comes from within the tragic hero. A modern concept of tragedy essentially reflects the Sophoclean: it presupposes a central figure whose suffering, endurance and conduct form the focal point of the play. Sophocles's 'imperishable position in the literature of the world ... [is] ... due to his character-drawing ... his real flesh-and-blood men and women ... are like ourselves and yet noble with an incomparable dignity and remoteness'. He made men 'as they ought to be'.

2. *Coriolanus*: source, diversity, affinity

All mythological literature, including Greek drama, revolved around the heroic, and the standards embodied in these tales by which the heroes lived and died were higher than, and different from, those of ordinary men. It is this difference which conferred on them the status of heroes. Shakespeare and his contemporaries had access to various versions and translations of numerous works within the heroic tradition of antiquity, which were transmitted by the ancients in their literature as historical tales of heroic characters and their achievements. He is known to have used history books as source material and it is especially the conception of the tragic hero as formulated in Homer and disseminated throughout the literature of the ancient world, which is relevant for this particular understanding of *Coriolanus*.

Any background influences, direct or indirect, should be acknowledged in the consideration of a work of art, as forming part of the wide-ranging substratum of that work. In fact, this underlying substance to some extent shapes our attitudes and reactions, but ultimately each opus must be appreciated as an entity which is borne upon, but not constrained by, preconceptions. *Coriolanus* is a more forceful, compelling tragedy for its demonstrable Sophoclean influence. Equally, the recognition of Plutarch's

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Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus as source material of the tragedy makes the drama much more than a mere re-telling of an old tale, for Shakespeare imbued the narrative with an inimitable mastery. There could have been, for Shakespeare, in Plutarch's Life, the dormant seed of a dramatic tragedy, and of a tragic hero of excellent and classical proportion, unperceived and undeveloped until Shakespeare discovered and cultivated the potential.

Janet Adelman suggests that the search for, and study of, sources too often becomes a type of 'literary detective work' by which the critic is only concerned to 'reconstruct the workings of a creative mind'. She remarks, however, although in a context different from the present study that 'the effect of [a] play would be utterly different if we were unaware of the classical tradition ... [and that] ... the meaning of any play is partly defined by the traditions in which it asks to be seen' (p. 54). In this respect, a consideration of Coriolanus within the classical, and specifically the Sophoclean mode leads to a distinct perception of play and hero.

The story of Coriolanus was not unknown in Shakespeare's lifetime, and Shakespeare could have been familiar with the tale from his schooldays, or from other versions of the story which were then current. The story, however, was neither as well-known, as attractive nor as inspiring as those of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and had not, like these, previously been dramatized. T.J.B. Spencer maintains that Shakespeare's decision to dramatize the story of Coriolanus was 'one of the great feats of the historical imagination of Renaissance Europe'. Classical allusions are by no means peculiar to Coriolanus; in this play however, as Spencer notes, Shakespeare 'is taking great care' to make literary, classical allusions 'appropriate'. Even more to the point, to an extraordinary degree, is the genuine classical aura, the evocative classical hero. The marked effect of Plutarch's Lives, the dramatic potential of classical tales, and the inspiring influence on Shakespeare to create 'a new kind of classical drama' are undeniable: the ancient world forms the setting for one-third of the entire Shakespearean canon, and for six of the eleven tragedies.

E.M. Waith remarks that the perspective of Plutarch's narrative differs from that of a tragic dramatist. Plutarch presents and judges Coriolanus as a
potential governor: 'he highlights those qualities which he considers a man in this position would require, and which he declares Coriolanus to lack.' As a biographer and moral philosopher, Plutarch narrates historical tales in a manner which serves a didactic purpose in the delineation of character. Shakespeare's tragedy takes up Plutarch's narrative and characterization, and develops dramatically a protagonist whose nobility of character and ideals are shown to be extraordinary in comparison with his society. The tragedy deviates from the source narrative chiefly in not being didactic, presenting rather the tragic hero's actions, reactions, and emotions within the constraints of life in a hostile community in such a manner as to elucidate the character of the hero and his society through the dramatization.

There has been much analysis of Shakespeare's departures in Coriolanus from Plutarch's Life, but for the purposes of this study it is relevant only to acknowledge those differences which suggest that Shakespeare might have ennobled Coriolanus in order to present a protagonist different from, and more essentially heroic and tragic than that portrayed in the source. This assertion does not imply that on reading Plutarch's account of Coriolanus Shakespeare envisaged the creation of a tragic hero modelled on a Sophoclean hero. The character and situation of Plutarch's narrative could have brought to mind the general situation or character of the heroes of the Ajax or the Antigone of Sophocles, but intent of an artist is impossible to substantiate in the absence of specific guidelines from the artist himself. The only rational approach to intent would thus be a comparison with a source which has been closely adhered to: any departures from the source material could then reasonably be construed as intent to present character or situation differently, to alter, for whatever reason, the essential elements of the source.

There is no lack of evidence that Shakespeare developed the character of Coriolanus along lines different from those in Plutarch. Shakespeare emphasizes and enhances Coriolanus's fundamental heroic qualities, and exaggerates the plebeian cowardice and inconstancy. In Plutarch, Coriolanus enters Corioles 'with very fewe men to helpe him', whereas in Shakespeare's play he enters the gates and is shut inside the enemy walls alone, abandoned by the craven plebeian troops:

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Mar. So, now the gates are ope; now prove good
seconds; . . . Mark me, and do the like.

[Marcius enters the gates.

1 Sol. Fool-hardiness; not I.
2 Sol. Not I. [Marcius is shut in.
1 Sol. See, they have shut him in.
All. To th' pot, I warrant him.

I.4.43–48

In Plutarch, Coriolanus ‘dyd persuade the Patricians to shew them selves no
lesse forward and willing to fight for their countrie, then the common people
were’.23 In Shakespeare the plebeians are consistently cowardly, 'steal away'
from any hint of battle, and show themselves

All hurt behind! Backs red, and faces pale
With flight and agued fear!

I.1.249 SD, I.4.37–38

The transformation of Coriolanus to a protagonist of heroic order, the
creation of a more noble and wronged character than Plutarch's, required a
concomitant diminishing of the plebeians, the tribunes and indeed the
patricians, and an implicit authorial attitude of censure towards them in the
drama, which is not found in the source material. It is significant that every
caracter in Shakespeare's version has been debased to a greater or lesser
extent, except Coriolanus and Virgilia; the universal emphasis on human
weakness, unreliability, and antagonism that surrounds Coriolanus effect a
consequential exaggeration of his intrinsic worth.

In Plutarch Shakespeare found 'a great warrior firmly characterized as
intemperately angry and hence given over to solitariness, and he accepted
almost everything about him except the characterization, which is to say he
accepted everything except what mattered most to his play'.24 Criticisms of
Shakespeare's Coriolanus cannot be based on a prejudiced preconception
gained from Plutarch's hero. Shakespeare's Coriolanus is not Plutarch's: in
the drama he has the megalopsychia, the greatness of soul, the characteristic
stature and dominance of an archetypal tragic hero. Although not
commenting specifically on Coriolanus, J.A.K. Thomson suggests that
'through the medium of North's Plutarch Shakespeare divined the true spirit
of Greek tragedy'.25 Similarly, Reuben Brower remarks that in Plutarch
Shakespeare came very close to 'direct contact with the heroic tradition of

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Homer'. These statements reflect perception of the essentially Homeric, Attic – if not Sophoclean – cast of Shakespeare's tragedy and hero.

Chapman's translation and publication of Homer's *Iliad* in 1598 'needed a verbal and cultural translation . . . in Chapman's paraphrases and interpretive explanations . . . [there was] . . . a systematic attempt to justify Achilles's behaviour according to Elizabethan ethical norms. Achilles's proud, defiant, destructive isolation thus becomes a virtuous stance in the face of a society that has wronged him'. It is not the intention of this study to suggest that Shakespeare's changes to the character of his hero were made in order to align character and behaviour with supposed Elizabethan ethical norms, but it could be surmised that such changes as he made were in effect an ethical translation of the source to suit his own dramatic ends.

The proposition that in his encounter with Plutarch Shakespeare discerned the spirit of Greek tragedy leads to a consideration of his artistic kinship with Sophocles. Critical recognition of Sophocles and Shakespeare as comparably pre-eminent tragedians has generally acknowledged their respective eminence, but has largely stopped short of any recognition that they may have had more in common than generic achievement (see pp. 59–61, above). It is virtually a commonplace to recognize the equivalent achievements of Sophocles and Shakespeare, of Periclean Athens and Elizabethan England.

H.D.F. Kitto suggests that it is not implausible that these two periods of European literature should have much in common, given that they were the only two periods in European history in which tragedy reached a peak, with the possible exception of the seventeenth century in France and the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. The similarities between the two periods, and between Sophocles and Shakespeare, are compelling and persuasive. J.C. Collins compares the 'remarkable analogies' between Shakespearean and Sophoclean biography, and between the political and intellectual conditions in which they lived. He considers their backgrounds, their characters, and their artistic qualities, noting that the Athens of Sophocles and the London of Shakespeare were comparable literary centres, and that both men 'lived at periods pre-eminently propitious to the development of poetry, and more
particularly of dramatic poetry', to the achievement of 'the crown and flower of Attic tragedy, . . . the crown and flower of Elizabethan tragedy'.

The intellectual temper of the two periods was indisputably similar: traditional concepts of order were questioned, and a greater sense of man's self-sufficiency evolved. In fifth century Athens, man became the measure of all things; Sophocles expressed this in the Antigone: 'Wonders are many on earth, and the greatest of these/Is man' (ll. 339-340). There was a new emphasis on the individual, a more profound recognition of man's uniqueness, and a corresponding separation between man and the forces of nature. Despite the growth of individualism, there was in both these periods of accelerated independence of thought and intellectual change, an underlying sense of doubt, a questioning of man's position in the world. It was a climate in which great tragic drama could flourish. In both periods the newly-apprehended belief in the inner life and moral consciousness of the individual, and the secure confidence in the responsibility of man for his own fate, become significant factors in the dramatization of human experience. Both Sophocles and Shakespeare in their tragedies interpret man's heroic potential: neither the gods nor fate, but man only, determines his own destiny.

As a literary genre with its own rules and characteristics tragedy . . . conveys hitherto unrecognized aspects of human experience; it marks a new stage in the development of the inner man and of the responsible agent . . . Tragedy involves a particular moment and . . . the period when it flourished can be pinned down between two dates each of which represents a different attitude towards the tragic spectacle.

3. A classical tragedy: Sophoclean analogies

An experience of Coriolanus may call to mind a Greek tragedy; it may even suggest analogies with specific Sophoclean tragedies. It does, however, distinguish noticeable dissimilarities from other Shakespearean tragedies. Consideration of the drama as embodying a different type of tragedy and tragic hero from others within the canon encompasses a recognition of what the play and hero are, as much as what they are not, a recognition which is free of

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preconceived ideas. Criticism based purely on comparison of kind generally infers a sense of anticipation, which includes preconception, a presupposition about the type of tragedy or hero expected, with a consequent - misconceived - sense of disappointment. A.P. Rossiter suggests: 'Shakespeare may have felt some dissatisfaction with Coriolanus. He would not be the last; for . . . few see it or read it without feeling that they "don't get as much out of it as they hoped to" or that it . . . is "less profitable than others I could think of". He does maintain, however, that 'there are many ways of interpreting this play' and suggests that 'almost any line of thinking' which may get us away from 'passionate political side-tracks . . . gives the play a better chance: a chance as a tragic play'. Not only passionate political side-tracks, but almost any prejudgement based on a categorizing of the play as conforming to an expected spirit, or as like any other, must ultimately obstruct an open and independent appreciation, a freedom to explore and experience the drama totally.

'Each generation will bring different experiences, different conceptual tools to great authors and thereby illuminate new facets of old texts'. Received apprehension is not constantly cast aside. Expectation of quality or standard in a work of art is right and proper, but not the expectation that it should be like any other, that it should conform to kind too nicely. A work of art is not a scientific formula, which is correct or false. Variation from tight classification may lend new, vital, and exciting aspects to a work of art.

Everyone must reread the books that have been a thousand times ransacked, for to every reader and to every century and even to every individual's different stage of life they present a particular countenance . . . . The image which the art and poetry of the past awakens changes totally, ceaselessly . . . far from being a misfortune, this is only a consequence of an interchange that is steadily alive. Norman Rabkin claims that 'the closer an intellectual system comes to full internal consistency and universality of application . . . the more obvious becomes the exclusiveness of its preoccupations and the limitations of its value . . . the ultimate irreducibility to a schema may be the hallmark of the work of art and the source of its power'.

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Although no two Shakespearean tragedies can be deemed to be similar, and each is a unique drama, nevertheless *Coriolanus* has generally been considered to stand apart within the canon. For the purposes of comparison, the six plays considered are *Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth* and *King Lear*. These dramas will be contrasted briefly for diversity from *Coriolanus*, specifically in those areas which are most apposite to this study: in general atmosphere, and in the extreme concentration on the protagonist.

Only *Coriolanus* focuses exclusively on one character – the hero – and his predicament. The other tragedies are created on a much more ample scale; there are sub-plots, witches, natural cataclysms, supernatural or cosmic reverberations, a play within a play; all of which communicate an extensive sweep of perception, an aura of expanding, of going beyond normal boundaries. In *Julius Caesar* the play ranges over the Roman Empire, the whole known world, as it does in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and in addition there are prophecies and supernatural portents, which further expand the arena. In *Hamlet* there is travel between countries, while the ghost, Ophelia's real madness and Hamlet's assumed disposition, confer notions of areas and worlds beyond our ken. Similar effect is achieved in *Macbeth*; the witches, Banquo's ghost, the prophecies, and Lady Macbeth's madness enlarge the context to a contemplation of phenomena which exceed everyday understanding. *King Lear* encompasses all of nature and the stage of the drama is greatly augmented as Lear's torment and madness are mirrored in the cataclysmic natural disorder of the storm. The dual plot amplifies both background and concept, and Lear's and Gloucester's suffering and newly-acquired sense of reality increase the range of perception.

Othello magnifies the vista of the drama with his fabulous tales of unimaginable and far-flung wonders, and the persona of the exotic black soldier in Venice reinforces the aura of the strange and the unknown. Only in *Othello* is there a similar, uninterrupted intensity of gaze on the hero as there is in *Coriolanus*. Like Coriolanus, all attention is concentrated on Othello, yet the worlds of the two plays, the perspectives shown, are substantially distinct: most significantly, in the earlier play, it is Iago and his irresistible evil, and
not Othello, who controls the action.

Othello appears to be narrower in scope than the other tragedies, and does not have the obvious wide political, philosophical, even religious implications of King Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet. The difference, however, between Othello and Coriolanus in respect of concentration, is one of style, of language, and of intent. In Coriolanus the contraction of perspective is matched by the tension and inflexibility in the language, in the imagery, and in the hero's character. In Othello, the vista of the play is conversely enlarged through language, imagery and the character of the hero. Othello is a romantic figure from a remote land; his bearing, language and stories recreate extravagant adventures and magical, far-flung worlds outside the action of the play: the only perception of constriction comes from Iago's overwhelmingly evil, his inexorable pressure on, and ensnaring of, Othello. Apart from this, the play has a atmosphere of great scope, quite different from the tight concentration in Coriolanus.

There is no suggestion of a world which is exciting or extraordinary in Coriolanus. The world of the play is unremittingly austere, restricted, and tough. The unadorned language conveys and emphasizes the martial rhythms, the taut and concrete imagery, and the intractable atmosphere within the confined, threatened, and threatening cities. The characteristic widening of focus in Shakespeare's other tragedies, the inclusion of diverse elements which effectively enlarge the scope of the dramas, is absent from Coriolanus. The world of the play is as narrow and as limited as is the temperament of the protagonist. This is the principal characteristic which marks Coriolanus as fundamentally different from others within the canon. Notably in Coriolanus all action emanates from the tragic hero, and all attention focuses on him, as it does in Sophoclean tragedy.

The great concentration on the protagonist in Coriolanus can be readily apprehended from the following scenic analysis of the play. Of the total twenty-nine scenes, Coriolanus is present in ten scenes from the beginning; in eight scenes he enters at a later stage, but is the sole topic of conversation before his entrance; in ten scenes he is not present, but is constantly discussed, and in six of these scenes within the first three lines. In only one scene of the
play, Act I scene 7, is Coriolanus neither active nor discussed; he is, however, mentioned in the stage directions and could be present on the sidelines or perhaps just off-stage; the scene is moreover, a mere seven lines:

TITUS LARTIUS, having set a guard upon
Corioli, going with drum and trumpet
toward Cominius and Caius Marcius,
enters with a Lieutenant, other Soldiers,
and a Scout.

Macbeth and Othello may resolve into a superficially similar concentration on the hero, but other phenomena or concerns within the action and dialogue tend to enlarge the focus, or to relieve the intense concentration. When compared with an equivalent analysis of King Lear, the narrowing of focus in Coriolanus is unmistakable. Of the twenty-six scenes in the earlier play, King Lear is present in six from the beginning, and in a further five he enters during the course of the scene. In nine scenes he is not present at all, but is talked of, or is mentioned in passing. In six scenes he is neither present, nor is he discussed at all. In addition, of the total twenty-six scenes, ten are concerned with the sub-plot, which, with natural and cosmic repercussions, effectively enlarge the arena of the play, and in so doing minimize the intensity of concentration on the protagonist.

In contrast, Coriolanus's life, conflict, and death form the entire drama: there is nothing else but his story, the portrayal of his continuing predicament. There is no deviation at all from the intense concentration on the hero. The entire subject and action begin and end with Coriolanus. The atmosphere of the play owes nothing to 'cataracts and hurricanoes . . . sulph'rous and thought-executing fires', to murky darkness to 'night's black agents'; there are no nocturnal apparitions 'which might appal the devil', no fools, seers, real madness or feigned 'antic disposition', nor are there tales 'of hairbreadth scapes . . . of the Cannibals . . . The Anthropophagi . . .'. The world of Coriolanus is not expanded by 'portentous things', 'the unaccustom'd terror of [the] night', 'most horrid sights', or by distant horizons, 'the wide arch/Of the rang'd empire', by extravagant language, or self-indulgence.35 There is neither structural nor dramatic device to divert attention from the hero. Coriolanus is, among the tragic heroes, uniquely and exclusively the
hub of all action, attention, emotion, discussion. He is the cornerstone and
the pivot of the tragedy. He is the tragedy. It is of cardinal significance that
Coriolanus is the only character in the drama who dies. In none of the six
plays considered, or in the extended Shakespearean tragic canon, is there only
the death – or murder – of the main protagonist.

The concentration of focus, the lack of amplification in Coriolanus, is
characteristically Sophoclean; play and hero have a massive, direct, classical
quality. Sophoclean drama typically encompasses a fusion of the static and the
dynamic, the architectural and the organic, which is most apparent in
Coriolanus. Like the drama, the protagonist manifests this Sophoclean
essence: he is a machine, a coign of the Capitol, a thing of blood or a rock, an
engine or a god.36 The blending of elements confers on the drama a
distinctive quality which enables it to be perceived simultaneously as
dramatic and energetic, yet statuesque and absolute. It is the essence of the
drama to achieve and to embody this amalgam of movement and stasis.

The fashioning of a 'one-man drama ... not done elsewhere' in
Shakespeare,37 is analogous with the Sophoclean mode, in which the tragedy
characteristically revolves exclusively around the figure of the hero. Ajax –
alive or dead – imposes his gigantic personality on every conversation, every
conflict and every movement of the action. He is, like Antigone, and like
Coriolanus, the only topic of discussion in the play. Ajax dominates the
tragedy even after his death: all tension, argument and drama are relevant
only to him. Similarly, during Coriolanus's exile from Rome, all discord and
action concern him alone. Significantly, Ajax's death, like Coriolanus's, is the
only death in the drama.

Michael Goldman remarks that despite the 'great amount of discussion ...
of ... the character of Coriolanus ... in the play ... of all the mature
tragedies this is the one whose hero seems simplest in inner constitution, a
relatively narrow or immature self.38 Yet Coriolanus can be categorized as
'narrow' or 'simple' only in respect of his absolute, rigid code of ethics, which
dictates a predictable mode of action. This is the self-controlled discipline of
the Sophoclean hero, which typically limits his conduct to that which would
be appropriate. It is not a narrowness or simplicity in the sense of immature

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under-development, but is rather an extreme constancy of purpose, a distillation to essence of the personality and the conduct of an archetypal tragic hero. He is, however, not a one- or two-dimensional representation of a hero: he is a fully realized, powerfully and compellingly portrayed character, whose massive persona sets him apart from any criteria of the commonplace. The simple quality remarked on by M. Goldman is rather a singleness of purpose, an inherent nobility, which distinguishes and isolates him from all around him. The lack of comprehension of his essential worth within the world of the drama is emphasized by the number and variety of opinions about Coriolanus within the play.

Discussion of the hero by other characters is not exclusive to Coriolanus within the Shakespearean canon. It is one of the conventional techniques of drama, by means of which aspects of character and action may be presented from diverse points of view. In Coriolanus, however, there is virtually no other topic of conversation: preoccupation with the protagonist is unparalleled. Yet Coriolanus is not easily understood from the welter of definition or criticism. A hero of steel, who refuses to compromise his integrity and his intensely personal principles, he is nevertheless a man of flesh and blood, who sustains the only genuinely tender and loving relationship in the drama. He is a man who remains essentially unchanged throughout, whose moral creed consistently demands adherence and fulfilment rather than adjustment or submission to restraint or compulsion.

Only Coriolanus among Shakespeare's tragic heroes does not alter his mode of thought or behaviour when subjected to persuasion, temptation, misfortune or restriction. The appearance of a ghost with a commission, of supernatural portents, the predictions of witches, false report and guile, the refusal of a daughter to flatter, or the love for a foreign queen, are provocations which impel other Shakespearean tragic heroes to a new line of conduct, or to development in a different direction. Coriolanus alone remains always as he was formerly, in the face of all external pressure. His sense of his own nobility and his passion to maintain his intrinsic nature set him apart from other men within the world of the drama, as they do from other Shakespearean tragic heroes. He is a different order of hero, a hero in Chapter III.
the classical tradition, in the subject, style, and spirit of the original. Criticism of the heroic in this respect cannot be founded on comparison with the ordinary, for the heroic is exceptional. His pride, arrogance and excessive passions are inherent attributes of the distinctive personality of the Sophoclean hero (see Chapter IV).

H.D.F. Kitto noted the similarity between the Sophoclean tragic hero and Coriolanus:

To a Hellenist, one interesting feature of Coriolanus is its resemblance to the Ajax of Sophocles. It is not easy to think of two characters in drama who are more like each other than Ajax and Caius Marcius: each a magnificent fighter; but proud, convinced of his own worth, dedicated to his own sense of honour. . . .

Naturally we must not allow an investigation of this play to be influenced by its resemblance to an older one . . . . But it will be interesting, if the resemblance proves to be more than skin-deep. 40

The resemblance is indeed more than superficial, and a consideration of the defining similarities sanctions the plausibility of a specific perception of the later tragedy. The fierce compulsion of Ajax, Antigone and Coriolanus to adhere inflexibly to their personal code of integrity has prompted a widespread, generally hostile apprehension of heroes who are valiant, yet are unattractive and unpopular. Critical opinion has found Coriolanus to be harsh and arrogant, in much the same way as Antigone has been judged to be 'an objectionable young woman' and Ajax 'a mere egoist'. 41 The similarity of critical reactions to the tragedies and tragic heroes points to resemblances which appear to be too fundamental to be disregarded.

Both the Ajax and Coriolanus are austere, compelling plays; both plays open on scenes of noise, violence and hatred, and both continue in much the same atmosphere until the end. Both heroes have been similarly criticized for being savage and limited, even repellent; yet both are undeniably heroic and the presence of each dominates the respective drama as the sole focus and topic of concern. Like Coriolanus and Ajax, Antigone has been condemned as being proud and inflexible. She shares with them an intransigent self-sufficiency, a refusal to compromise passionately held principles, and a steely determination to maintain personal autonomy. Even more than other

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Sophoclean tragedies, the style of the *Antigone* is harsh, the language taut, as they are in *Coriolanus*.

Sophoclean tragedy is distinguished by austere severity and concentration to essence in expression and action, qualities which are echoed in the character of the hero. Spectacle, diversions of plot, and devices to arouse pity and fear, so typical of Æschylean tragedy, were eschewed by Sophocles. Yet there is nothing cold or detached about Sophoclean tragedy, as indeed there is nothing frigid in the unlaboured refinement and classical restraint of the Parthenon. Applied to literature, that most fundamental Greek quality, *sôphrosynê* – perfect classical control and proportion – confers an aversion to extravagance of spectacle, embellishment, or language. This is pre-eminently the Greek – the Sophoclean – essence of *Coriolanus*: style, vocabulary, and character are condensed, integrated towards a totality of effect and relevance, an apparent severity which is the manifestation of the singleness of artistic purpose, a marrying of form and subject-matter. The undeviating progress of the action, and the extreme concentration on the hero in *Coriolanus* illustrate the essential element of Greek tragedy – the *agon* – a continuing conflict, with the centre of interest in the manner in which the hero plays his role, as he asserts his integrity against the restrictions and compulsions imposed on him by the society in which he lives. The tragic situation is one in which the defeated hero may yet win a significant moral victory.

4. The tragic hero in the community

Critical assumptions about moral issues within the drama are neither unimportant nor insignificant. Both Sophocles and Shakespeare evince a deep interest in the character of the tragic hero, inasmuch as it is revealed through his moral principles and conduct in the face of ethical conflict. Those philosophical and ethical ideas which originally gave rise to the concept of the heroic are significant in the context of their translation into dramatic tragedy. The Homeric concept of the heroic can be understood only from its presentation in the *Iliad*. It is possible, however, to make wider assertions about the underlying beliefs in Sophoclean tragedy concerning the hero as a man – or woman – living within a hostile community, and the conflicts.

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which arise from the clash of attitudes.

a. A new concept of morality

In fifth century Attica, the waning authority of traditional religion necessitated the erection of a completely new philosophical structure in the place of the old. Socrates reflects the fundamental concerns of the Greek people at that time in their total concentration on the things of this world. Consideration of man was paramount, as an intelligent, active, and most significantly — a social being, and the over-riding question was the manner in which he should live his life righteously within the community. In his own life Socrates ultimately embodied the philosophy he propounded: in a clash between the demands of a social system and his own conscience he obeyed his personal concept of right. This is of particular relevance to the character of the Sophoclean tragic hero and his conduct within the community. Cicero claims that 'Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and set her in the cities of men, bringing her into their homes and compelling her to ask questions about life and morality...'. This concern with men's souls is in effect a preoccupation with the moral personality; the belief in human knowledge and reason, and the ability to act ethically, came at a time when more and more man in society was the focus of interest.

The intense humanism of the Greeks placed on man an accountability to himself and his principles which, together with a fundamentally Homeric concept of the heroic, determined the portrayal of the tragic hero in Sophoclean drama. The aretē of the heroic tradition runs throughout Greek culture and, as epitomized in the Sophoclean tragic hero, it encompasses practically every kind of excellence, of ideal, and of virtue. Sophocles appropriately presents his heroes within a public arena, in which the operation of the heroic aretē — that most fundamental quality of the Sophoclean tragic personality — can be fully perceived as the hero acts and reacts according to the demands and restrictions of the community. His character and actions resist judgement in conventional terms of good or bad, for the heroic is shown to be beyond the comprehension of the non-heroic (see Chapter V). Throughout the drama, despite pervasive criticism, the
inherent heroic integrity can be perceived in contradistinction to the dubious worth of all sections of society.

Ajax, Antigone and Coriolanus are judged by their fellows to be proud, stubborn, and inhuman:

**CHORUS:**
A wilful man, doomed Ajax...
That stubborn soul...
That venomous tongue

*Ajax:* ll. 911, 924, 928

*compare Jebb:*
that unbending soul...
in thy fierce mood, bitter...
with a deadly passion.

*Il. 926–931*

**CREON:**
The over-obstinate spirit
... Proud thoughts...
This girl's proud spirit

*Antigone:* ll. 476–485

**Sic.**
Was ever man so proud as is this Marcius?

**Bru.**
He is grown
Too proud to be so valiant.

*Coriolanus:* I.1.250–257

**Bru.**
being once chaf'd, he cannot
Be rein'd again to temperance;

*III.3.27–28*

**Com.**
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was tim'd with dying cries.

*II.2.107–108*

Each hero manifests a view of himself, of society, and of the relationship between them, which is at odds with, and in fact is inappropriate to that society. He knows instinctively the value of his own merit, and recognizes the imperfections of his community:

**AJAX:**
I, his son, came, strong as he,
To this same ground, and bore as brave a part
In action, and now am brought down to this,
... these sons of Atreus
Have filched them from me...

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And turned their backs on me and all my triumphs.

Ajax: ll. 435–445

ANTIGONE: What greater honour could I wish? All these Would say that what I did was honourable, But fear locks up their lips. To speak and act Just as he likes is a king’s prerogative.

Antigone: ll. 503–506

compare Jebb:

All here would own that they thought it well, were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty . . . hath the power to do and say what it will.

Antigone: ll. 502–504

Mar. You shames of Rome! . . . how have you run From slaves that apes would beat!

Cor. The cruelty and envy of the people, Permitted by our dastard nobles

Coriolanus: I.4.31–40; IV.5.74–78

The Sophoclean hero has an essential role to play within the community; he embodies those values which, by their implementation, would preserve society. Paradoxically, by opposing the laws of society, the Sophoclean hero protects the very fundamentals of societal life. He is compelled to live at the limits of society, alienated and isolated within a community which cannot comprehend the heroic nature. His isolation is not purely a physical manifestation of disjunction, but is an emotional and a moral state. Separation of an individual within his community, physically or idealistically, is an indispensable element of Sophoclean tragedy. The hero is inevitably in a situation of confrontation, which arises from the incompatibility between his personal ethic and socially accepted mores. Jean-Pierre Vernant distinguishes a particular 'moment' in which tragedy flourishes, and describes the necessary incompatibility between the hero and his community:

The tragic technique exploits a polarity between two of its elements: on the one hand the chorus, an anonymous and collective being whose role is to

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express, through its fears, hopes and judgements, the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community; on the other the individualized figure whose action forms the centre of the drama and who is seen as a hero from another age, always more or less alien to the ordinary condition of the citizen. . . . [The hero is] in a way under examination before the public . . . . In the new framework of tragic interplay, then, the hero has ceased to be model. He has become . . . a problem

(Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece, pp. 5, 2).

Coriolanus manifests the typically Sophoclean intransigence of the hero whose passionate dedication to his unique moral values sets him at odds with, and thus apart from, society. Generally considered to be perverse and antisocial, even fanatical, he is shown within a community which appears to be determined to impair his fortitude. He is most honoured yet most denigrated, needed yet vilified and cast out. He is enmeshed within his community, yet an outsider. David Daniell quotes a statement made by John Burgess about Coriolanus, and defines the conflict engendered by the irreconcilable clash of opposing principles:

'E everyone's preoccupations, hopes, plans, desires, concerns are in that one man . . . ' [Dr Daniell continues] no-one talks of anything else but that man, his separation from the rest, yet the dependence of everyone on him . . . the problem of the person of special powers, needed by a society for success, yet not containable by it. Though the society does not even half begin to understand him, he has to be accommodated somehow. 48

Like Ajax and Antigone, Coriolanus's disjunction from his community is comprehensive: the characteristic ostracism of the Sophoclean hero in society. No other Shakespearean tragic hero experiences such a degree of unremitting condemnation and isolation. Only Coriolanus is resolutely unchanged and unchangeable throughout the drama, always 'a problem'.

The essential similarities between Coriolanus and the tragedies of Sophocles appear to be in the same category as the differences between Coriolanus and other of Shakespeare's tragedies. If the field of Shakespearean tragedy were to be narrowed down to the three tragedies with warrior-heroes which were written at the outset of the Jacobean period, to Othello, Antony

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and Cleopatra and Coriolanus, it would be possible even within this limited
category to perceive how Coriolanus deviates from its analogues. Richard Ide
places these three tragedies into the sub-genre of heroic tragedy (pp. 64–65,
above), and observes that each of these heroes is a 'social misfit'. He further
distinguishes between the three tragedies by suggesting that heroic tragedy
falls into two groups: that of love, into which group Othello and Antony and
Cleopatra fall, and that of dislocation, into which category Coriolanus falls.49
These distinctions, and particularly that of disjunction, neatly, if
incompletely, distinguish Coriolanus from the body of Shakespeare's
tragedies as well as from those heroic tragedies with which it has the greatest
affinity.

The dislocation which characterizes Coriolanus's situation, the
characteristic isolation of the Sophoclean hero within his community, is born
of an inherent distinctness – a moral singularity – which places him outside
the pale of ordinary values and judgement. He cannot be estimated by
reference to prevailing mores within the community, by social norms
suggested or embodied by characters within the drama. He cannot be judged
and found wanting according to everyday ethical contexts, for he is
extraordinary. C.H. Whitman affirms that the excellence of the Sophoclean
hero is beyond the comprehension of most of the members of his
community of 'lesser souls': their opinions are based on standards and norms
which are inapplicable to the heroic. His areté is a 'supra political moral
possession' which compels his reality and which submits to no outer
influence.50 It is an individualism which defies description and criticism in
terms of ordinary ethical standards, an absolute, unvariable instinctive
essence.

The Sophoclean tragic hero cannot be subject to facile value-judgements:
to define him as too proud or too fierce is to strip him of his essential worth.
Those faults which normally are attributed to him can have no relevance in
the consideration of the heroic personality. Any conclusion that Ajax's
downfall and death are ultimately attributable to his pride or anger, that
Antigone's stubborn pride is responsible for her death, or that Coriolanus's
passion and arrogance are to answer for his tragedy, fails to take account of the
basic traits of heroic *areté*. These qualities are not faults but are indispensable, essential elements of the unique heroic personality, as portrayed by Sophocles. The hero's ethical conviction is shown, through the drama, to be inappropriate and antagonistic to his society only because it is highly principled and incorruptible in comparison with the unreliable standards of his community. The tragedy arises chiefly from the pettiness and instability of society as a whole, the general failure to comprehend or to value the heroic.

b. Interdependence between individual and community

The antagonistic relationship between the Sophoclean tragic hero and his community stems from the confrontation between the heroic and the ordinary. At a more fundamental level, however, it can be ascribed to the moral conflict which emerged when the archetypal heroic individual challenged developing political, social, and ethical institutions. In Athens, prior to Sophocles, one of the basic tenets of the ancient city-state community had been interdependence, the reciprocal co-operation which existed as an essential prerequisite between the individual and his fellows. The value and dignity of each man derived in part from his necessary, symbiotic relationship with the community. Æschylus saw life as a conflict, and explored in his drama a scheme which was all-inclusive. The individual lived within the community according to stringent ancient lore, and was accountable to transcendent forces which determined his destiny. The family or clan was more significant than the individual, and through retribution, over generations, transgression was always punished.

Sophocles, born thirty years after Æschylus, lived in the more prosperous, enlightened and optimistic Periclean era, and focused attention in his tragedies on the individual. He moved from the more primitive form of theology presented by Æschylus, to a recognition of the inherent dignity and power of the heroic individual. The elemental interdependence and mutual support between the individual and his society, which had been such a significant basis for the well-being of the city-state, came under scrutiny for the first time in the tragedies of Sophocles. No longer could the community demand unquestioning compliance from all its members. No longer did the
individual assert his ethical validity exclusively through, and by means of, his place in the community. The individual assumed a new significance in his own right, as his individuality was asserted over previously dogmatic and unquestioned traditions and social institutions. There was a new scepticism, which Sophocles portrayed in his tragedies, about traditional wisdoms, about the belief-system of the ancients, their assumptions concerning social organization and control by higher forces.

In England, some two millennia later, there was a corresponding transition from reciprocal co-operation within the community to the assertion of singular individuality. During the Middle Ages, much emphasis had been placed on the individual's responsibility and obligation to his fellow-man, to the community. Subsequently, there was a movement towards the recognition of the significance of the individual identity, and the ability and necessity to express this individuality in the face of social opposition. In the latter part of the sixteenth century there was a concept of society in which the community-at-large was considered in terms of an organic unity, 'a system of mutual responsibilities'. In *Coriolanus* Shakespeare examines the validity of this concept through the conflict between Coriolanus and the community. Janet Dillon suggests that with the increasing emphasis on the individual identity as defined from within, society came to embody 'a more remote and abstract meaning', a sense in which the group was 'set apart from, almost against, the individual'.

Thus in England, in the early seventeenth century, Shakespeare paralleled in *Coriolanus* the issues which had engrossed Sophocles in his tragedies in Athens in the fifth century B.C. Once again a dramatist challenged the previously acknowledged notion that the well-being of the state and its members was dependent on the mutual support between individual citizens and the community as a whole. As Sophocles had done in his tragedies, Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* uncompromisingly confronts the traditional assumptions about society and the identity of the hero, and the complex interrelationships between the two. Both dramatists draw attention to the extraordinary individual who is set apart from society by his unique essence. The tragedies present an examination of the heroic identity, which implicitly

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reveals the limitations and faults of the society.

As the heroic identity demands self-expression rather than self-control or constraint, and as social institutions tend to require compliance rather than dissidence, there must always be conflict between the hero and the prevailing social attitudes, and it is from this conflict that the essence of the heroic identity can be comprehended. Throughout Greek literature the heroic individual is represented as someone who considers himself to be autonomous, as beyond the law, if the law should conflict with his personal integrity. Consequent on this attitude and the fallibility of society, it is inevitable that the heroic individual and his community should be incompatible.

Sophoclean tragedy reflects the manner in which the moral conflicts between the heroic individual and his society are engendered by the questionable demands which society makes on the heroic nature. In six of the seven extant Sophoclean tragedies the hero is shown in direct and defiant opposition to all around him, although it is most particularly in the Ajax and the Antigone that the heroic identity is presented and examined in terms of the complex ethical relationship between society and the extraordinary individual. The tragedies present a defiant, aggressive hero who is constantly at odds with the community, excluded from society and the potentially corrupting demands of society by the pursuance of his unique moral principles. The analogy with Coriolanus is insistent.

Sophoclean drama decisively probes the nature of the heroic personality: his identity, his very essence is under scrutiny. He stands apart, isolated by his inability to conform to the mediocre or the facile mode of conduct. The hero cannot, nor will he, conform for the sake of expediency to social mores. He is driven by inherent standards of being and of behaviour, which are incomprehensible to his fellow-citizens and it is inevitable that he should be misunderstood and therefore reviled:

MENELAUS: When common men
Dare to defy the powers set over them,
They show their evil nature.

Ajax: ll. 1069–1071

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Yet 'tis the sign of an unworthy nature when a subject deigns not to obey those who are set over him.

II. 1069–1070

CHORUS: crushed out
By pride of heart and the sin
Of presumptuous tongue.

Antigone: II. 597–598

by folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart.

1. 604

Caius Marcius was
A worthy officer i' th' war, but insolent,
O'ercome with pride, ambitious past all
thinking,
Self-loving —

And affecting one sole throne,
Without assistance.

Coriolanus: IV.6.29–33

Like Ajax and Antigone, Coriolanus is different from other men, and it is the nature of this difference which the drama explores. The essence of the heroic individual cannot be perceived without the apprehension that it is not he who is at fault for failure to meet standards set by society, but his fellow citizens and the social institutions that are wanting.

As it embodied social organization sustained by social institutions, the polis for the Greeks was the fundamental unit of civilization. As such it signified harmony and security, compared with the hostile environment outside. In Sophoclean tragedy, however, the polis is depicted as the source and focus of incompatibility. In Coriolanus Shakespeare depicts early Republican Rome as primitive and claustrophobic, confined within city walls, surrounded and constantly threatened by hostile neighbours. As Sophocles did, so does Shakespeare portray the city as inimical rather than supportive in its relationship with the hero. Menace from without is paralleled by menace from within; seething discontent, treachery and open conflict are rife among the citizens. Rome is a city at war with itself and its neighbours. Despite the walls ostensibly separating and protecting citizens from outside threat, the enclosed citizens are shown to be more destructive to their own environment.
than is the enemy. Sophoclean tragedy characteristically presents situations in which the normal boundaries between the civilized and the hostile are disrupted, in which social institutions are imperfect and social relationships are exploited and manipulated (see pp. 208–210, below).

Hostility of environment is fundamentally attributable to moral conflict within the polis. The heroic is invariably presented in conflict with the mediocre, the tragic hero shown to be necessary to the society, yet rejected by it. Within the community the hero achieves high standing by virtue of his exceptional qualities. Yet those same qualities lie at the root of the characteristic friction between him and the members of the community. The resulting tensions reveal the excesses and the integrity of the heroic, and simultaneously expose the incompetence and unreliability of the citizenry. Criticisms levelled against the hero and demands made of him serve to exacerbate an already inflammable situation. The Sophoclean hero must speak out boldly and act against laws, words or conduct which he recognizes to be morally unjustifiable. His stance may be insolent and arrogant, his temperament excessive, his words and actions provocative, but he is never shown to be self-deluding or unworthy. Opponents are compelled ultimately to concede his merit.

Antigone recognizes that well-established, commonly acknowledged social or political institutions are not necessarily equitable merely because they are universally accepted. Despite general condemnation of her inflexible stand against Creon's edict, she is manifestly defending a significant principle, denial of which would debase her own integrity and that of the state:

ANTIGONE:  
Live, if you will; 
Live, and defy the holiest laws of heaven. 
ll. 72–73

compare Jebb:  
be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have established in honour.  
l. 77

In analogous fashion, Coriolanus recognizes that he must express his resolute dissatisfaction with, and opposition to, those laws, customs or practices which

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he knows will bereave the state 'of that integrity which should become' (III.1.158–159).

In Sophoclean tragedy the heroic individuality and nobility of the protagonist is not in doubt. It is essential, however, to comprehend the necessity of the hero's idiosyncratic modes of speech and behaviour, for it is only through these peculiar reactions that his essential nature and the reasons for his conduct can be fully understood, rather than merely the fact and expression of them. Comprehension of the heroic personality and conduct includes a perception that the social pressures exerted on the hero compel his non-compliant, committed stance. Sophoclean tragedy confirms that the hero is driven by an inescapable inner compulsion to act as he does, in response to unjust, hypocritical or unreasonable situations.
CHAPTER IV
The heroic personality
1. Heroic *areté*

a. The aspect of 'growth and change' in the heroic personality

There is a necessary relationship between the hero's expression of his identity, and his conduct and participation within the community. Robert Weimann suggests that Shakespeare incorporates a paradox in the manner in which he includes the radical notion of individuality within the contemporary viewpoint concerning the requisite social aspect of a character's identity. Thus, socially, each man must "communicate his parts to others" in order to establish his identity, but 'at the same time ... he can be "lord of anything", he can claim "to have that which he hath".' In this way, Weimann observes, Shakespeare 'reflects an awareness ... of a new type of contradiction between society and the individual'.

Weimann considers the dialectic between identity and relationship, between individual action and social circumstance ... [as] ... the centre of the greatest of changes in the newly achieved art of Renaissance characterization. The results are almost always tragic ... [The hero's] ... destiny is a social one, and as such it remains subject to forces and collisions beyond his control' (p. 29).

He suggests further, that it is only when the hero and society interact that the 'dimension of growth and change' of the character are manifest (p. 25).

The concept of 'growth and change' in the heroic personality is valid with regard to the majority of Shakespeare's tragedies, in which the tragic hero develops through the drama towards an understanding of himself, the requirements of his social position, and his relationships within the community. This dimension to the heroic personality, the development of understanding and self-awareness, must be achieved within a social context: he must learn to define himself with reference to his role in society. In contrast, the Sophoclean hero is fully developed throughout the drama, unchanged and unchangeable. A brief glance at Shakespearean tragic heroes from the specific perspective of confident self-knowledge or of an alteration in their attitudes or conduct through the action, will indicate the extent to which they differ from the Sophoclean heroic attribute of immutable absolute certainty.

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King Lear demands public expressions of devotion from his daughters in order to enhance his sense of self. He imagines that he can barter for their love:

Lear. Which of you shall we say doth love us most? That we our largest bounty may extend Where nature doth with merit challenge. I.1.50–53

Lear. Now, our joy, . . . what can you say to draw A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak. Cor. Nothing, my lord. . . .
Lear. Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again. . . . Mend your speech a little, Lest you may mar your fortunes. 81–94

Lear fails to understand that his two roles – father and king – cannot sanction similar behaviour. He demands, with a king's authority, expressions of filial love which should be given freely and not under compulsion, and mistakes such enforced declarations for sincerity. He believes that the fulsome public protestations of Goneril and Regan are worth more than Cordelia's reticence, and, in his 'hideous rashness', his obsession with title and authority, with 'the name, and all th' addition to a king . . . our power', is betrayed and exploited by the daughters he trusted. The dawning realization of their perfidy causes Lear to doubt his own identity in his gradual progression towards madness and belated self-awareness:

Does any here know me? This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? . . . Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I.4.225–229)

Lear finally recognizes that 'all th' addition to a king . . . [his] lendings', are not essential to the intrinsic man, and in his newly-acquired sympathy for other 'poor naked wretches', begins to understand not only himself, but all men. It has been necessary for him to grow and change, to learn to experience and understand sympathy 'feelingly', in order to perceive the nature of Chapter IV
magnanimous authority, loving relationships, and the distinction between outward show and the integrity of word and act. He must develop from one who 'hath ever but slenderly known himself' to 'a very foolish fond old man', who recognizes and admits his past fallibility and self-deception. He develops through suffering and madness to 'comprehend his "mad" view of the "sane" world – that what appears a distorted image is in fact a true reflection'.

Othello, like Lear, understands neither himself nor others. Like Lear, he has an imperfect appreciation of the true nature of love, but sinks into more irrational, unseemly, and ultimately more deplorable conduct than Lear does. Othello's self-delusion, his misconceptions, and his social inexperience account for his easy deception – about Iago: 'this fellow's of exceeding honesty' – and about love:

She's gone; I am abus'd; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage

Most essentially, Othello's gullibility and his ill-treatment and murder of Desdemona reveal his disastrous lack of faith in his own judgement, and in his wife: 'Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell... Impudent strumpet!' (IV.2.40, 82). He idealizes and romanticizes his love for Desdemona, as he does his own personality, and his blindness to reality results in the degradation and destruction of his marriage, his ideals, and himself. Even after he realizes the truth, he still perceives himself as 'an honourable murderer', as 'one not easily jealous' (V.2.297, 348). In fact he thinks of himself in the same exotic, romantic and adventurous terms as he did previously, and fails to achieve complete self-understanding: he is a 'base Indian... a turban'd Turk' (350, 356). He does, however, at the end regain his dignity, as he sends his last message to the senate before stabbing himself, and finally gains understanding of his folly in trusting Iago, and of the essential purity of Desdemona and her love.

Hamlet appears to develop through the drama from a doubting, self-conscious procrastinator to a tragic hero who fulfils his moral obligation despite his mental anguish. He experiences fearful conflict in his struggle to

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understand or come to terms with the reality of his situation, the mystery and disorder of his world. Hamlet's perception of the nature and motives of those about him is superior to that of Othello or Lear. He understands his ethical obligation, but cannot immediately bring himself to act. He deludes himself about his motives, the reasons he offers for his hesitancy are constantly changing 'Am I a coward?/Who calls me a villain...?' (II.2.565–566), and he must eventually cry: 'why, what an ass am I!' (578). Amid the doubt, he seems to grow and change, to accept the necessity for resolute action, the judicious purpose behind the deed:

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
...there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow...the readiness is all.

V.2.10, 212–216

Antony degenerates before and during the drama, and is portrayed as 'the triple pillar of the world transform'd/Into a strumpet's fool' by his intertemperate infatuation for Cleopatra (I.1.12–13). He is reduced to an ineffectual parody of his former self, is led astray into unbecoming behaviour, futile effort, and ignominious retreat. He constantly queries and doubts his own essence:

I
Have lost my way for ever.
...
Authority melts from me...
I am Antony yet...

Here I am Antony;
Yet cannot hold this visible shape


Antony's uncertainty and folly, his humiliating loss of prestige, and his bungled, unheroic death provoke a measure of sympathy for greatness gone off. More essentially, however, the drama rouses feelings of disappointment and dismay at Antony's lack of resolution and loss of reputation, rather than a sense of admiration for his former heroic qualities.

Macbeth's initial irresolution, despite his unrestrained ambition, and his subsequent submission to his wife's compelling verbal pressure, reveal his
physical and moral unpredictability:

Macb. We will proceed no further in this business.

Lady M. What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;

Macb. If we should fail?

I am settled

I.7.31, 47–49, 59, 79

His ambition and moral vulnerability make him susceptible to influences which motivate him to commit a deed which profoundly disturbs him. Nevertheless, he subsequently arranges yet more murders in a most calculating and callous manner, as heartless resolution appears to replace moral sensibility:

I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

II.2.50–52

for't must be done to-night,
and with him,
To leave no rubs nor botches in the work,
Fleance his son . . .
must embrace the fate
Of that dark hour.

III.1.130–137

From this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand . . .
The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife, give to the edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line.

IV.1.146–153

Macbeth elicits only fleeting admiration for his courage: his death arouses little or no sorrow, for he is from the outset obsessed with selfish objectives, and is progressively more unscrupulous and merciless. He shows no indication of moral growth and change but is, at the end, a lesser man than he

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was formerly:

\[
\begin{align*}
Macb. & \quad \text{I have supp'd full with horrors;} \\
& \quad \text{Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,} \\
& \quad \text{Cannot once start me.}
\end{align*}
\]

...  

\[
\begin{align*}
Sey. & \quad \text{The Queen, my lord, is dead.} \\
Macb. & \quad \text{She should have died hereafter;}
\end{align*}
\]

V.5.13–18

Only Coriolanus among Shakespeare's tragic heroes exhibits an undeviating consistency of character throughout the drama. The complexities of character manifested by the other tragic heroes find no analogy in Coriolanus. His character is unequivocal and singular. Always resolute, he remains steadfast to that which is his essential identity. He is never shaken by the tormenting doubts or indecision experienced by other Shakespearean tragic heroes, nor can he be persuaded or tempted to change his attitude or his actions. This does not indicate an undeveloped, inadequate, or static personality, but is evidence of his positive self-awareness and unwavering constancy of attitude and purpose. It is his indestructible confidence in his own worth which differentiates Coriolanus from others within the Shakespearean canon. It is, too, this quality which is most akin to the areté of the Sophoclean tragic hero.

Coriolanus, like the Sophoclean hero, lives within a community but does not depend on his position in that community to define or mould his character. The dimension of personal growth and change relative to his status in the community is inapplicable to the Sophoclean hero – as it is to Coriolanus: there is neither development nor alteration in his character throughout the drama. Nor need there be. This is not a defect of the drama or in the characterization of the hero, for the Sophoclean hero is, unalterably, from beginning to end confidently himself. His heroic essence is bound up with his sure understanding of himself, his position in the community, and the certain – but ultimately thwarted – knowledge of what that society ideally should be. The ideal of a past age, embodied in the Sophoclean tragic hero, is out of step with the reality of his society. His principles have no relevance within the community, which may attempt to change him, but must always

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fail.

The tragic hero says, at least implicitly, that his life does not need to mean something with reference to other lives, because it is something in itself. In this essential quality Coriolanus is an archetypal tragic hero. He takes full responsibility for his own destiny within the social context, through his adherence to a strict personal code of being. The Sophoclean hero typically manifests supreme confidence in himself and his conduct; he expresses no doubts about his identity, or about his mode of behaviour. Antigone's certainty about the soundness of her instincts is a feature of her personality which remains unchanged and unchangeable throughout the drama. She constantly affirms this, and is prepared to die rather than compromise her moral principles:

I will bury my brother;  
And if I die for it, what happiness!  
Convicted of reverence —  

II. 66–68

Undeviating moral certainty is a natural concomitant to precise self-knowledge, and is a defence against abuse or manipulation. The Sophoclean hero is confident of his own integrity and cannot be persuaded or dominated by the will or the opinions of others.

Coriolanus is at all times certain of his own worth, keenly understands the emotions and motives of others, and needs no confirmation that his viewpoint or his conduct are approved. He dismisses his service to the state as that which any true Roman should perform:

I have done  
As you have done — that's what I can; induc'd  
As you have been — that's for my country.  

I.9.15–17

His open scorn of the citizens is based on certain knowledge and practical experience of their unreliability and cowardice: 'He that trusts to you, /Where he should find you lions, finds you hares' (I.1.168–169). His understanding of the ambition and machinations of the tribunes is blatantly outspoken; he cares nothing for the good opinion of those he does not respect. Something of his understanding of, and his indifference to, public reaction is expressed by

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the officers at the Capitol:

2nd Off. Therefore, for Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition, and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see.

II.2.11-14

He is impervious to suggestion, coercion or guile. The tribunes attempt to manipulate him through the medium of the citizens, whom they rehearse in responses calculated to inflame him:

Sic. If I say fine, cry 'Fine!' — if death, cry 'Death!' ... 

Bru. Put him to choler straight.

III.3.16, 25

They imagine that they have out-maneuvered him, but he continues to be essentially his own man, confident and unbowed: 'I banish you./And here remain with your uncertainty!' (125–126). He may be banished from Rome, but will remain always as he was formerly.

From Homer onwards, Greek heroes in epic verse and in tragic drama manifest the essential quality of an inherent personal integrity — aretē — which defines them as heroes. Ide identifies the Roman ideal of epic heroism in Coriolanus as deriving from the Greek concept of aretē, and states that 'the aretē of The Iliad ... is reflected not only in Coriolanus's martial superiority but in the patrician political philosophy of a natural "aristocracy" (a word derived etymologically and conceptually from aretē').

Coriolanus's attitude, in line with that of the Sophoclean hero, relates to a sense of the natural qualification of the patricians, 'the honour'd number', to exercise authority in Rome. This view may be out of step with the development towards a Republic in the Rome of the drama. It reflects, however, at a most fundamental level, a purely intuitive, unreasoned belief in the time-honoured privilege of the patrician class, reinforced by a rational understanding of his actual experience in peace and war of the unreliability of the plebeians. He may perceive that the nobles are in fact less principled than they ought to be, that they abandon him when he needs them, but he cannot
alter his attitude, which is founded on a primitive, essentially apolitical conviction. If he is concerned at all about social change, his anxiety is exclusively for the widespread malady within the community and for the effect that this ultimately must have on Rome.

b. 'Man's character is his fate'

The operation of heroic areté is intuitive and irresistible. There is no alternative, for it is the quintessential basis of the heroic identity. Heraclitus of Ephesus, c. 500 B.C., stated that a man's character is his god-sent destiny, his inward being, and 'in this sense one's own character is also one's destiny (daemon), for that judgement . . . which determines one's destiny is clearly character-based'. For the Sophoclean hero, his essential identity is one with his mode of behaviour: he speaks and acts according to the dictates of an integrity which defines him. His decisive self-assurance incorporates the conviction that no concession or adjustment is possible, that any impairment of his integrity must inevitably cause him to forfeit his inherent heroic identity: for heroic identity is founded on moral disposition.

The Sophoclean hero must possess this areté; he cannot learn to achieve it, nor, having it, can he alter his attitude. Defiant, aggressive, sure, he asserts his right always to be himself. His moral consciousness and self-understanding are from the outset innate and functional and do not develop through the drama. His self-confidence is never shown to be misplaced, and his integrity is not an expression of defiant and undisciplined egocentrism, but of indispensable necessity. It is an individual ethical perception, a demanding elemental code of being, which acknowledges no claims of social mores, and which can neither be attained nor comprehended by lesser men. Coriolanus fulfils this pre-requisite, alienated yet determined in his adherence to a code of behaviour which will not compromise his character or integrity:

Let them pull all about mine ears, present me
Death on the wheel or at wild horses' heels;
... yet I will still
Be thus to them.  

III.2.1–5

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Founded as it is upon heroic *areté*, the heroic identity is thus of a different order than the identity of the non-heroic: his words, actions and reactions issue from unique moral imperatives and cannot therefore be subject to conventional estimation.

Self-preservation in terms of the Sophoclean hero relates to the adherence to an inner precept of order so that an essential integrity may be maintained, and does not relate to the preservation of life. It is in this sense that the heroic character is also the heroic destiny, as Heraclitus claims it to be. If, finally, public opinion appears to prevail against heroic opposition, the inevitable death is tragic, but not a defeat of heroic integrity. The self-discipline which impels the Sophoclean hero to choose death rather than to compromise his integrity is often apprehended as egotistical or self-destructive individualism: it is, rather, a desire to live nobly, or not at all. The Sophoclean hero dies with his convictions intact and vindicated.

Momentary vacillation or mental torment have no significant or long-term effect on the affirmation of integrity. Antigone may feel a natural regret that her inevitable death must deprive her of the worldly fulfilment which would otherwise be hers:

> You see me, countrymen, on my last journey,  
> ...  
> No wedding day; no marriage music;  
> Death will be my bridal dower.

Il. 801–806

Despite this instinctive human emotion, an urgent moral compulsion drives her to act in a manner which honours 'those things to which honour truly belongs' (Il. 944-945). Regret there may be, even transient qualms, for these heroes are human and sensitive: 'I am loth/To leave a widow and a fatherless child/Here among enemies' (*Ajax*, Il. 653–655).

> Cor. Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow  
> In the same time 'tis made? I will not.  
> ...  
> But out, affection!  
> All bond and privilege of nature, break!  
> Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.  
> ...

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my young boy
Hath an aspect of intercession which
Great nature cries 'Deny not'.

Coriolanus, V.3.20–21, 24–26, 31–33

Ultimately, however, their essential integrity cannot be denied, and they
must die as they lived: loyal and undeviating to values beyond the reach of
ordinary men.

Sophoclean areté includes the attribute of unflawering honesty which is
more than sincerity or adherence to the truth; it is a deep-seated, fundamental
abhorrence of any conduct or viewpoint which might fall short of those
standards which the hero regards as requisite for a good citizen. He applies
these criteria of behaviour stringently to himself at all times, and is
vehemently intolerant and outspoken about those who are inadequate to his
demanding ideals. Antigone manifests a typically rigorous attitude towards
Ismene, who, she feels, shows a discreditable lack of courage in her refusal to
disobey Creon's edict:

ISMENE: I fear for you, Antigone; I fear –
ANTIGONE: You need not fear for me. Fear for yourself.

Il.82–83

It is his uncompromising, intractable stance which earns the Sophoclean hero
his controversial reputation. His inevitable inclination to speak and to act
always in a manner which is consistent with his deepest beliefs must be
recognized for the highly principled stance it manifests, despite the offensive
tenor of his outbursts:

Mar. He that will give good words to thee will flatter
Beneath abhorring.

Coriolanus I.1.165–166

Accused of pride and arrogance, the Sophoclean hero expresses even at his
most vituperative, viewpoints which are consistent with the reality of the
situation as shown in the drama. His inflexible attitude, his unwillingness,
even inability, to conform to generally accepted modes of behaviour provoke
constant criticism, if not vicious antagonism, from those who resent or
misconstrue his conduct. Antigone is criticized by the chorus for being
stubborn and foolish: 'She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish/Not to
give way when everything's against her' (Il.475–476). Creon exercises his

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authority in an attempt to break her proud, obstinate spirit, which he feels poses a personal insult to himself as 'she gloats over her deed' (ll. 485–486).

In Coriolanus, misunderstanding, petty antagonism and vicious resentment are blatantly shown by all sections of the community. The patricians cannot comprehend why Coriolanus is unable to pretend to be other than he is, as they do, why he must always express his opinions with such uncompromising honesty:

Vol. Pray be counsell'd;
I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

Men. Well said, noble woman!

III.2.28–31

The plebeians discount his services to the state, stung by his scorn of their ignoble behaviour: 'Our enemy is banish'd, he is gone! Hoo-oo! (III.3.139). The tribunes express mean and malevolent determination to cause Coriolanus's downfall:

Bru. We must suggest the people in what hatred
He still hath held them; that to's power he would
Have made them mules . . .

Sic. and that's as easy
As to set dogs on sheep –

II.1.235–237, 246–247

Surrounded, therefore, by an atmosphere of incomprehension and moral insensibility, unable to compromise in order to conform, the Sophoclean hero is destined to be set apart from, yet bound to, his community. His alienation from the community is exacerbated by his inability to curb his outspoken convictions.

2. The concept of hamartia

If the hero's individuality is considered to be the cause of the eventual catastrophe, it would be convenient, but simplistic and inappropriate to lay the blame for the tragic conclusion on hamartia, or a tragic flaw in the hero's character. The section of Aristotle's Poetics in which he mentions hamartia has stimulated centuries of debate and conjecture. It is a term which has

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been used with familiarity by students of both Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, and generally has been interpreted to mean a fatal character flaw in the heroic personality, which can be held accountable for his downfall. This interpretation, however, has been for some time subject to considerable opposition.

R.D. Dawe quotes Rostagni's suggestion that *hamartia* should rather be defined as an involuntary error, caused by ignorance or the non-recognition of some fact or circumstance. Dawe maintains further, that Aristotle's examples of Greek tragedies, which are of 'the best type of tragedy', and which have 'proved the most influential in the history of later European tragedy . . . share the concept of some noble person going to his doom' (p. 94). Among the tragedies which fall into this category, he numbers the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*. He notes that the meaning of *hamartia* could be considered to be a composite of either human or divine ill-will, or, as Rostagni suggests, an error of judgement, which 'can be either entirely the responsibility of the man who makes it, or can be something induced, normally by the gods', thus ensuring that the protagonist 'has little choice but to make a decision that will later recoil on him with disastrous, and above all disproportionate, consequences' (pp. 94-95).

a. The inapplicability of *hamartia* to Sophoclean tragedy

Despite attempts to define *hamartia*, to apply it to heroic tragedy, the interpretation of *hamartia* as a fatal flaw is open to question, and the applicability of such a concept to Sophoclean tragedy is decidedly dubious. It is inconsequential, within the context of the present thesis, whether Aristotle intended the term to denote a tragic flaw or an error of judgement, caused by human failing and/or divine malevolence. The attribution of the catastrophe to *hamartia* in whatever sense must ultimately divert attention from the essential human tragedy to that which is more formulaic, which could be reduced to expository or causative constituents. Charles Segal notes that 'Whitman jettisoned the deeply-rooted idea of the tragic flaw . . . and opened the way for the appreciation of what is genuinely tragic in the Sophoclean hero'. Whitman rejects the concept of *hamartia*, claiming that the quality of
sóphrosyné is a 'glib formulation' which could not serve a tragedian 'faced with the paradox of human evil and human dignity.... Anything which offends the ethics of the critic's own day is likely to emerge as an hamartia.... The hamartia theory may take many forms, but it always fits the critic better than it fits the play'.

The tragedy of Ajax, of Antigone, or of Coriolanus cannot, therefore, be held to derive entirely from specific faults of the heroic personality such as pride or anger. A.P. Rossiter affirms this: 'the "tragic flaw" analysis is far too simple. It will never do to say that Coriolanus's tragedy is "caused" by his being too proud and unyielding and just that'. Yet these heroes are undeniably proud, angry and arrogant. Their passions, as all else about them, are extraordinary: as such, they cannot be subject to ordinary moral judgements. Whitman specifically objects to the 'substituting [of] the moral mean for the heroic extreme' and considers 'the insufficiency of idealistic philosophy to deal with tragedy' with reference especially to criticism of classical tragedy; he indicates, too, its inapplicability to Shakespearean tragedy:

There is a certain low brand of dramatic criticism... which offers solutions such as: If Oedipus had only controlled his temper better, he would not have come to grief; or, Othello could have saved himself a great deal of trouble if he had been less naive. These tasteless vulgarisms... destroy the play rather than elucidate it

The Heroic Paradox, pp. 47-48

While neither specifically discounting nor affirming the principle of hamartia as responsible for the tragic outcome, Fredson Bowers appears to consider the concept of a crucial decision which is provoked by a tragic flaw in the heroic personality. He maintains, with reference to Shakespearean tragedy, but the assertion is equally relevant to Sophoclean tragedy -- or, indeed, any tragedy -- that 'in the world of tragedy a protagonist is ethically responsible for his actions, and particularly for the decisions that motivate these actions'. He suggests further that the protagonist makes a 'crucial decision' which 'constitutes the turning-point of the play and will dictate the nature of the catastrophe', and cites as an example of an 'implementing

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action . . . simultaneous with the [tragic] decision' Hamlet's murder of
Polonius (p. 8).

The initiating of tragic consequences by a tragic, and generally misguided
decision can be applied to other Shakespearean tragedies. Othello's decision to
trust Iago results ultimately in his decision to believe the accusations and to
murder Desdemona. Macbeth's decision to heed the witches' prophesies and
to follow Lady Macbeth's scheme sets in motion the movement towards his
death. King Lear's decisions to divide his kingdom, to believe in Goneril and
Regan's sincerity, and to banish Cordelia motivate his personal tragedy.
Bowers notes that Shakespeare's protagonists are all the victims of a 'tragic
flaw' and that it is this character flaw which provokes the tragic decision, and
thus the final outcome of the tragedy (p. 12).

Whether the 'tragic flaw' assumption is confirmed or rejected with
relevance to Shakespeare's tragedies, it is significant that all the above
examples of crucial decisions which motivate disastrous actions are provoked
by some form of external stimulus, suggestion, or coercion. All the
protagonists are persuaded to adopt a new viewpoint or a different course of
action. Sophoclean tragedy, however, does not follow this pattern, nor,
significantly, does _Coriolanus_: no Sophoclean hero can be persuaded to
change his attitude, his words or his actions by outside pressure.

The Sophoclean hero characteristically speaks and acts in a certain way,
and his autonomous, steadfast resolve is typically in conflict with general
opinion. Antigone's decision to flout Creon's edict and to bury Polyneices,
Ajax's intemperate fury and subsequent suicide, and Coriolanus's
unremitting opposition to insincerity and unreliability are all ethical
imperatives dictated by heroic integrity. The Sophoclean tragic hero may meet
his doom as a consequence of his own words, actions or decisions – and
indeed does – but this does not necessarily attach blame to a character flaw, or
to the commission of some wrong.

C.H. Whitman notes that Sophocles 'turned deliberately away from the
suffering which was caused by sin [as in _Aeschylus_]. . . to the suffering which
comes of moral action or simply of itself', and that, tragically, 'all action and
not merely sinful action, may entail suffering'. H.D.F. Kitto suggests that

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critics who have found Sophoclean tragedy — and Coriolanus — 'puzzling or
defective' and the heroes elusive and unsatisfactory, are looking at the plays
from the wrong perspective and do not therefore grasp their 'amplitude'. In
an attempt to understand the meaning or the cause of his downfall, critics
have commonly sought to explain what is wrong with the hero.
Conveniently, blame has been laid on the Aristotelian hamartia, and the
hero's supposed character flaws can then be made accountable for his tragic
end. This solution inevitably constricts the drama into an undeservedly
artless design and obscures the 'something bigger' which the Greek poets and
Shakespeare give us (Kitto, p. 140).

Once the concept of hamartia is discarded, it becomes possible to recognize
that which makes the plays and heroes of Sophocles so enduringly and
painfully tragic. It is this tragic essence which Coriolanus shares with the Ajax
and the Antigone: the concept that a hero of undoubted distinction can suffer
adversity and death without attributable personal blame. In the tragic world
of Sophoclean drama, meaning is created by man. The tragedy stems not from
the actions of malevolent gods, fate, or a flaw in the heroic character, but from
the conflict between the heroic and the ordinary, the regrettable inadequacy of
the everyday nature to recognize and accommodate that which is
extraordinary in the human spirit. Calamity appears to be inescapable, and the
affirmation and maintenance of moral integrity in the face of overwhelming,
unmerited adversity is the essence of Sophoclean tragedy and of the
Sophoclean heroic personality.

b. Inward resolve: virtue rather than fault

For the Sophoclean hero, then, there is no tragic character defect which
impels his downfall, no momentous decision or pivotal action taken, which
might indicate a significant change of attitude. There is rather, inflexibly and
unalterably from start to finish, an instinctive adherence to a principled mode
of conduct, which typically generates a hostile reaction from society and
which results ultimately in disaster for the hero. The heroic standpoint,
however, cannot be held responsible for the tragedy: there is no sense, in
Sophoclean tragedy, of heroic fault. The Sophoclean hero goes to his death as

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defiant as he has been throughout his life, unrepentant and fully convinced that he has acted always in accordance with his essential integrity. Coriolanus manifests this characteristic absence of moral adjustment. He is, at the end, as he was formerly: forceful and committed, determined to defend his honour against insults and lies.

In Sophoclean tragedy, as in Coriolanus, it is the direct, relentlessly honest nature of the hero and his reactions against improbity, which make the tragedy inevitable. Only in that sense, of an unremitting and vehement opposition to unprincipled behaviour, can the Sophoclean hero be considered to bring about his own tragedy. Fredson Bowers's attribution of the reaffirmation of initial error, or the justice of a retributive conclusion, in the Greek tragedies he considers, are concepts which are more applicable to Æschylean than Sophoclean tragedy.18 Such facile cause and effect resolution would inevitably detract from the tragic effect of Sophoclean drama, in which the very nature of the tragedy arises from a certain but unacceptable fact that disaster is not a punishment from the gods or retribution for wrong (as it is in the Oresteia), but an inescapable and therefore tragic part of the human condition.

C.H. Whitman affirms the essentially human dimension of Sophoclean tragedy: 'Choice, action, suffering, and death are the domain of humanity. The gods do not enter it – at least, not in Sophocles. All motive comes from within the actors, and only in the sense of an inward moral standard, which is itself a kind of divinity, can any god be called responsible for Antigone's death'.19 Her suffering and death cannot be blamed on the sin of her father or her own self-will, as the chorus habitually tend to do:

My child, you have gone your way  
To the outermost limit of daring  
And have stumbled against Law enthroned.  
This is the expiation  
You must make for the sin of your father.  

ll.863–867

Compare Jebb:

Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against that throne where Justice sits on

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high thou hast fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall. But in this ordeal thou art paying, haply, for thy father's sin.

ll.853–856

The chorus generally assert, somewhat self-righteously, their moral principles and religious convictions, but they evince no real understanding of the underlying dilemma in Antigone's decision. They imagine that her disobedience and self-will (ll.876–877) are at the root of her tragedy, and fail to realize that her unflinching adherence to a superior moral code is a virtue rather than a fault. Whitman affirms this: 'It is useless to speak of the defects of Antigone's qualities; there are no defects. Nor need there be any fault whereby her fall is justified... It is therefore clear that Antigone's famous stubbornness... is really moral fortitude' (Sophocles, p. 90).

Similarly, the character flaws which traditionally have been held responsible for Coriolanus's downfall are in reality the manifestation of those heroic, moral qualities which place him beyond the comprehension of his fellows. H.D.F. Kitto notes that Shakespeare's 'perspective' in Coriolanus was not 'as Plutarch's was, on the glaring faults in one man which ruined so much that was noble in him'. Coriolanus's pride and inflexibility are integral components of his heroic areté and are testimony to his moral principle and purpose. Indeed, if he had been more moderate he would, in Sophoclean terms, have been less heroic, and ultimately less tragic.

The quality of sóphrosynē, or temperance, is one which has been ascribed to Sophoclean tragedy in order to express the indispensable merit of the golden mean, of control in all things. It is, however, as inappropriate to the nature, attitudes, and behaviour of the Sophoclean tragic hero as is the concept of hamartia. Nevertheless, there is extraordinary, idiosyncratic self-restraint in the conduct of the hero: not in the conventional sense of a reining-in of passions, but in the sense of a severity of behaviour, of a personal imposition of stringent moral standards. Rather than moderation or mediocrity, sóphrosynē in this sense embodies a fundamental quality of self-discipline which both implies and demands a profound self-knowledge. It is, however, most essentially not an attitude of temperance in speech or conduct. Self-control in the context of the Sophoclean hero is neither

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inhibition nor limitation, but is the firm and steadfast confrontation of those attitudes or laws which, by their implementation, threaten to prevent self-fulfilment, or to compromise the integrity of self or city-state. With reference to *Antony and Cleopatra*, Janet Adelman asserts that 'temperance . . . is inimical to heroism': this is especially applicable to the Sophoclean hero.

Reasonableness, moderation and temperance are not qualities which define the Sophoclean tragic hero, nor indeed Renaissance man, whose instinct was to be individualistic, to manifest excess rather than restraint in his characteristic behaviour. The Sophoclean hero 'is not reasonable, refuses to be reasonable . . . and this terrible emotional consistency is one of [his] basic qualities'. He 'proudly . . . rejects sophrosyne' and transgresses the conservative code of behaviour commonly represented by the term and for so long mistakenly considered to be the hallmark of Sophoclean drama.

The views expressed by the chorus and other characters do not reflect those of Sophocles, for, as C.H. Whitman remarks, 'if we trust the chorus, Sophocles wrote about nothing but the evil effects of stubbornness. The mind of the chorus . . . is not a sufficient moral guide to Sophocles'. Similarly, the opinions of the Roman citizens do not constitute an indication of the manner in which we are to comprehend Coriolanus's character. Excesses of temperament and severe ethical behaviour place the Sophoclean hero beyond the understanding of the common, for whom any deviation from token or prudent rules of conduct constitutes culpable self-will. Pride, intransigence and intolerance are essential qualities of the Sophoclean hero. He recognizes no code of practice or social expectation which is antagonistic to his personal moral code: he is consequently criticized for behaving as if he were beyond the law:

CHORUS: A wilful man, doomed Ajax

CHORUS: You are the victim of your own self-will

Compare Jebb:

CH. Thy self-willed temper hath wrought thy ruin

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Pat. This man has marr'd his fortune.

Sic. he hath resisted law,
And therefore law shall scorn him further trial
Than the severity of the public power,
Which he so sets at nought.

_Coriolanus_, III.1.254, 267–270

The Sophoclean hero claims nothing more material nor tangible than his right to be himself. Unlike Coriolanus, who spurns words or rewards as signs of worth, King Lear demands ostentatious shows of affection, and the external trappings of royalty. Macbeth's unprincipled drive recognizes no limitations: Othello irrationally demands material proof of Desdemona's fidelity.

Personal ambition and tangible evidence of regard play no significant role in the expectation of the Sophoclean hero. His motivation proceeds from a different rationale than that of advancement, esteem or acquisition. In asserting his right always to be, rather than to have, to fulfilment rather than half measures or temperance, he passionately responds to any factor which challenges this right. His characteristic lack of regard for socially-accepted restraint is, paradoxically, in its highly-principled constancy, a pattern of rigid self-control.

Realization that the hero's tragedy cannot be attributed to some fatal defect of character – _hamartia_ of whatever order – necessitates the recognition that causality has no place in Sophoclean tragedy. Reasons for misfortune and retribution, both applicable in _Æschylean_ tragedy, are irrelevant in Sophoclean: suffering and catastrophe are not inflicted as appropriate punishment for culpability. Disaster can and does come arbitrarily; the hero's calamity comes as an inevitable consequence of a string of interacting circumstances which are not exclusively his responsibility. His attitude of inflexible confrontation with the community is rooted in an irresistible necessity to commit himself to a resolute stand, a heroic gesture. This gesture arises directly from the operation and demands of his _areté_ and consists of a principled opposition to anything which threatens his sense of right conduct. His heroic gesture may be a determined ethical stand on a specific issue, as is that taken by Antigone in her decision to bury Polyneices; or it may be a

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violent reaction to insult and injustice as is shown by Ajax.

Ajax's sense of affront over the award of Achilles's arms to Odysseus is provoked by what he perceives to be official public inequity, an insult to his heroic essence, and he is unable to contemplate life in the shadow of indignity. He makes the supreme heroic gesture of committing suicide rather than enduring what is to him, undeserved ignominy. Antigone reacts as she does to Creon's edict in an instinctive and committed manner: there is no possibility that she would contemplate acquiescence. Her heroic gesture to bury Polyneices is an expression of her most intrinsic moral attitude, an enterprise undertaken because she cannot do otherwise. Her heroic integrity – her aretē – excludes the possibility of any other response or mode of behaviour, although she knows that the burial of Polyneices must result in her death. C.H. Whitman states: 'Those who believe that Sophoclean heroes are faulty have puzzled embarrassedly over the passage in Aristotle's Poetics which quotes Sophocles as saying he made men as they ought to be. Should people be proud like Ajax, or stubborn like Antigone? The answer is yes, if they can really be like them'.

Coriolanus shares this inevitability of response – the necessity to make a defiant gesture based on ethical principles – with the Sophoclean hero. His mode of behaviour, his words and decisions, are motivated by a deeply-rooted sense of integrity and he is appalled at the conduct of his fellow Romans. His words may be impolitic or ill-timed and his reactions rash, but they emanate from the bedrock of his perception as to what is right and proper conduct for him, and ideally, for every Roman. Coriolanus's fundamental heroic gesture is an unremitting defiance of all sections of the community, which results in his banishment, and ultimately in his death. Realization of the eventual tragic outcome is no deterrent to the grand heroic gesture which the Sophoclean hero must make. His aretē demands it. It is not a flaw which is at the basis of the hero's tragedy, it is rather an absolute standard of impeccability, of irreproachability: 'excellence, not failure, is the source of tragedy'.

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3. Excesses of the Sophoclean temperament

The Homeric-Sophoclean image of the tragic hero inevitably reveals 'a glimpse of a past when men were greater than they are now, when in fact excess was the rule'. The portrayal of heroes in a manner which accentuates their stature is a tradition which began dramatically, morally, and physically on the Attic stage. Large masks ensured that characters could be identified in the huge theatres, and at the same time enabled the audience to perceive the protagonist to be extraordinary. Buskins added to his height, his physical stature, and his heroic presence. Physically and emotionally the ancient heroes had gigantic personalities, and they were thus initially dramatized. The general evolution of the tragic hero as a man of noble individuality and aggrandizement, as portrayed in ancient Greek culture, is at the root of the presentation of most tragic heroes in later Western literature.

Each of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is depicted with a commanding presence, a larger-than-life personality: physically and emotionally each dominates the stage. Nevertheless, Reuben Brower remarks that there are no heroes in Shakespeare - 'in the absolute sense of the word. Coriolanus comes nearest to the absolute'. And yet the very qualities which distinguish him as an archetypal Sophoclean hero are those which have caused him to be labelled an unpopular, repellent hero: his unreasonably extreme, inflexible temperament and arrogant self-assurance. In remarking the similarity between Ajax and Coriolanus, H.D.F. Kitto enumerates those traits which they have in common, each of which is characterized by the fact that it is excessive, immoderate, uncontrollable. They are superlative warriors, each overwhelmingly proud of his own superiority, each given to violent rages, each determined at all costs to defend and maintain his own conception of self.

The Sophoclean hero is excessive in everything he says and does. He dominates the drama by the extraordinary force of his will, his lack of moderation or compliance, and the passionate intensity of his reactions. He is misunderstood by compatriots and criticized for intransigence and pride:

MESSENGER: The gods have dreadful penalties in store
For worthless and redundant creatures, mortals

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Who break the bounds of mortal modesty.

_Ajax:_ II.760–762

Compare Jebb:

_ME._ 'lives that have waxed too proud ... are struck
down by heavy misfortunes from the gods ...'

II.756–758

_CREON:_ Proud thoughts do not sit well
Upon subordinates. This girl's proud spirit
Was first in evidence when she broke the law;

_Antigone:_ II.481–483

_Sic._ Was ever man so proud as is this Marcius?

_Bru._ He has no equal.

_Coriolanus:_ I.1.250–251

Choric or general criticism in Greek drama of the hero's immoderate
behaviour reveals the conservative and unremarkable natures of the
non-heroic characters, as it does their cautious but misconceived opinions.
Harry Levin remarks on the 'unusual number of choric roles' in _Coriolanus:_
'citizens, officers, soldiers, servants, other ranks of society'. These
contribute, as the chorus does in Greek drama, a barrage of dubious,
imperceptive, or malevolent criticism of the hero's pride, his intemperance,
his inability to conform.

Richard Ide asserts: 'Roman society finally repudiates [Coriolanus] because
he is too idealistic, too proud, and, as his pride is fully justified, too great'. The
passionate intensity which marks everything Coriolanus says and does is
very much a defining characteristic of the Sophoclean hero. It is a necessary
concomitant to a profound sense of self-confident superiority; for only
extreme self-reliance could be expressed with such inflexible resolve and
defiant determination in the face of any and all opposition. Ajax proudly
affirms his absolute conviction of his own pre-eminence:

One thing is certain – had Achilles lived
To name the champion worthiest to receive
His weapons in reward for valiant service,
They would never have fallen to other hands
Than mine.

II.439–443

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In similar mode, Antigone audaciously confirms her moral certainty and the virtue of her actions:

This punishment will not be any pain.
Only if I had let my mother's son
Lie there unburied, then I could not have borne it.
This I can bear.

II.470–473

Coriolanus shares this proud independence of being: careless of the consequences, he characteristically reacts with extravagant affirmation of principle:

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 clutch'd 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.

III.3.68–74

He is too absolute, too noble, excessive in those qualities which ultimately distinguish his Sophoclean essence, and which derive from the Homeric: "always to be the best, and superior to the others".33

Coriolanus's heroic individuality is integral to, and accounts for, those excesses which make him, as Kenneth Muir remarks, 'something more than the valiant, proud, intolerant, choleric, impolite treacherous politician he seems at first to be'.34 Censure tends to focus on his lack of self-control, his arrogant defiance of accepted social mores, his haughty, intemperate speech, his characteristic reactions to any sign of injustice or weakness. In similar fashion, Antigone's reaction to the inhumanity of Creon's edict is as precipitate as is Ajax's response to the tribunal's award to Odysseus. Although her retort may lack the physical violence of Ajax's retaliation, the vehemence of Antigone's verbal attacks on Ismene and Creon bears a similar stamp of principled resistance to moral outrage:

Publish it
To all the world! Else I shall hate you more.

Now you have caught, will you do more than kill me?

II.96–97, 498

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Like Ajax and Antigone, Coriolanus may be excessive, but is always scrupulous in his responses to any instance of improbity. Even his much-maligned first appearance, imperiously shouting abuse, is shown, in the development of the drama, to have the justification of a well-founded assessment of the unworthiness and unreliability of the citizens in war and in peace:

> What would you have, you curs,
That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
The other makes you proud . . .

> you are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice
Or hailstone in the sun.

I.1.166–8, 170–172

Cor. being press'd to th' war,
Even when the navel of the state was touch'd,
They would not thread the gates.

III.1.122–124

1 Cit. He has our voices, sir.

...  

3 Cit. He's not confirm'd: we may deny him yet.

2 Cit. And will deny him;
I'll have five hundred voices of that sound.

1 Cit. I twice five hundred, and their friends to piece 'em.

II.3.152, 206–209

Excess in fifth-century Athens was a feature of the heroic, and indeed was so recognized in sixteenth-century Europe. Salutati portrays the hero with 'a kind of excess which can be called heroic', and E.M. Waith suggests that the acknowledgement of the greatness of such a hero removes him from the usual moral judgements. This is in line with C.H. Whitman's opinion on the dubious validity of conventional moral judgements concerning the Sophoclean hero:

> the heroic will not always quite square with the moral. . . . Morality . . . is a restrictive kind of code of behaviour . . . [whereas] . . . the heroic code . . . in its earliest form in Homer . . . demands fulfillment rather than restraint of the self . . . through action and adherence to inner standards. Thus though it does indeed differ from our moral code, heroism is not
simply the opposite of the moral, but rather a different kind of approach toward behavior

*The Heroic Paradox*, pp.20–21

Thus a criticism of the tragic hero’s excesses on the basis of socially acceptable morality cannot comprehend his unique nature. Not for him the equivocation, the half-measures of the devious and the craven. He stands defiant against the laws, the people, and the codes of practice which threaten his very essence.

Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Plutarch’s account of Coriolanus does not follow Plutarch’s didactic objective. Plutarch describes details of behaviour, character traits, and episodes, which he feels elucidate or emphasize strengths or weaknesses of personality, which he comments on in an edifying manner:

> His behaviour was so unpleasant to them, by reason of a certain insolent and stern manner he had, which because it was so lordly, was disliked. And to saye truly, the greatest benefit that learning bringeth men unto, is this: that it teacheth men that be rude and rough of nature, . . . to be civill & curteous, and to like better the meane state, then the higher.36

Plutarch’s tone of censure concerning Coriolanus’s ‘insolent and stern manner’ is expressed by most of the characters in Shakespeare’s tragedy. This is not, however, testimony that Shakespeare intended Coriolanus to be so characterized. In order to comprehend the identity of the hero from the drama it is necessary to look beyond what is said about him, for the opinions and criticisms which are expressed about Coriolanus arise from impercipient, or are motivated by ill will or envy.37

a. Heroic pride

Criticism of Coriolanus’s pride as a character defect and the reason for his downfall is as common from critics of the play as it is from characters within the drama. H.D.F. Kitto asserts that Shakespeare’s intention in *Coriolanus* was to present ‘his nobility, his pride, [and] the way in which the one nullified the other’ (*Poesis*, p. 378). It is more to the point to comprehend the way in which the one is the other. The substance of his pride derives from his

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nature. This is not pride which is manifested in an 'unduly high opinion of one's own qualities', but is rather 'a sense of what befits one's position, preventing one from doing [an] unworthy thing'. Coriolanus's pride is a product of his integrity and his self-knowledge: confidence in his own merit results in an attitude which is arrogant and impatient because it is based on moral certainty and disapproval of those who fail to measure up to his unique standards. His justifiable pride in his own integrity and ability results in his harsh and disagreeable intolerance of attitudes or conduct which are less principled than his own.

Coriolanus's pride, like that of Ajax and Antigone, is intrinsic to his sense of self, and is substantiated within the drama. Like the Sophoclean hero, he knows his worth, and his arrogance and pride derive from this confident knowledge. Professor Philip Brockbank affirms both the distinctive Greek intrinsicality, and the paradoxical quality of Coriolanus's pride: 'pride, in a rich and authentic sense that returns us to the Greek concept of hubris, is the essence of Coriolanus; it is his vice and his virtue'. His pride is not, however, hubristic in the sense of a presumptuous attitude towards the gods, a divine affectation: the Sophoclean hero's aspiration is to excel in a human context. His pride is harmonized at a most fundamental level with his heroic integrity, and prevents him from acting in an unworthy manner. His pride in this sense is his 'truth', which he is determined to 'honour' (III.2.121).

Richard Ide attributes the 'fundamental distaste' of most critical opinion for Coriolanus to the fact that he is 'psychologically monolithic. He undergoes no essential change . . . [and] moves through the plot rather than develops with it; his attitudes . . . are predictable, indeed fiercely consistent, and his sense of self is fully developed' (p. 168). This, in essence, is a definition of the fundamental difference between Coriolanus and other Shakespearean tragic heroes, and is too, the reason for his identification with the tragic heroes of Sophocles. Although Coriolanus may appear to be 'psychologically monolithic' in his refusal to change, the portrayal of a hero in this way is fundamentally Greek, peculiarly Sophoclean. Coriolanus manifests an archetypal, self-assertive individualism which is an unchanging
demand for absolutes. Because the society he lives in may change but he
cannot, his attitude appears non-rational in the sense that he rejects conduct
or mores which, to society, are reasonable. The monolithic quality remarked
on is characteristic of the Sophoclean hero, who does not develop through
the drama: the tragedy 'slowly uncovers a character which is complete from
start to finish'.

A distinctive fusion of the human and the extraordinary, the
static and the dynamic, he is a self-sufficient and inflexible individual who
must live within and react to his community, and who is ultimately
destroyed but not impaired by the interaction.

Heroic extremes of action, aspiration and expression are condemned by all
as proud arrogance and intransigent self-will. Salutati defines the quality of
heroic pride not as hubris, but as megalopsychia, or magnanimity: 'the virtue
of justifiable pride'.

Neither the Greek nor Latin term carries any
underlying attitude of censure, each describing the nobility inherent in
greatness of soul. The Latin magnanimus, a vague term for virtue in
medieval ethics, is a translation of Aristotle's megalopsychia and
incorporates the qualities of courage, loftiness of thought and purpose, and
superiority to petty resentment or jealousy.

There are significant indications within the drama that the Sophoclean
hero should not be censured for his overbearing pride, despite numerous
assertions to the contrary. Ajax is roundly criticized for his arrogant boasting
which 'broke the bounds/Of mortal modesty' (ll. 776-777), but his pride is
ultimately vindicated by his erstwhile enemy, Odysseus: 'He was my enemy,
/But he was noble' (ll.1355-1356). Antigone compares herself with Niobe, a
traditional symbol of pride:

The daughter of Tantalus, a Phrygian maid,
Was doomed to a piteous death on the rock
Of Sipylus, which embraced and imprisoned her,
Merciless as the ivy;

ll.813-816

Aristotle, however, uses Niobe as an example of an 'excessive good', while
Sophocles regards her 'as an ideal of steadfastness in affliction', a model of
'good incontinence'. It is, essentially, a definitive confirmation of a
generally-accepted fault as a heroic virtue: 'this is not pride, or if it is, it is the
Chapter IV
right kind of pride, necessary to virtue'.\textsuperscript{42} Whitman affirms further, that despite universal censure, Antigone's sense of superiority should not be condemned as overweening pride: 'many critics to the contrary, there is no overbearing or overemancipated individualism in Antigone; indeed, her self-discipline is the most apparent thing about her.' Like Ajax who reaffirms his pride in choosing death instead of submission, Antigone 'chooses to die well rather than live badly' (p. 88).

Coriolanus's pride aligns him with the Sophoclean hero. Assured courage of his convictions enables him to reject conventional dependence on praise or blame. He does indeed pay himself with being proud, for his own understanding of his worth is the only confirmation he needs. Praise makes Coriolanus extremely uncomfortable, and especially any public commendation, for his modesty is genuine. His reluctance to have his exploits monstered is not evidence of false pride or of affected diffidence. It is rather a manifestation of his confidence that his conduct is at all times consistent with his moral code, and needs no affirmation from others. The ostentation of King Lear, and the self-dramatization of Othello are foreign to Coriolanus's nature. Not concerned with creating an impression, he has no interest in the opinions of others; he is true to his essential self, and needs no outside endorsement of his worth:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Her.}  
Know, Rome, that all alone Marcius did fight  
Within Corioli gates, where he hath won,  
With fame, a name to Caius Marcius; these  
In honour follows Coriolanus.  
Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!  

[Flourish.]

\textit{All.}  
Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!  

\textit{Cor.}  
No more of this, it does offend my heart.  
Pray now, no more.
\end{quote}

II.1.153–159

He characteristically counters any praise with emphatic displeasure and an embarrassed attempt to negate the necessity of, or basis for, such praise. His modesty is not at odds with his arrogant demeanour, for he feels that he has only done what he has to do to satisfy his own concept of right conduct, what others have done, or should do:

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No more, I say.
For that I have not wash'd my nose that bled,
Or foil'd some debile wretch, which without note
Here's many else have done, you shout me forth
In acclamations hyperbolical,
As if I lov'd my little should be dieted
In praises sauc'd with lies.

I.9.46–53

Plutarch's Coriolanus shows no hesitation in displaying his wounds for public approval, whereas Shakespeare's hero feels the exhibition to be demeaning and unnecessary. He needs no eulogies, no signs of approval — verbal or material — to bolster his sense of self or status; on the contrary, he feels that the public showing of his wounds degrades the acquiring of them:

To brag unto them 'Thus I did, and thus!'
Show them th' unaching scars which I should hide,
As if I had receiv'd them for the hire
Of their breath only!

II.2.145–148

His aversion to adulation is one with his lack of ambition: he desires no tokens of approval and has no desire for political honour. The ambition he is accused of, 'ambitious past all thinking ... affecting one sole throne' (IV.6.31–32), is not confirmed in the drama. His mother reveals her self-centred egotism in her desire for him to be consul, but he shows no such aspiration, claiming that his actions need no official reward; he feels that any ambition for debatable honours must be in conflict with his essential integrity. It is sufficient that he can be himself, remain true to his concept of what is fitting for himself, and for Rome:

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

Cor.
Know, good mother,
I had rather be their servant in my way
Than sway with them in theirs.

II.1.189–194

Coriolanus betrays, in his opening words 'Know, good mother', a hint of impatient disapproval for Volumnia's blatant, selfish eagerness for his political advancement: 'I ... my ... my ... I'. His reply effectively, and rather

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pointedly, communicates his own lack of ambition, and his intuition of personal obligation towards Rome. The verb 'sway' incorporates into the meaning of rule a sense of the instability and unreliability which he perceives to be prevalent in Rome.43

C.H. Whitman's explanation of Ajax's pride is as applicable to Coriolanus as it is to the Sophoclean hero. His pride

is identical with his best self, and if he had been less proud he would have been less good. To the everyday man who believes in getting through life as easily as possible, supreme arete often looks like mere pride, folly, and even hybris. But the quality which Sophocles saw exalting man from within has none of the irresponsibility of these sins. It is discipline, through and through.

Sophocles, p. 97

Coriolanus, like Ajax and Antigone, manifests this discipline: like them, he never wavers in his insistence on the rectitude and the maintenance of his moral position. Pride, arrogance, and stubbornness are the products of his defiant conviction.

b. Heroic rage

The classical hero can no more be condemned for his uncontrollable anger than he can for his pride. Immoderate rage is the dominant quality manifested by Homer's Achilles, the archetypal hero: in Allardyce Nicoll's edition of Chapman's Homer, Chapman states that 'the first word of [Homer's] Iliads is wrath'.44 Typical Sophoclean rage, derived from the Homeric, is a violent, vehement assertion of moral certainty in the face of opposition. It is characterized by a harsh – often vitriolic – and uncompromising attitude, a swift and immoderate eruption of anger and abuse. B.M.W. Knox asserts: 'The attempt to sway or hinder them provokes their anger; they are all angry heroes' (p. 21).

Antigone's self-confidence and her conviction of right conduct compels her to an impatient, peremptory manner of speech, an uncontrollable irascibility in the face of Ismene's faint-heartedness or Creon's dubious judgement:

Chapter IV
ISMENE: May the dead forgive me, I can do no other
But as I am commanded; to do more is madness.

ANTIGONE: No; then I will not ask you for your help.
Nor would I thank you for it, if you gave it.
Go your own way; I will bury my brother;

ll.64–66

Compare Jebb:

I, therefore, asking the Spirits
Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on
me herein, will hearken to our rulers; for 'tis
witless to be over-busy.

ANTIGONE: I will not urge thee, – no, nor, if thou yet
shouldst have a mind, wouldst thou be
welcome as a worker with me.
Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him:

ll.65–71

CREON: Did you know the order forbidding such an act?

ANTIGONE: I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.

CREON: And yet you dared to contravene it?

ANTIGONE: Yes.
That order did not come from God. Justice,
That dwells with the gods below, knows no such
law.

ll.449–454

Compare Jebb:

– knewest thou that an edict had
forbidden this?

ANTIGONE: I knew it: could I help it? It was public.

CREON: And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that
law?

ANTIGONE: Yes; for it was not Zeus who had published me
that edict; not such are the laws set among men
by the Justice who dwells with the gods below;

ll.447–453

Her fiercely defiant show of temper and rude intolerance are the distinctive
reactions of the Sophoclean hero who finds himself confronted with a
person, a mode of conduct, or a directive which he knows to be unworthy.
Any injustice is a direct affront to his moral sensibility: his massive passion is
aroused if he feels unjustly used, and he reacts precipitately.

Antigone's passionate outburst of anger – described by the messenger as
'screaming like an angry bird . . . crying and cursing' those who had

Chapter IV
desecrated Polyneices's body – is not merely an irascible outburst. Jebb suggests, in a note to line 423, above, that the alternative translation of 'shrill and bitter cry' should not forfeit the sense of pathos to that of bitter hostility. The Sophoclean hero may be inflexible and harsh, but he is intensely human, capable of tender love. Antigone is motivated by a moral obligation, but she is equally prompted by her love for her brother. The passionate anger of her assertion to Ismene 'against . . . me . . . against me' (ll. 31-32), is evidence of her deep sense of personal indignation at Creon's unjustifiable edict. Her rage, as Ajax's, is not irrational petulance; it is an outraged sense of integrity in the face of the base, the inept, or the unjust. She shows the same determination as does Ajax to do what she considers to be her moral duty, irrespective of the threat of certain death:

He has no right to keep me from my own.
... There is no punishment
Can rob me of my honourable death.

Antigone, ll.48, 106–107

Ajax's response to what is a confirmed miscarriage of justice similarly is not merely injured pride expressed in a raging tantrum: it is the reaction of a noble spirit to an unworthy act and a slur on his worth. The awarding of Achilles's arms to Odysseus, as the next greatest Achaean warrior, is considered by Ajax to be an inequity and an undeserved insult. His demoniacal rage is excessive and formidable, but his reaction, if not the savagery of it, is vindicated posthumously by Odysseus's admission that it was Ajax who correctly deserved the award:

I could not bring myself
To grudge him honour, or refuse to admit
He was the bravest man I ever saw,
The best of all that ever came to Troy,
Save only Achilles.

ll.1339–1343

Philip Vellacott considers that errors of moral judgement concerning tragic heroes, or of the moral standards delineated by 'persons and actions of the play', of which 'even the most revered scholar may be capable . . . are not unimportant; they affect major issues of tragedy'.45 Thus the criticism of these heroes as being immoderately proud and intemperately angry, in terms of Chapter IV
everyday standards of behaviour, must fundamentally diminish the tragedy, reducing it to a presentation of passion, a moralizing study which would sacrifice the tragic, human heart of the drama. Heroic rage, like heroic pride emanates from a nature which is excessive in all its attributes specifically because it is exceptional, and cannot be judged as a character flaw.

E.M. Waith identifies those of Coriolanus's qualities which have evoked most of the more contemporary criticism: 'in the eyes of the twentieth century... his very superiority repels sympathy, while his aristocratic contempt of the plebeians shocks the egalitarian. His pride and anger provide a convenient and conventional basis of disapproval'. Commenting on Plutarch's description of Coriolanus, Hermann Heuer concludes that the 'characteristic quality of Coriolanus is anger' (p. 61). Shakespeare's perspective in the drama, however, is much more ample: it is not to delineate flaws in the hero's character but to present a hero whose moral convictions and conduct expose as flawed the individuals and mores of his society. Like his pride, Coriolanus's rage is excessive, a product of his heroic temperament: if he were not so imperious, so passionately wrathful, he would be less heroic. His attitude and conduct repel and shock in terms of everyday morality, but his temper and conduct are unattractive only if 'the moral mean [is substituted] for the heroic extreme as the meaningful focus of moral judgement'.

Coriolanus shares with Ajax and Antigone a propensity to vehement outbursts of anger from the opening scene throughout the drama. His hostile encounters are not confined, as are Antigone's, within the city-state, but extend beyond the city walls and place him unremittingly in conflict for, and against Rome. J.C.F. Littlewood states that the 'spirit of war rules Coriolanus at all times'. He maintains further that this quality of 'aggressiveness... though it looks like... a destructive force... is... what we may have to depend on to maintain the inner meaning and the vital principle of cohesion of society' (p. 28). In fact, despite his unbridled and unpleasant hostility and disdain, Coriolanus manifests a well-founded concern about the general laxity and degeneration of ethical values in Rome. He bitterly predicts an alarming and potentially damaging loss of commitment and solidarity 'when what's

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not meet ... was law' and 'dishonour/Mangles ... true judgement' (III.1.167, 157–158).

There have been attempts to discover reasons for Coriolanus's irascibility, or to discern specific words which provoke his most violent outbursts. Michael Goldman subscribes to the idea of a 'buried trigger' which activates Coriolanus's anger, and suggests that the word 'boy' kindles his final eruption (p. 79). Coriolanus repeats the word 'boy' three times with increasing rage in response to Aufidius's taunt 'thou boy of tears':

'Boy'! O slave!

'Boy'! False hound!

Alone I did it. 'Boy'!

V.6.101, 104, 113, 117

It is, however, not so much a specific word which triggers his violent responses, despite the repetition of "'Boy'!" The word may appear to be the catalyst which causes an immediate and aggressive reaction, but in fact it is always any overt or implied debasing of his heroic standards of being which prompts the reaction. It is certainly simplistic to suggest that Coriolanus should react in a somewhat Pavlovian manner in response to a specific external stimulus. His reaction may be direct and inevitable, but is not conditioned, for it is a riposte of a more principled order.

The essential implications behind the words or situations which inflame him are always those which insult or denigrate his integrity, or diminish that of the Roman state: cowardice, hypocrisy and ingratitude. Aufidius's derogatory charges that Coriolanus is a traitor, that he has behaved 'perfidiously', and in an unseemly, unheroic manner – 'whin'd and roar'd' – are too much for Coriolanus to bear with equanimity. His erstwhile enemy's denunciation, unjustifiable and profoundly humiliating, arouses in Coriolanus all his ancient animosity towards Aufidius, and provokes a typically aggressive reaction. His concern is to establish the falsity of Aufidius's allegation, to 'give this cur the lie ... to thrust the lie unto him' (V.6.85, 107, 110).

Coriolanus's harsh outspoken contempt for the plebeians in the first scene of the play has been condemned as a signally unattractive introduction to a
protagonist. The course of the drama, however, enables a retrospective perception from Coriolanus's point of view. His first outburst is not an unprovoked reaction to a rightful demand for corn, as it may initially appear to be, but is rather a development, a result of years of cumulative frustration with the Roman masses. He has courageously defended Rome from the age of sixteen, while the average Roman soldier and citizen has proved himself always to be unreliable. Coriolanus's eruption into the first scene (161-162), cursing the people and their representatives for no immediately discernible reason provokes an immediate aversion towards him:

    Mar. What's the matter, you dissentious rogues
    That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
    Make yourselves scabs?

His opinion, although not his manner, is to some degree extenuated in the drama. Almost immediately, and throughout the action, his arrogant disdain of the citizens is shown to be grounded in the true knowledge he has of their moral instability. His words must be perceived in terms of his accumulated contempt for the citizens, which is shown to have adequate past justification. J. Dover Wilson remarks that Shakespeare makes the plebeians 'cowards and shirkers', that he generally blackens their character in comparison with that presented by Plutarch, with the express intention of heightening 'the glory of Coriolanus by contrast'. With that intention acknowledged, it is reasonable to accept Coriolanus's rage and his contempt for the unreliable masses to be justifiable in substance if not in degree.

Philip Vellacott lists 'indignation against injustice' as one of the necessary virtues of the heroic nature in tragedy: it is 'one of the few positive virtues on which a stable society is based' (p. 15). The Sophoclean hero is particularly sensitive to any form of unscrupulous or unjust behaviour, and reacts with predictable vehemence. Like Ajax and Antigone, Coriolanus is beleaguered by insults, criticism, injustice and provocation throughout the play. He is roundly criticized for his aggressive and vehement responses, but in fact he manifests in his reactions the necessary albeit unavailing opposition which both Littlewood (p. 28) and Vellacott remark as being indispensable to the
integrity of society. The 'thunder-like percussion of [his] sounds' (I.4.59), and
his ungovernable fury explode in response to the slightest insult to his
honour, a fact which is used to good effect against him in the political
manoeuvrings in Rome and in Antium. He reacts with predictable
impetuosity when his official and legitimate confirmation as consul is
unjustly withdrawn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men.</th>
<th>You have stood your limitation, and the tribunes Endue you with the people's voice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cor.</td>
<td>Is this done?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sic.</td>
<td>The custom of request you have discharg'd. The people do admit you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com.</td>
<td>Hath he not pass'd the noble and the common?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>Cominius, no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cor.</td>
<td>Have I had children's voices?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

... Must these have voices, that can yield them now
And straight disclaim their tongues?

II.3.135-141

In fact his reaction is, under the circumstances, relatively controlled at this
point, although his passion escalates. It is significant that he is more
concerned that Roman values are being eroded by the unreliability of the
throng and their devious mouthpieces. The issue of his consulship is of lesser
import to him than is the fact of the improper revocation.

His immoderate reaction to the invalidation of his legitimate election as
consul 'is something very different from mere "temper" and is badly
misrepresented if it is put down to lack of self-control on the hero's part'
(Littlewood, p. 30). John Hankins considers that his 'violent language masks a
real concern for effective government in Rome. When decisions by the
appointed leaders may be vetoed by jealous tribunes in the name of "the
people", any effective action may become impossible in the face of a foreign
threat or other emergency'. Brutus and Sicinius have rehearsed the citizens
in their role, confident that Coriolanus would react as he does. The 'purpos'd	hing', which Coriolanus recognizes as such, is condemned by Cominius as a
dishonourable obstruction, an insult to Coriolanus:

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nor has Coriolanus
Deserv’d this so dishonour’d rub, laid falsely
I’ th’ plain way of his merit.

III.1.38, 59–61

Unbowed by the possibility of severe punishment, Coriolanus ignores all attempts to calm him and persists in his tirade:

Men. 

Let’s be calm.

Cor.

This was my speech, and I will speak’t again –

Men.

Not now, not now.

1 Sen.

Not in this heat, sir, now.

Cor.

Now, as I live, I will.

57–64

He is determined to express his concern for the lack of moral or physical purpose in Rome, and his fear of 'the ruin of the state' (118). Even after the tribunes condemn his conduct as deserving death, he defiantly hurls a general challenge: 'Come, try upon yourselves what you have seen me' (225).

His angry defiance is the Sophoclean characteristic which Whitman distinguishes as 'that special quality of self-willed independence called authadeia by the Greeks ... which keeps a man from yielding to his fate and keeps him talking harshly and proudly' (Sophocles, p. 31).

In this key issue of his election and the subsequent rescission, it is significant that in Plutarch's account Martius is not elected consul: '... they refused Martius in the ende, and made two other that were suters, Consuls'.

Shakespeare's Coriolanus, however, is officially confirmed as consul, and is so addressed by both Cominius and Menenius: 'Lord Consul ... the consul's worthiness ... the consul Coriolanus'. The marked amplification of the source material assigns a special significance to the legitimacy of Coriolanus's election and his confirmation as consul according to prevailing Roman custom. The appointment is then revoked after an explicit exposé of the tribunes' manipulation of the plebeians in Act III scene 3. The incident is deliberately calculated to interpret and to extenuate to some degree his well-grounded sense of outrage at the injustice of the revocation, and the irresponsibility of the citizens.

In Plutarch, Martius is 'a man to full of passion & choller', and in Shakespeare the anger is even more insistently stressed. Again and again in Chapter IV
the action of the drama Coriolanus is baited into a fury by those who desire his downfall, and on every occasion his irascibility is shown to be directly attributable to his reaction against injustice, his disillusion with the general behaviour of the Romans, to his perception of plots hatched 'to curb the will of the nobility' by those who are not competent to rule yet can be exploited to act against established law (III.1.39–41). At this point, therefore, and typically throughout the action, Coriolanus's extreme indignation, if not the monumental scale of his rage, is shown to be morally justifiable: a vehement response to the insults and unscrupulous practices levelled against him. The nature of his anger can more readily be comprehended if compared with the reactions of the Sophoclean hero. Ajax's response to an equally unmerited and unsupportable public insult is more extreme, more savage, but fundamentally of comparable origin: heroic moral outrage to humiliating inequity.

Among Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, only King Lear could be described as an angry hero. His temper in Act I scene 1, however, is patently rash, exploding out of all proportion over imagined insults:

_Lear._ Let it be so! Thy truth, then, be thy dower!

... Here I disclaim all my paternal care, Propinquity and property of blood, And as a stranger to my heart and me Hold thee from this for ever.

... _Kent._ Good my liege— _Lear._ Peace, Kent! Come not between the dragon and his wrath. _I.1.107, 112–115, 119–121_

In his 'hideous rashness' at the fancied indignity, Lear banishes the two who love him most and are most worthy. He fails to understand true integrity and devotion, and his anger under the circumstances has more of the vindictiveness of a wilful child about it than the fury of a heroic monarch. His irrational outburst and banishment of Cordelia and Kent are petulant responses to notional affronts. Neither Cordelia's simple and sincere statement nor Kent's well-intentioned intervention warrants such an aggressive backlash. His later passion, however, after he has been insulted

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and abused beyond all tolerable limits by Goneril and Regan, is fully justified, and the scale of his fury at this stage is truly heroic:

Lear. No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall — I will do such things —
What they are yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.

II.4.277–281

Lear's rage, and the monumental intensity of his passion on the heath are grand and heroic reactions to genuine indignities. Integral to his bitter resentment and irascibility is his madness, which substantially expands the concept of the drama to a consideration of a nature which is more complex, more capricious, and ultimately more frail than that of the absolute prototype. His passionate outbursts are fundamental to the process of growth and change, whereas the characteristically swift and violent rage of the Sophoclean hero is the predictable expression of a nature which is essentially immutable, a nature which is 'driven by passion ... a rage of the soul.' Heroic anger is an intrinsic part of the temperament of the Sophoclean hero: it may be impetuous or disproportionate, but is never petty or without justification. He reacts only to real, not to imagined insults or injustices.

J. Dover Wilson enumerates the instances of Coriolanus's ungovernable rage: 'Marcius is in a fury at his first entry, enters Corioli single-handed in a fury, twice ruins his chance of the consulship by his fury, lays siege to Rome in a fury, and in the end perishes in a fury'. He concludes that Coriolanus conveys an impression of 'a young Hector with an ungovernable temper'. Coriolanus's temper is undeniably ungovernable in certain circumstances, magnificently titanic in his defence of his moral principles, but not necessarily manifesting, as Dover Wilson suggests, a 'berserk' quality. At no stage is there any indication that Coriolanus is deranged in the sense that his reactions — although excessive — might be out of control. He is at all times finely aware of his words and the effect they will have, careless of the real possibility of calamitous consequences. His words are indeed ill-timed, his invective impolitic and unnecessarily savage, but he always speaks with the full knowledge that what he says is exactly what he means. Despite his
passion, his understanding of the situation is unimpaired. Even at his most vituperative his words retain the sense he intends, and his views, although harshly stated, are—within the drama—rationally defensible:

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
... Have the power still
To banish your defenders, till at length
Your ignorance— ...
.deliver you
As most abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows!

III.3.122–135

In comparison, Othello in his most passionate outbursts reveals his incomprehension of Iago, of himself, of Desdemona, and the nature of their love. Because he lacks a confident understanding, his romantic, misguided attitudes are able to be perverted. The destruction of his faith in his ideal vision of love is manifested through a loss of reason and control in his disordered speech. In his perplexity any erroneous certainty is more tolerable than doubt. His chaotic mind is echoed in the disintegration of the rhythms and poetry of his normal speech patterns into obsessive repetitions, inarticulate exclamations and crude imagery:

Lie with her—lie on her? We say
lie on her when they belie her...  
Handkerchief
—confessions—handkerchief!... 
Handkerchief! O devil!

IV.1.33–44

Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write 'whore' upon? What committed!
Committed! O thou public commoner!

IV.2.72–74

His mental anguish is apparent in his reiteration of words, his meaningless interjections and coarse, unsubstantiated accusations. He becomes insensible to the reality of the situation or of his words, as he is goaded into unworthy conduct.

Similarly, and even more distressingly, Lear is tipped over into madness by his pain and rage. On the heath he thunders against the elements, but retains his awareness of the reality of injustice and falsity:

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Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks; rage, blow.

Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
That makes ingrateful man.

III.2.1-9

Later, less rational, his words betray, in their core of substance, a profoundly moving concern with actual issues: 'Didst thou give all to thy daughters? /And art thou come to this?' (III.4.48-49). He senses rather than understands the moral deterioration in a world dominated by ingratitude, injudicious authority and implacable greed. Unlike Othello, Lear is able to express in his madness a perception of the world which is more valid and compassionate than that which he had before his wits turned.

Coriolanus suffers no loss of awareness of his surroundings or of his words in the heat of his passionate rages. In the midst of the most emotional and punishing situations he is able to express incisive truths:

Being i' th war,
Their mutinies and revolts, wherein they show'd
Most valour, spoke not for them.

III.1.125-127

His anger is excessive, often harsh, but always morally justifiable. It is provoked by the inevitable conflict between a defiant heroic nature and the compromises demanded by a less than heroic society. Between them is an implacable, reciprocal lack of understanding and accommodation, an insoluble, tragic dilemma.
CHAPTER V
Communication and comprehension:
the tragic hero in the community
1. Non-verbal communication

A playwright is to some extent conditioned by, and must utilize to his advantage, such external factors as the physical characteristics of the theatres of the day, the size and positioning of the audience, and current theatrical conventions. In addition, he would take into consideration the opinions and preferences of the audience, and the versatility or special talents of the actors for whom he was writing.

Greek tragedians of the fifth century, B.C. were constrained by prevailing dramatic and religious traditions or techniques, by the nature of the large, unenclosed amphitheatres, and the huge audiences which could number up to twenty thousand people, as well as by the actors' use of masks and buskins. The mask completely enclosed the actor's head, with small holes for the eyes and a slightly open mouth. The expression on the mask was stereotypical and unvarying and obviously precluded any use of facial expression. The actors wore high-heeled buskins, which almost certainly would have hampered their movements. H.C. Baldry states that the actors 'were at least twenty yards from the spectators in the front row on the other side of the orchestra [and] nearly a hundred yards from the back of the auditorium'. Close and immediate contact between audience and actors was therefore improbable, although being in an arena theatre the audience almost surrounded, and was spatially continuous with, the central orchestra. With no barrier of structure or illumination between the two, the visible, unseparated audience attained a dramatic capacity, and the audience-actor rapport was enhanced, despite the size of the amphitheatres. There is no indication that scenery in the modern sense was used in the presentation of the Greek drama. It is most likely that all the action took place in front of the skene, with a door or doors, possibly painted in architectural perspective.

In comparison, Jacobean amphitheatre playhouses were considerably smaller, accommodating some three thousand spectators. There was closer contact between actors and audience than there was in the Greek amphitheatres, and the actors, unrestricted by the masks and heels worn by their Greek counterparts had more freedom of movement and expression.

The setting of Jacobean drama, particularly in the open-air public playhouses,
was roughly equivalent to that of the Greek, with its static background of doors, although the Jacobean stage had the additional balcony above. Andrew Gurr notes that a performance of *Coriolanus* took place in 1607 in the Globe playhouse. The play was probably the last of Shakespeare's to have been written especially for an amphitheatre playhouse, the last non-Blackfriars drama. Because *Coriolanus* was more likely to have been performed in a public amphitheatre than a private, indoor hall playhouse, only the Jacobean open amphitheatres have been considered in comparison with the Greek theatres.

Without the creative or interpretive stage sets and lighting of modern theatres, the imagination and emotions of both Greek and Jacobean audiences were stimulated exclusively by the words and actions of the dramatic characters. Words, the prime tools of the dramatist, are the most immediate and versatile means of communication between character and character, or players and audience. However, communication in all its forms is the essence of drama: language, the means by which a performance transcends mime and becomes a complete and integrated re-enactment of a part of life, is only one aspect of this communication. Gestures, actions, and silence play an essential role in dramatic presentation, and in the maximum comprehension of the nature of the drama, the characters, and their relationships.

M. Charney remarks of a Shakespearean play (but the viewpoint is equally applicable to a Greek drama), that although a play is fundamentally a poetic text, 'the words are, after all, only a part of the full imaginative experience of the play, and . . . there are many nonverbal elements in a performance which work together with the poetry of the text and help to express it'. Bruce Erlich considers Shakespearean drama, 'and especially . . . those dense and allusive plays set in the Classical world', and concludes that rather than being 'the summary of discrete, chronologically ordered events', a total experience of the play must encompass 'in both reading and performance . . . dimensions of the tale . . . which are – and yet, paradoxically, are not – “in” the text'.

There is adequate available evidence for the conclusion that the background of Jacobean drama was not primarily verbal. There are layers of substance below the obvious and the explicit which exist to be discovered as
complementary to the words which communicate the essentials of character, relationships, action and emotion. Gary Schmidgall suggests that 'a harsh literary and artistic aristocracy dominated Shakespeare's time. It assumed that true art concealed the essence of its meaning from the view of the shallow, the lazy, and the ignorant . . . [while] all . . . may behold superficial reality . . . there is also an inner significance that only the initiated can appreciate' (pp. 107-108). However, it is also true that a dramatist would not, in his plays, 'lay traps for the ordinary man, so that [his] “real intention” only becomes plain when revealed by a much later scholar'. A full understanding of the communication between character and character, and character and audience, the 'inner significance' of the drama, derives from a harmonizing of both verbal and non-verbal modes of information.

If the communication between the characters within a play or between characters and audience breaks down, is inadequate or unreliable, it is not necessarily a defect of the drama; it can be a significant pointer to the nature of the characters, their relationships, and indeed, the whole ethos of the play. Criticism of Coriolanus on the basis of a chill atmosphere, and of the hero for being narrow and uncommunicative falls short of the mark, and fails to take into account the fact that such austerity and lack of communication are symptoms of the internecine incompatibility between Coriolanus and the citizens of Rome.

Inga-Stina Ewbank remarks that Coriolanus incorporates 'verbal poetry which makes us see, in our imaginations, more than is or ever could be shown on stage . . . [and] a theatre which . . . [shows], to our outer eye, more than man can find words to express'. This indeed is true of all Shakespearean – and Sophoclean – drama. The accumulation of understanding, which goes beyond the verbal, is possible only by means of an inclusive reaction to all the composite elements of dramatic communication: mimesis and expression, language and action, stillness and silence. Ewbank writes of 'theatre poetry' in King Lear, but the notion is much more widely applicable, that on the verbal or the non-verbal, the gestural and representational levels, drama 'works . . . by asserting the pregnancy of words, and yet also by creating on stage an image more pregnant than words' (p. 18).
a. Stage directions and stage pictures

Although the verbal component gives to drama its vigour and substance, there are significant non-verbal means of communicating those conscious or unconscious thoughts and emotions which form an indispensable part in the understanding of the dramatic characters and their relationships. The stage picture is an evocative element in dramatization, which qualifies and extends the sense of the spoken word. Non-verbal, purely visual communication provides a means of presenting to the audience an additional facet of a character, of emotions, of a scene or action, as complementary to, distinct from, or even opposite to, the verbal impression. Robert Weimann notes that 'M.M. Charney has asked us “to extend our concept of 'image' beyond the mere words of the play, to the actual performance in the theater . . . [where] . . . gestures [and] grouping . . . provide us with significant images”.¹¹ The stage picture and stage directions derive explicitly or implicitly from the text, and as such are relevant additional forms of communication between the characters, or between character and audience, which significantly expand the substance of the dialogue.

Stage directions may be authorial, or may be the additions of players or editors close to the author in time or intent; as such they must be integrated not only into the presentation of the drama, but into an appreciative response. Coriolanus, particularly, has the most detailed and numerous stage directions, which are probably authorial.¹² They form a substantial part of the communication of the play by providing indications of movement, gesture, emotion and stage picture at points in the drama when conventional verbal communication breaks down, or would be inadequate or superfluous, and the non-verbal elements are better able to contribute complementary or contradictory dimensions to a scene. Having such copious stage directions, Coriolanus is arguably therefore a particularly visual play. In this aspect it is akin to Greek drama, which was, in the enormous amphitheatres, necessarily formal, statuesque, and visually explicit. To this end the masks, buskins, stark stages and limited number of actors were effective in the creation of impressive tableaux. The actors' movements, hindered by the high heels, were certainly exaggerated: with no recourse to facial expression, and given

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the size of the amphitheatres, gestures and character grouping had to be
unambiguous and strikingly evocative.

In the absence of detailed knowledge of the dramatization of Greek
tragedies, the exits, entrances and stage directions, whether specified by the
translator or not, must play a significant role in the dramatic realization. In
Sophoclean drama the stage directions are not authorial: the actors almost
certainly took their instructions directly from the poet, even if there was a
written copy of the script. However, it is in the nature of Greek tragedy that all
stage directions emerge directly and unequivocally from the dialogue.
Information about gestures, movement, emotion, and stage activity is
contained within the text, and characters generally describe stage business as it
happens:

SENTRY: Where's the King?
CHASE: He's just coming out of the palace now.

Antigone: ll. 379–380

CR: Thou – thou whose face is bent to earth –

Jebb, Antigone, l. 440

In the Ajax, stage directions at line 814, although inserted by the translator,
provide the reader with the possibility of participating visually in the details
of Ajax's preparation for suicide, which is, significantly, the only time in
extant Greek tragedy that a death is enacted on stage. His 'careful deliberation'
and calm readiness are in direct contrast to the wild passion he has
manifested previously. Jebb's translation does not have the copious stage
directions of the Watling version, noting only: 'The scene changes to a lonely
place on the sea-shore'. Even without any explicit stage directions, however,
Ajax's preparations and his state of mind are communicated clearly in his
words:

There. Now he's ready. The executioner
Stands ready for his business. He'll not fail.
Why should he? –

... There, then; we're ready.
Next, my prayers:

ll. 815–817, 825–826

He is firm and resolute, but the short, staccato phrases reveal his mixed,
agitated emotions. In Jebb’s version the speech pattern is not in the separate, abbreviated bursts of the Watling translation, but Ajax’s preparations, and his mental tension are equally conveyed in long, fragmented sentences and parenthetic phrases:

The slayer stands so that he shall do his work most surely, — if leisure serves for so much thought, — the gift of Hector, that foeman-friend who was most hateful to my soul and to my sight; ’tis fixed in hostile soil, the land of Troy

ll. 815–818

A hero to the last, determined to die with the dignity worthy of his distinction, he carefully completes all that needs to be done. He prays to Zeus, thinks of those he loves who will weep for him, of his homeland, and reiterates his hatred for the Atreideae. Without hesitation he dies nobly, in full view, and his death is followed — expressively, in the Watling version — by ’a short interval of silence’. In any dramatic presentation, silence is a distinct and expressive element in the non-verbal communication between characters, and between actors and audience. It is evident from his drama that Sophocles understood that silence, or the comparative paucity of words, which developed directly out of a dramatic situation could, with the presentation of a vivid visual picture, reveal profound emotion more immediately than could excessive words. He perfected the ability to convey intense passion with a minimum of words or histrionic effects, by means of a significant lack of fluency, or a meaningful silence. The consequence of silence is commented on in the Antigone:

CHORUS: Yet there is danger in unnatural silence
   No less than excess of lamentation.
MESSENGER: I will go in and see, whether in truth
   There is some fatal purpose in her grief.
   Such silence, as you say, may well be dangerous.
ll. 1251–1255

The final lines of the Ajax declare the significance of the visual over the verbal, for ‘not seeing, how shall [man] know . . . ?’ (ll. 1416-1420).

Wolfgang Clemen contrasts the more flamboyant use of excessive words and emotion in Senecan drama with the restraint of Sophocles, who, in

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'moments of greatest stress . . . [understands] the value of the inarticulate cry, the faltering voice'. In the _Antigone_, Creon's inarticulacy on learning of the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice is the only time he displays sincere emotion, as compared with his normal mode of glib dictatorial verbosity:

CREON: What more? What pain can overtop this pain? 
... 
O second horror! 
What fate awaits me now? 
My child here in my arms ... and there, the other ... 
The son ... the mother ...

Il. 1280, 1309–1311

In Jebb's translation the broken phrases, the interjections of overwhelming sorrow clearly express Creon's intense grief:

CR: Ah me, – yonder I behold a new, a second woe! 
What destiny, ah what, can yet await me? I have but now raised my son in my arms, – and there, again, I see a corpse before me! Alas, alas, unhappy mother! Alas, my child!

Il. 1295–1300

Sincere emotion, as opposed to his normal callous, overbearing manner is communicated in his lack of fluency, the broken, agonized rhythms and phrases, the repeated questions and exclamations.

Coriolanus's discomfort, silence, and eventual exit during the 'after-meeting' (37) at the Capitol and Cominius's recital of his feats in Act II scene 2, call to mind Antigone's silence during the guard's report of her actions. Although the essence of the two scenes is different, for Antigone is not ill-at-ease or being praised, nevertheless the dramatic effect of isolation within a crowd is similar in both scenes. Antigone is silent and set apart, surrounded by a group of people who are talking about her, ignoring her presence. She is guarded by some soldiers, the sentry reports what he has seen, while Creon and the chorus stand by. She is separated physically and morally from the sentry, the chorus, and especially from Creon, by her stillness and the strength of her principles. The burial of Polyneices against Creon's order is her obligatory familial and ethical observance. She knows
that the punishment is death and her silence, during the sentry's recital and Creon's indignant responses, emphasizes her defiant determination to affirm the integrity of her deed, despite the penalty. When at last she speaks, her words clearly express her resolute moral commitment: 'I do admit it. I do not deny it' (l. 444).

Antigone's posture in this scene, like Coriolanus's silence while holding Volumnia's hand in Act V scene 3, conveys more forcefully than words could ever do, the strength of her emotion. Creon addresses her: 'you, hiding your head there' (l. 443). Jebb's version defines her posture; 'Thou – thou whose face is bent to earth –', and he notes: 'Antigone has her eyes bent on the ground: she is neither afraid nor sullen, but feels that Creon and she can never come to terms. There is nothing in common between their thoughts' (p. 87, note 441). Arnott comments on the position of the head in Greek theatre, stating that 'the position of the head makes a strong statement; any deviation from vertical and frontal is immediately significant'. Although the gesture is not as extreme as covering the face would be, which in Greek tragedy 'is . . . a powerful visual expression of the death-wish', it does hide the face from view and cut off the sight of the sun, the source of life. Thus Antigone's posture, with bowed head, is a silent evocation of her alienation, her deep emotion, and her heroic acceptance of her inevitable death sentence.

b. Reticence and silence

These are heroes whose essence is expressed in actions rather than in speech, in reticence rather than rhetoric. Ajax's love for Tecmessa, like Coriolanus's for Virgilia, is never stated in elaborate phrases, yet the strength of his feeling is forcefully evoked in his controlled words. Antigone's devotion to Polyneices and the recognition of her duty towards him forms the raison d'être of the entire tragedy, yet neither this emotion, nor her love for Haemon, is ever expressed in excessive language: lack of words is no measure of lack of emotion. Her love for Haemon is clearly communicated in her unselfish, controlled yet heartfelt response to Creon's vulgar dismissal of his son's love, and Ismene's comment emphasizes the special nature of their love:

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IS: But wilt thou slay the betrothed of thine own son?
CR: Nay, there are other fields for him to plough.
IS: But there can never be such love as bound him to her.
CR: I like not an evil wife for my son.
AN: Haemon, beloved! How thy father wrongs thee!

Jebb, ll. 568–572

Antigone shows unselfish sensitivity in her distressed reaction to Creon's insult to Haemon rather than to herself. She is determined and single-minded, harsh in her impatience with moral inadequacy, but is, above all, a deeply caring young woman: 'My way is to share my love, not share my hate' (ll. 523). The ultimate evidence of the love between her and Haemon is his resolute readiness to die with her if he cannot live with her.

Coriolanus is a play of unremitting noise and activity, and much devious oratory, which is set against the widely-criticized taciturnity of the hero. It is inappropriate, however, to criticize the drama for Coriolanus's lack of grand, introspective speeches or soliloquies, to suggest that the audience is therefore denied access to the inner workings of his mind. Consensus of opinion has appeared to incline towards the view expressed by J.C.F. Littlewood, that Coriolanus lacks a 'much-needed opening-up of... [his] soul to our imaginative sympathy'; that he is, at the most intimate moments, 'entirely inaudible', and that, compared with Macbeth or Othello, 'we feel that Coriolanus is quite determined not to be a tragic hero on their scale' (pp. 44–45). In fact, one of the most crucial aspects of Coriolanus's so-called inarticulacy is misconstrued: he communicates his essence to the audience particularly by means of his lack of communication with the other characters in the drama. Significantly, both play and hero impart their intrinsic nature by other means than the purely verbal.

Words, gestures and actions throughout, are shown to be untrustworthy, to be used deliberately to convey false impressions, whereas reticence or silence cannot as easily deceive. In a play in which almost every character mouths false accusations, lies, and hypocritical cant, and gestures too, are perverted to mean their opposite, any verbal reserve must acquire a significance beyond that of words. Virgilia, the only character besides

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Coriolanus who does not equivocate in any manner, is eloquent in her reticence. She is too, notably, the only character in the drama with whom Coriolanus has an uncomplicated and mutually rewarding relationship. Coriolanus's recognition of her as his 'gracious silence' is an indication of his appreciation of her intrinsic worth. It is a significant comment on the value of reticence and the inconsequence of fulsome speeches.

The continual clamour throughout the play emphasizes the power and significance of silence or verbal reserve. Volumnia and the other patricians are unable to comprehend that reticence may be preferable to unnecessary bombast or insincere wordiness:

Vol. I pray you, daughter, sing, or express yourself in a more comfortable sort.
I.3.1–2

Com. You shall not be
The grave of your deserving; Rome must know
The value of her own.
I.9.19–21

Words throughout the drama are not good testimony of the truth; they are used to manipulate, to flatter, and to deceive, and a scepticism of language is generated. Silence, thoughts, emotions unexpressed or expressed with restraint, and untutored gestures – as opposed to rehearsed reactions – assume paramount significance in the understanding of the characters, and of the drama as a whole. David Bevington suggests that 'silent eloquence' has the ability to 'portray certain emotions with an expressiveness that spoken language cannot always match'. He observes that 'Shakespeare paradoxically uses his finest writing to exalt the eloquence of the non-verbal'.\(^{15}\) Certainly this is manifest in the contrast between Volumnia's effusive acclaim on Coriolanus's return from battle and Virgilia's silent emotion. Coriolanus's words reveal his somewhat impatient attitude towards his mother, as opposed to the deep empathic love between him and Virgilia, whose reticence and unobtrusive demeanour inspire Coriolanus to his most lyrical language:

Com. Look sir, your mother!
Cor. O,

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You have, I know, petition'd all the gods
For my prosperity!

... My gracious silence, hail!

... Ah, my dear,
Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear

Coriolanus reveals himself most particularly in his restrained words to
Virgilia; his ability to express his love with such controlled yet obviously
profound emotion challenges the suggestion that he is either an incomplete
or inhuman character. In Coriolanus, and especially in the characterization of
the protagonist, Shakespeare employs taciturnity to communicate sincerity, as
indeed he does in Cordelia's personality in King Lear. Coriolanus and
Virgilia's love, the only unambiguous and totally reliable relationship in the
drama, is founded on sensitive reticence rather than excessive phrases.
Between them, and consequently between them and the audience, there is a
deep understanding of their high principles, and the true value of their love.

Virgilia's love, and her concern for her husband's safety are manifest in
her silence, her quiet determination to honour him in her own way, and her
resolute resistance to Valeria and Volumnia's derision:

Vir. No, good madam; I will not out of doors.
Val. Not out of doors!
Vol. She shall, she shall.
Vir. Indeed, no, by your patience; I'll not over the
threshold till my lord return from the wars.

L.3.71–75

Her devotion to Coriolanus and his love for her reflect advantageously on
both of them. Amid the turmoil of the play, Coriolanus and Virgilia's quiet
constancy provides a degree of integrity, of unequivocal moral certainty, in
opposition to the patricians' opportunism, the tribunes' devious
machinations, and the plebeians' woolly-headed vacillation. Her simple
anguish in the contemplation of Coriolanus's possible injury, when set
against Volumnia's self-assertive verbosity, shows up his mother's greater
preoccupation for her own prestige through kinship, than for her son's safety:

Vir. But had he died in the business,
madam, how then?

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Then his good report should have been my son;
I.3.19–20

He was wont to come home

wounded.

O, no, no, no.

O, he is wounded, I thank the gods for’t.

II.1.112–114

From her first appearance, silent, and proof against Volumnia's self-serving ambition and domination, Virgilia is, in an ethical context, implicitly aligned with Coriolanus. Her determination not to leave the house while he is away at war, or to glory in the possible number of his wounds, reveal her quiet integrity as a positive moral standard in the drama.

Coriolanus's love for Virgilia, a reliable index of his own fundamental worth, is expressed in words more beautiful and articulate than any others in the play. His four simple words in greeting, and her silence in his home-coming scene, contrast tellingly with Volumnia's babbling effusiveness:

Nay, my good soldier, up;
My gentle Marcius, worthy Caius, and
By deed-achieving honour newly nam'd –
What is it? Coriolanus must I call thee?

... I know not where to turn.
O, welcome home!

II.1.162–165, 172–173

His brusque manner is not evidence of the lack of finer feelings: grand declarations are not necessarily more emotional or reliable than restrained expressions. Cordelia's 'nothing' is unmistakably a standard of sincere emotion when weighed against Goneril and Regan's false verbiage. Othello's profuse greeting to Desdemona in Cyprus is, J.M. Gregson notes, 'too grand in scale for what is essentially an intimate greeting . . . a cathedral constructed to house a pair of turtle-doves'.16 Although Othello's lack of sensitivity to the demands of the occasion does not necessarily devalue his love, it is a significant manifestation of his character. He uses over-decorative phrases to express the idealized image he has of himself and his love, revealing his inability to perceive himself, his relationships, and life as they really are. This is in direct contrast with Coriolanus's firm hold on reality, his inability to be
swayed from that which he knows to be right, and his fundamental mistrust of wordy language.

James Calderwood considers that Coriolanus lacks 'verbal resources and the confidence in language... he locks himself in silence... in the two major scenes where his family appeals to him'. In Act III scene 2 and Act V scene 3, against the persistent, vociferous pleas of Volumnia, his retreat into silence, rather than being indicative of a 'smothered vitality', has the strength of a positive virtue 'when contrasted with the hollow fabrications, and sinuous manoeuvrings of the patrician class'. It is a conscious decision to remain silent, his unenforced verbal and physical stillness a strong emotional and ethical contrast to Volumnia's callous insistence.

In the earlier scene, Coriolanus is on stage in a characteristic and revealing situation. He is alienated on the stage, although at the centre of a group of people who are ranged in opposition against him, verbally and emotionally attempting to compel him to use words and actions which run contrary to his conception of right conduct. This is, in fact, the typical situation of the Sophoclean hero: alone against a hostile crowd, silent, or courageously defending himself physically or verbally against onslaughts on his courage or his integrity. Coriolanus's distinctness is palpable, as is his bafflement at the actions Volumnia and the patricians urge him to adopt, the rationale behind their insistence:

*Cor.* I muse my mother
Does not approve me further

*Men.* Return to th' tribunes.

*Cor.* Well, what then, what then?

*Men.* Repent what you have spoke.

*Cor.* For them!...
Must I then do't to them?

... Why force you this?

In the ninety-four lines before his agonized decision at lines 99-101, and after his first two speeches – which are delivered before the verbal attack commences (1-6, 7-16) – Coriolanus utters some thirty-five words in eight
impatient, disapproving exclamations and questions: 'Let go . . . let them hang . . . What must I do? . . . Well, what then, what then? . . . For them! . . . to them? . . . tush, tush! . . . why force you this?' (18, 23, 35–39, 45, 51). At first the patricians attempt to persuade him to simulate a milder manner towards the citizens, but Coriolanus shows no sign that he might comply with their suggestions. They then urge his patriotism:

1 Sen. There's no remedy,
Unless, by not so doing, our good city
Cleave in the midst and perish.

Men. Before he should thus stoop to th' herd, but that
The violent fit o' th' time craves it as physic
For the whole state

26–28, 32–34

Volumnia's next ploy is to appeal to his sense of honour: she maintains that it should be equally honourable to dissemble in peace as in war, in order to achieve his 'best ends' (47). Finally, as she generally does, Volumnia appeals to him in the name of his wife and son, and of all the patricians. Coriolanus is worn down by the insistent exhortation; his brusque, incommunicative exclamations are not indicative of a lack of verbal resources but rather of an impatient disdain for the insincere conduct recommended by the patricians. His comparative silence and taciturnity is in striking and dramatic moral opposition to the devious, persuasive rhetoric of the patricians, and especially of his mother.19

The tumult and activity throughout the play distinguish and emphasize those scenes in which a telling lack of words or movement provides additional communication for a full perception. The crucial moment in Act V scene 3, in which Coriolanus holds Volumnia's hand in silence forms an impressive and highly evocative tableau vivant. He does not, as Calderwood suggests, 'lock himself in silence' because he has neither confidence nor ability with words. It is rather, as it is in Act III scene 2, that his silence and moral discipline form a telling contrast, a non-verbal comment, when set against Volumnia's excessive, effusive verbal wiles.

Bounded on one side by Aufidius and the Volscians, and on the other by the Roman envoy, Coriolanus is in Act V scene 3 once again isolated in the

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midst of antagonistic groups. The anguished joy he feels at the sight of his beloved wife and son after a long exile, the verbal bombardment from his mother, and his moral turmoil charge the silent, motionless scene that follows with a potent mix of emotion. His re-kindled distress and anger, his perception of what must be, and above all, his determination to honour his word and his integrity, are all implicit in the silence, the stillness, and the final tormented 'O mother, mother!' (182). There is no 'smothered vitality' here: there is rather, in the silence, an indication of Coriolanus's intense emotional pain and his heroic attempt to maintain his integrity, to choose death before ignoble compromise.20

There are scenes in Sophoclean tragedy which recall this silent, anguished, inevitable struggle: the bitter and exacting conflict between passionately-held principles and the equally intense desire to live within a beloved family. After his frenzied attack on the animals, Ajax regains his senses in a scene which is evocatively described by Tecmessa. The shocking impact of the slaughter, and Ajax's deep torment are manifested in his silence, his incoherence:

TECMESSA: And slowly, painfully, regained his senses. Looking about him at the scene of havoc That filled the hut, he uttered a loud cry And beat his brow, and tumbling to the ground . . . sat there with clutching fingers Gripping his hair — sat for a long time silent. . . . He broke into such piteous cries of anguish . . .

AJAX: O! O! . . .
. . .
O my son, my son!

Il. 309–316, 319, 332–339

Tecmessa clearly understands that he 'means to do some dreadful thing' (I.328). Ajax, torn between the knowledge of his shame, his determination to end his life in a manner consistent with his honour, and his love for Tecmessa, Eurysaces and Teucer, reveals his distress clearly in the immobility, silence, and incoherence reported by Tecmessa:

And so he still sits, utterly dejected; Will take no food nor drink, but only sits

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Still where he fell among the slaughtered beasts.
He clearly means to do some dreadful thing,
If there is any meaning in his words,
His bitter cries.

2 Verbal communication

Comprehension of a dramatic production relies equally on the distinct yet related roles of both verbal and visual impressions. G.K. Hunter suggests that we feel no discomfort about attending a dramatic performance in a 'theatrical auditorium' despite the fact that the 'etymology of the word theatre tells us that this is a place for using our eyes, for seeing things . . . [while] the etymology of the word auditorium tells us the opposite, that here is a place for hearing'. In fact, the dual implication of a theatrical auditorium is significantly apt: action, or the telling lack of it is an indispensable complement to the spoken word in dramatic perception. Ultimately, however, despite the undoubted significance of the non-verbal, H.C. Baldry affirms that 'the magic of the theatre [was] . . . achieved on the slopes of the Acropolis or in the Globe, not by any scenic realism or trick of lighting, but by the spoken word' (p. 72). Despite the lack of evidence of the way in which the Attic plays were enacted, the predominance of voice and the spoken word is generally accepted. H.C. Baldry affirms that the actor in the theatre was

a striking, though distant spectacle for the eye. But above all he was a voice, reaching out over the orchestra to the most remote rows of the vast auditorium. We are uncertain of the actor's appearance and know little or nothing of his moves and gestures; but there is ample evidence to show that it was the voice that mattered most.

In the huge amphitheatres, excellent acoustics meant that members of the audience were able to hear more clearly than they could see. Movements and gestures were formal and obvious, the actors' faces were covered, but the actor's voice, his most versatile means of communication, could be used to express subtle nuances. Integrally linked to the voice, the words and language of the drama are naturally of fundamental importance. In Sophocles,
practically every word . . . [springs] . . . naturally and directly from dramatic circumstance and characterization, [and] helps develop a number of themes at once. The characters . . . say more than they intend or realize.22

It is almost impossible to envisage the dramatization of a Greek tragedy as it might have been in the fifth century B.C. Similarly, it is difficult to perceive from even the most precise translation a complete experience of the original Greek poetry and drama. Any translation of a Sophoclean play cannot communicate as immediate an appreciation of the words and language as an informed reading of the Greek original would do, but a comparison of several authoritative translations facilitates a well-grounded perception into the original. Although even the most skilful translation, as E.F. Watling remarks, 'inevitably omits, or transmutes, something of its original, . . . it can ease the opening of doors that would otherwise remain, for some, permanently closed'.23 Thomas Woodard remarks that provided 'translations give many of the essentials of dramatic effect and larger meaning . . . the quality of the scholar's response matters more than the quantity of his erudition'.24 An attempt to assess the words and language used in the Ajax and the Antigone is necessarily hampered to some extent by the use of translations, but the fundamental issues underlying the dialogue emerge clearly from competent translations.25

a. The use of language

Language establishes most immediately the ethos of a dramatic presentation: the manner in which language is used, the choice of words, and the tone and mode of expression, are of the utmost importance in the communication between characters and between characters and audience. The personality of the hero is as fundamentally related to the language he uses, as it is to the style, the movement and the atmosphere of the whole. Coriolanus has been much criticized for being a harsh and unmusical play, with an unattractive hero. Violence and dissension in the action are reflected in the discordant language of the play, and in the hero's uncompromising nature and manner of speech. The language is inextricably bound up with the thematic significance of Rome, the nature of which plays an integral part

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in the drama. Rome in Coriolanus is a small, primitive warring city-state, constantly embroiled in internal and external conflict. Even peace is spurious, for the mutinous citizens constantly carry 'staves, clubs, and other weapons' (S.D. I.1.1), and the prevalent ethos in the city is the reciprocal dissension between all sections of the community.

There is no fundamental difference in language, imagery, or behaviour in peace or in war: Caius Marcius, defender and saviour of Rome, is also 'chief enemy to the people' (I.1.6–7). Appropriate to an austere lifestyle, the language of the play is essentially unadorned. Rhythms are most frequently martial, and there are few moments of lightness or lyricism. Predominantly inflexible imagery evokes an atmosphere which is as intractable and as formidable as is the nature of Rome's leading citizen. Paradoxically, despite the rigidity, Rome is presented as a city of unpredictable instability, of continual restlessness, of noise, conflict and confusion. Criticisms of the drama or of the hero on the basis of their harsh nature or language, fail to recognize that these are essentially the features which distinguish Coriolanus as 'one of the most taut and powerful tragedies Shakespeare ever conceived'.

The 'difficulties' criticized in the language of Coriolanus, as Derek Traversi affirms, are 'part of Shakespeare's intention and result in an artistic success... [a] tragedy more new and interesting than many have realized'. It is fundamental to an understanding of the drama to perceive that the breakdown and unreliability of all forms of communication in Rome contribute substantially to the ultimate collapse of all that pertains to the past glory of the city. Rome becomes a social setting which no longer reflects, nor is it compatible with, the nature of the hero it bore.

Coriolanus's contempt for the 'tongues o' th' common mouth' (III.1.22) and for words which merely 'make motion through... lips' (III.2.118), sets him apart from patricians and plebeians alike. His disdain for excessive and untrustworthy words forms an ethical signpost for an insight into the ethos of the play, the nature of the hero, and, most essentially, the role which words and language play in the communication of the drama. The inadequacy of the populace is reflected in the implication of their reduction as adequate.
Romans to the ineffective exhalation of their breath. Coriolanus associates the insufficiency of the citizens with the futility, the irrelevance of their verbal approbation. The scars he earns, and his conduct in the defence of Rome are expressions of his integrity, and are owed to no man. He cannot regard approval from those he considers to be unworthy as confirmation of the value of his actions. On the contrary, he perceives such needless approval to be demeaning:

Show them th' unaching scars which I should hide,  
As if I had receiv'd them for the hire  
Of their breath only!

II.2.146–148

He rejects the authority given the voices which judge him, in the same manner as Ajax rejects the validity of the general decision to award Achilles's arms to Odysseus.

Despite the fact that 'many critics feel that the play's rhetoric is chill, and that this corresponds to something uninviting about both the play's ambience and its hero – a lack of warmth or generosity', Michael Goldman feels that in order to understand Coriolanus, an audience must find 'the passion hidden in the chill rhetoric, the richness of spirit beneath the many signs of poverty'. Coriolanus, so often accused of being inarticulate, is in fact both eloquent and articulate when he chooses to be. His observations on the Roman political situation, and the cowardly or inconsistent behaviour of the citizenry in war and peace reveal, apart from his harsh contempt, his sound grasp of the circumstances, which he expresses with coherent fluency. When compared with the opportunistic verbosity of both patricians and tribunes and the capricious opinions of the plebeians, his much-criticized straightforwardness appears to be an ideal rather than a fault.

Virgilio Malvezzi states that Plutarch 'saw Coriolanus with a Greek eye', and it is thus that Shakespeare portrays him. His taciturnity and bluntness, mislabelled inarticulate churlishness, is typical of Sophoclean heroes. The poet Pindar, whose account of the tragedy Sophocles follows, and who had great regard for Ajax, describes him as a man 'with no gift of tongue, but stout of heart'. Ajax is misunderstood and misjudged because he, like Coriolanus,
is unable to adapt his words or behaviour to that which would be acceptable

to his society, but Bernard Knox notes further that Ajax is at times able to

speak with 'the tongue of a great poet'(p. 44) as indeed Coriolanus can.

Coriolanus's greeting to Virgilia in Act V scene 3: 'my wife comes foremost . . . best of my flesh' (22, 42), is a remarkable expression of intense and sensitive love. John Arthos quotes Professor Price as considering 'best of my flesh' to be the most glorious expression of love in all Shakespeare.31 'My wife comes foremost', is an equally evocative declaration of Coriolanus's profound and tender devotion for his wife: an extraordinarily perceptive and revealing comment on Virgilia's priority in his esteem. These are not the words of an inarticulate man.

Like Coriolanus, the Ajax has been judged through the years to be a harsh play, with an almost unbroken atmosphere of hostility. The hero has similarly been criticized as unattractive, even repellent and brutal.32 It is important, however, to discern that beneath the apparent rough aggressiveness 'Sophocles does not mean to make of Ajax merely a brutal killer . . . there is a nobility in Ajax' language, a strength and constancy, that is unmistakable'.33 Charles Segal states:

in the Ajax . . . the hero's relation to society is deeply involved with language. Ajax is silent and uncommunicative . . . [he] is isolated in the silence of his grief . . . Everyone speaks to Ajax but no one really makes an impression. He has to work out his decision in his own terms, through his own essentially private, uncommunicative meditations. 34

The taciturnity which prompts Ajax's critics to label him as a limited, disagreeable, even unsociable character, is in fact evidence of an assiduous honesty, an inability to use words which might mislead, or might pervert the truth. Impressive rhetoric or dishonest assertions are as foreign to Ajax's customary manner of speech as they are to Coriolanus's. His essence is revealed in his verbal reserve, for every word he utters carries the full weight of its precise meaning. His reticence masks a complete, sensitive humanity, which is all the more surprising for being inexplicit. His rough speech, especially to Tecmessa, often conceals intense emotional torment, especially

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in his crucial resolution to end his life. He silences her appeals tersely, but the severity of his words reveals his mental stress. His final words to Tecmessa: 'You're a fool, Tecmessa,/ To think that I could change my nature now/ On your instructions', may appear to be stern and unloving, but his later admission that her words touched him, reveal a man capable of tender affections despite his resolve to stand firm, his ostensibly harsh words:

now my edge is blunted
By a woman's soft persuasion. I am loth
To leave a widow and a fatherless child
Here among enemies.

ll. 600–602, 652–655

Compare Jebb:

I . . . felt the keen edge of my temper softened by yon woman's words; and I feel the pity of leaving her a widow with my foes, and the boy an orphan.

ll. 651–653

It is not an inability to express himself which sets the Sophoclean hero apart from his community: it is, more significantly, a lack of moral accord which irrevocably precludes any mutual understanding. In the Antigone there is a conspicuous lack of communication, and consequently of concord, between Antigone and everyone around her. She deplores Creon's edict, is contemptuous of Ismene's lack of courage, and criticizes the people's hesitation to express what they feel:

ANTIGONE: Have you heard how our dearest are being treated like enemies?
... He has no right to keep me from my own.
...

ISMENE: I cannot act
Against the State. I am not strong enough.

ANTIGONE: Let that be your excuse, then. I will go
And heap a mound of earth over my brother.
...
All these
Would say that what I did was honourable,
But fear locks up their lips.

ll. 12, 48, 75–78, 503–505

On their part Creon and the people of Thebes misconstrue her defiance and

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misinterpret her integrity: lack of understanding results from - and in - lack of communication. The gap in moral intuition between Antigone and Creon is unbridgeable, and without any mutual basis there can be between them neither comprehension nor communication. He is as unable to understand the moral imperatives on which she bases her conduct as is the chorus. She is charged with impiety but she has a more fundamental understanding of true dutifulness than he does:

CREON: I am king, and responsible only to myself. ll. 737
ANTIGONE: What help or hope have I
In whom devotion is deemed sacrilege?
ll. 915–916

Compare Jebb:

CR. Am I to rule by other judgement than mine own?
ll. 736
AN. What ally should I invoke, — when by piety I have earned the name of impious?
ll. 923–924

Charles Segal remarks that despite the fact that Creon 'talks constantly of "pollution" and "reverence" . . . [he] understands them only in the narrowest and least reverent way'.

In Coriolanus lack of communication emanates, as it does in the Antigone, from a lack of shared values between the protagonist and his community, and a generalized ethical insufficiency in the population at large. The Romans' inability to comprehend Coriolanus's integrity is countered by his bitter disillusion in, and antagonism towards, his compatriots. Between him and them, there is no meeting of attitudes or ideas, no real communication. The people speak about him and around him, they instruct him, order him and insult him; for his part, he curses and commands, and terminates rather than initiates conversations. Without communication, he is a man alone within his own city: his emotional and spiritual exile effectively begins within Rome long before his physical banishment. There is an atmosphere of antipathy concentrated around Coriolanus: with no communication there can be no rapport between him and his fellow Romans,
or, latterly, the Volscians. The ethical abyss between him and those around him compounds, and is compounded by, the inability to comprehend and communicate.

Without commonly-held principles or standards of behaviour all forms of communication must break down, or at least become suspect. Truth and reliability in the world of the drama appear to exist only in the heroic reality of Coriolanus. The recognition of the unreliability of communication within the drama is an important factor in the apprehension of the heroic identity, for, as Robert Weimann remarks: 'character is defined not only in terms of mimesis and expression, but as a function of theatrical communication'.

Inga-Stina Ewbank contends that Shakespeare's art often teases our imaginative responses with a presentation, through the drama, of the riddle that "'what you see is the real thing' / 'what you hear is the real thing'" (p. 16). In Coriolanus the question increases in complexity: for both Coriolanus and the audience, the communication of identity and experience through the drama could be more accurately expressed as: what you see is not the real thing, and what you hear is not the real thing. Through the presentation of almost universal duplicity, the play conveys an uneasy sense of the incompetence of both words and actions in communication.

Coriolanus shows a marked aversion to words throughout the drama: he flees from words, hates to hear his 'nothings monster'd', shows disdain for 'acclamations hyperbolical', and finds no need to brag about his exploits. Only Coriolanus and Virgilia choose and use words precisely. Only they say what they mean, and mean what they say at all times: only they use words as a true reflection of what they believe. The inarticulacy for which Coriolanus has been criticized is in fact a verbal and moral preciseness which precludes rhetorical sophistry. His first words to Virgilia, 'My noble silence, hail', are four simple words which convey implicit information about Coriolanus, about Virgilia, about their relationship and about some of the dominant concerns of the play: sincere emotion, words, silence, and communication. His mistrust of words and his ability to convey a maximum of meaning in a minimum of words is an integral part of his character. Like Virgilia, Coriolanus is eloquent in his reticence.

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Sophoclean heroes manifest this quality of using words and language with precision to express and communicate exactly how they feel: they are inherently unable to deceive or to play a part for any reason. In this Coriolanus stands apart from all other Shakespearean tragic heroes. Hamlet adopts an 'antic disposition' and uses words and behaviour for his own ends; Othello agrees to Iago's stratagem to trap Desdemona, and loses control over the words he uses; Macbeth betrays his king and his closest friend; King Lear demands empty words to flatter his ego, and misunderstands and misuses power and love. Even in the most extreme passion, Coriolanus always says exactly what he means and believes.

'Words measure the gap between individuals: they do not bridge it'. This statement, not made about *Coriolanus*, is nevertheless relevant. Words in *Coriolanus*, rather than being a means of communication and understanding, are more commonly used to conceal real feelings, to deceive, or to persuade. Communication is treacherous; words do not carry their apparent significance and meanings are untrustworthy. Throughout the drama Coriolanus is assailed by words which are meant to confuse him, to manipulate him or to enrage him. In such a situation, in which, James Calderwood notes, 'truth... [is] hard to come by' (p. 212), truth must be perceived by other means than from the words of those who are untrustworthy and insincere. A reliable understanding of the nature of the tragic hero and his relationship with the community can be attained from his words and actions only, as all others prove to be unreliable. The opinions of other characters reveal more about themselves than they do about the hero.

Carol Sicherman notes that the 'theme of language' is developed in *Coriolanus* through the examination of 'verbal inadequacy'. Almost the first words, 'speak, speak' suggest the role that words, language and communication are to play in the drama. D.J. Gordon's observation that 'in this city to speak is to be guilty', is a statement about the unreliability of both words and ethical standards. However, Coriolanus's language is not 'ill-chosen', as Sicherman suggests (pp. 192–193), but is, indeed, extremely well-chosen. It reflects the truth, and the relevance of his language is not so much what it is, as why it is so, and what conclusions can be drawn from the
comparison of his language with that of other characters. His language may be
less circumspect than that of others of his class, but, unlike theirs, it never
compromises his principles, or the truth of the situation as shown in the
action. The other patricians may use more conciliatory words, but in truth
feel the same contempt for the plebeians and tribunes that Coriolanus does.
The tribunes dissemble even more than the patricians do; they only reveal
their true thoughts and natures to each other, and are unremittingly
deceptive in everything they say in public. In private they admit their
antagonism towards Coriolanus, and the threat he poses to their ambitions:

Bru. I heard him swear,
Were he to stand for consul, never would he
Appear i’ th’ market-place, nor on him put
The napless vesture of humility;

Sic. I wish no better
Than have him hold that purpose . . .

Bru. ’Tis most like he will.

Sic. It shall be to him then as our good wills:
A sure destruction.

II.1.221–233

In public, however, they are ingratiating and crafty:

Sic. I would he had continued to his country
As he began, and not unknit himself
The noble knot he made.

Bru. I would he had.

IV.2.30–32

The plebeians' words are equally unreliable: their 'multitudinous tongue'
yields with obtuseness and vacillation:

6 Cit. He has done nobly, and cannot go without any
honest man's voice.

7 Cit. Therefore let him be consul. The
 gods give him joy, and make him good
 friend to the people!

All. Amen, amen. God save thee, noble consul!

3 Cit. He's not confirm'd: we may deny him yet.

2 Cit. And will deny him;

II.3.130–134, 206–207

J.L. Simmons states: 'When the people speak, decorum between language and

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reality breaks down and with it the decorum of civil life. When Coriolanus is named traitor instead of consul, the state is thrown into moral chaos. Coriolanus's inability to converse amicably is not so much indicative of his antisocial nature as it is of his moral incompatibility with all around him: his verbal severity is consonant with his ethical inflexibility. Shakespeare's taciturn hero differs from Plutarch's who 'had an eloquent tongue', and the difference is not a failure in dramatic characterization but a decisive indication of moral values in the drama. Rather than being 'ill-schooled', Coriolanus is more correctly extremely sensitive to words; he 'is not a man who lacks verbal resources'. Brusque but not inarticulate, he is well able to express coherently that which he feels most deeply. His verbal resources are indeed more than adequate, and on occasion he rises to impressive fluency of expression and keen insight. No other character attains the verbal passion and perspicuity that Coriolanus does, unless there is some devious motive for such eloquence. Coriolanus never wastes words in idle or insincere talk. Rather than adjust his words to the demands of each situation, as he is often advised to do, he can only express that which he feels, rather than that which others may wish to hear: he 'cannot bring/ [his] tongue to such a pace' (II.3.49-50).

James Calderwood affirms that in Coriolanus 'language falls apart', that words are corrupt, and the relation of language to truth is 'shifting and elusive'. Coriolanus's language, however, is not an eccentric, created 'language of his own', as Calderwood suggests (p. 214), unless it is in the sense that, with the exception of Virgilia's, it is the only scrupulously correct language used in the play. Only he, of all the Romans, uses words which at all times precisely express his thoughts and emotions. Only he, with the invariable exception of Virgilia, never suggests that words other than those expressing his true feelings would be more convenient or politic, or that there might be advantage in disguising or changing the truth. What he is, feels, and says, never alters: 'what his breast forges, that his tongue must vent' (III.1.258). He has no concern for the effect he may be making. Indeed, if all men spoke as they felt, as he does, 'his heart's his mouth' could not be used as a reproach.

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Calderwood feels that Coriolanus 'rarely calls upon the full evocative power of language; [that] there is none of the richness and depth of expression in his speech that we take for granted in Hamlet's, and none of the "Othello music"' (p. 215). He concludes that Coriolanus's 'general imperceptiveness . . . his lack of self-awareness, his failure to see issues or people in their full reality . . . owes something to the inflexibility of his language and to his indifference to nuances of meaning' (p. 215). In this, Calderwood reverts to the well-worn conception of Coriolanus as inarticulate and insensitive. Coriolanus's determination to say and to do as he sees fit is conversely a measure of his self-assurance, bolstered by his moral certainty. Not for him the endless debates, the exploratory indecision of Hamlet; his perceptive awareness of himself, of others, and of his role in Roman society, lies at the root of his confident understanding of the way in which he must speak and act. Compared with the 'Othello music', Coriolanus's plainness of expression may well lack the pomp generally associated with Othello's habitual language, but Coriolanus too, can rise – on suitable occasions – to admirable heights of eloquence which are, by dint of their infrequency, so much more strikingly effective.

His language does not show the inflexibility which is attributed to it by Calderwood. He is more able to modulate his mode of expression than is generally recognized but only, however, if he considers the occasion to merit it, and never for reasons of policy. He can, and does, express himself with fluency, with humour, tersely, or fervently, as the situation demands. His recurrent uncontrolled outbursts of anger may suggest a uniformity of speech and response, but are only one of the elements among his linguistic and idiomatic resources. Rather than being indifferent to nuances of meaning, as Calderwood suggests, Coriolanus is, in fact, exceptionally and rigorously alert to words and their precise significance. It is this sensitivity to the substance and intention of words which causes him to react in such an extreme manner to each instance of unsubstantiated affront; his two outbursts with the most disastrous repercussions in Act III scene 3 in Rome and in Act V scene 6 in Antium, are both motivated by his sensitivity to the indignity and unjustifiability of the suggestion that he is disloyal, a traitor.
b. Words and actions

The society in which the Sophoclean hero lives, and, by implication, that which will supersede the heroic, is, B.M.W. Knox states, 'one in which action is replaced by argument, stubbornness by compromise, defiance by acceptance'. It represents the change from a heroic ethos to a more democratic society, in which discussion and co-operation – whether actual or spurious – will replace individualism. It is a society which purports to be more ordered by dint of basing each man's position within that society on a proficiency in negotiation and compromise. The qualities which distinguish the Sophoclean hero – his singular integrity and his proud inflexibility – account for his incompatibility within such a society, for he is unable to adjust, to yield, or to conform. The self-assertive individual, the heroic man of action affirming his own ethical code, is replaced by men whose perspective appears to be more appropriate to a regulated, formulaic community life. The tragedies of Sophocles mark the period of transition between the great age of Homeric heroes, and the emergence of a more egalitarian, moderate, albeit unexceptional, life in the polis. Similarly, the era of Coriolanus marks the foundation of the Roman Republic, a period of change from an aristocracy to a more democratic form of social organisation.

Because Sophoclean tragedy reflects societies at critical stages in their social and political development, the heroic personality is particularly at odds within a society which has moved away from the absolute demands of the heroic ideal. Accordingly, a specific understanding of Coriolanus as a Sophoclean tragic hero must affirm the power of the heroic individual to transcend judgement which is based on ethical moderation rather than heroic intemperance. Whitman remarks that

the idea, and the problem, of the heroic individual . . .
in great part prevented the Greeks . . . from contriving any . . . durable political system . . . [because] the heroic and the idea of society are not always at one . . . [and] the heroic will not always quite square with the moral as we see it.

*The Heroic Paradox*, pp. 19-20

With the development towards a more rational society the value of the
heroic individual declined. There was no place for extremes in the new society. Sophoclean drama, however, shows that a convergence could be achieved between the heroic and the moral: that the heroic individual, in conflict with society and alienated from it, nevertheless embodies those values which are fundamentally necessary for the ethical bases of society. Arrogant and antisocial the Sophoclean hero may be, but he confronts and exposes those qualities which made the new society. Whitman remarks, 'a bureaucracy full of legal sharks, political entrepreneurs, and an increasingly less responsible, because exploited, proletariat' (The Heroic Paradox, p. 36).

A.J.A. Waldock remarks on the emphatic, unequivocal aspect of heroic action in Sophoclean tragedy, stating that Creon is negative to Antigone's positive; 'he reacts where she acts' (p. 52). The contrast is between Antigone's moral certainty and decisive action, and Creon's diffuse bombast, his determination that, 'right or wrong' he should be obeyed (l. 666). Essentially the contrast is between positive deeds and less exacting words: between exposure to risk and the avoidance of forceful action. There is a general disinclination to act, a general moral inadequacy. The Theban elders are wary of purposeful commitment; they typically evade responsibility and betray their moral irresolution: 'To me, as far as an old man can tell,/It seems your Majesty has spoken well' (ll. 680–681). In the Ajax, the chorus show a passivity and a dependence on Ajax which is in direct contrast to his independent, determined actions. They complain and wail, talk of hardships and escape, but do nothing:

There is nothing else but to cover
Our heads and creep away, then.
Or quickly back to the oar-bench
And pull for the sea, for safety

... Pity us here,
Stretched on our grassy beds. How long?
Months without number,
Year after weary year
Waiting for nothing but our cold
Dark everlasting graves.

ll. 245–248, 606–611

The degradation of words over deeds in Coriolanus parallels that shown

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in Sophoclean tragedy. In Rome the plebeians are prepared to take rewards or
credit for deeds which they shirk from doing. Volumnia boasts of her son's
exploits, claiming honour through his wounds. All sections of society show a
reluctance to act in a principled manner, preferring to talk of actions, to react
to situations. Coriolanus sheds his blood for his country, 'not fearing outward
force' (III.1.76–77), while the citizens of Rome at every level are active only
verbally: in internal dissension, and the planning of stratagems to achieve
selfish ends. In the Shakespearean tragic canon, Coriolanus is pre-eminently
the man of action. He manifests none of the deliberations of Hamlet, the
doubts of Othello, the reluctance of Macbeth, the vulnerability of Lear, or the
loss of competence of Antony. Every situation provokes in him an
immediate reaction. His soliloquies are fewer than any other Shakespearean
hero, not because he lacks substance, but because, for him, thought and deed
are one.

Coriolanus is unambiguously defined by his words and actions. The
determination of what manner of man he is, what he truly thinks and feels,
requires no analysis. His moral certainty is directly translated into words and
actions which are immediately revealing. Soliloquy may be an effective
dramatic medium for the resolution of inner doubts or emotions, an
important clue in the communication of identity, but lack of soliloquy does
not necessarily deny the audience this perception. Coriolanus's nature
precludes the necessity for soliloquy or asides; his actions are as direct an
expression of his identity as are his words. Those thoughts, emotions, fears or
intentions which most Shakespearean heroes express in soliloquy or in
asides, are for Coriolanus part of his normal speech: he hides nothing, nor
does he consider there should be any reason to do so.

C.H. Whitman suggests that Sophocles portrays the tension between the
man of prudence – 'the talker' – and the man of heroic standards – 'the doer' –
intimating that the superior individual 'holds himself above reasoning
matters out... [preferring]... to fight them out'. Thus Ajax, stung into
decisive action by the injustice he experiences, reacts immediately with a
single-handed attack on what he imagines to be the entire Greek army, and
ultimately, against all arguments, by committing suicide. Similar rash action

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is taken by Antigone in her defiance of Creon's edict, without hesitation and fearlessly, confident that her course of action is the only correct conduct for her.

Coriolanus shows the same instinctive responses: in battle he is as decisive in action as he is in his verbal reactions in the political arena. Impetuous action is characteristic of the Sophoclean heroic: instinctive reaction is the only possible reaction. It is, for Coriolanus, the only type of response which is correct and undistorted, in which thought, speech and action are inseparably related to his intrinsic integrity. E.M. Waith remarks that Coriolanus's characteristic mode of speech is comparable with the manner in which he behaves; his words of denunciation of the plebeians 'are the exact analogue of the sword-strokes with which he fights his way alone into Corioles'. Coriolanus uses words which not only reliably reflect his thoughts, but which, at all times, match his actions; the honest accord between word and deed which characterizes the moral commitment to action of Ajax and Antigone:

AJAX: Quick, out of my sight!
Dirges and canticles are no prescription
For ills that need the knife.

Antigone: Go your own way. I will bury my brother;

For the Sophoclean hero word and deed are indivisible, but in the community debate, compromise, and insincerity sever the relationship between word and deed. J. Jones notes that in Sophocles, there is a 'persistent antithetical fondling of "word" and "deed" . . . [and] . . . we conclude that his language/action rendering of the appearance/reality tension shared by the tragic literature of the West is at once nearer to ourselves'. There is a comparable antithesis between speech and action in Coriolanus: L.F. Dean states that in Coriolanus a 'pattern of opposition between word and deed is developed', and D.J. Gordon suggests that in Coriolanus the overall opposition between word and deed 'is basic for the play'.

Like language, actions and gestures can be turned to deception. David

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Bevington asserts that gesture has 'a language of its own . . . [and] in the theatre it can both reinforce and diverge from verbal language' (p. 16). More significantly, in Coriolanus, actions and gestures can conceal inner emotions and pervert the truth: for all sections of Roman society gestures are used intentionally, to deceive. Only Coriolanus uses words and gestures as a direct expression of his innermost convictions. He has a scepticism of words, and instinctively chooses to express himself in actions rather than words: 'yet oft,/When blows have made me stay, I fled from words' (II.2.69–70). This is consistent with the source material; for Plutarch 'life is activity', and actions are an essential manifestation of the inner man. Coriolanus particularly emphasizes physical achievement over verbal intention: the action significantly – and uniquely among the tragedies – portrays the hero victorious in battle on stage. His actions both on and off the battlefield are always an expression of his own ethical standards, and are never in response to external motivation, or the expectations of others. The only instance in which he behaves in a manner which is prescribed, doing and saying that which has been recommended, he is patently uncomfortable. In the gown of humility he is ill-at-ease in his role of suppliant, eager to discharge the duty as speedily as possible in order that he may discontinue the performance and once again know himself. Only when he is not persuaded to conduct imposed by others can he be confident that his words and actions truthfully reflect his ethical principles, his essential nature.

In his nature there is no divergence between thoughts, words, and actions: the private man and the public man are identical. Other Shakespearean heroes may deliberate about a course of action, but such indecision would corrupt the immediate essentiality of motive upon which Coriolanus's actions are based. For him 'speeches about deeds abstract the deeds from the doing'. He uses actions as he uses words, as undistorted, spontaneous expressions of his integrity; he neither contemplates the effects of his actions, nor does he seek rewards for them. Like Ajax and Antigone, he expresses himself through his actions, truthfully.
3. Roles: acting a part

The Sophoclean tragic hero characteristically refuses to behave in a manner which conflicts with, or does not accurately express his fundamental integrity. Ajax would rather end his life prematurely than live in a manner which he deems to be inappropriate: 'Honour in life, / Or honour in death' (ll.480–482). Antigone knows immediately that Creon's edict challenges her moral obligation. She is unable to compromise her integrity, to behave in a way which would constitute a lie to her being:

   It is against you and me he has made this order.
   Yes, against me.

   ... I know where my true duty lies.  

ll. 31–2, 100

The Sophoclean hero cannot conform to social mores; he must be himself always, must act and speak as his nature, and not as society, dictates. B.M.W. Knox remarks that the chorus uses the word 'unadaptable' of Ajax, and notes that the word is not used elsewhere in Greek tragedy.55 It is precisely this unadaptability which expresses the absolute and inflexible integrity of the Sophoclean hero, his inability to be other than he is.

In the late sixteenth century in London, any alteration in conduct and speech was considered to be reprehensible: 'it is a strange matter to se, how menne . . . begin to alter their manners and customes, not onely in garments, and ordinary behaviour, (which be things of none importance:) But even in their order of life, and conversation'.56 The disparagement of imitation or acting a part, which Plato expressed in The Republic, reflects a similar attitude in ancient Greece. He considered that men were likely to be influenced by whatever role or conduct they assumed and were in danger of adopting such characterization as their own. Accordingly, he declared that actors should be banished from the state because men should not "'depict or be skilful at imitating any kind of illiberality or baseness, lest from imitation they should come to be what they imitate'".57

Anne Righter notes that the attitude expressed by Plato is comparable with Coriolanus's repugnance towards acting a part:

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You have put me now to such a part which never
I shall discharge to th' life.

... Well, I must do't.
Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit!

III.2.105-106, 110-112 (A. Righter, p. 190)

This is in fact an attitude which is commonly expressed in Shakespearean
drama; acting in a manner which is calculated to deceive, any display of
artfulness, is represented as treacherous:

_lago._ When devils will their blackest sins put on,
  They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
  As I do now;

  _Othello:_ II.3.340-342

This accords with the Greek origin of the word for actor, _hypocrítês_; an actor is
in essence one who attempts to persuade by pretence or simulation. Generally
in drama, conduct which is feigned merits distaste, or at the least mistrust,
and conversely, conduct devoid of artifice must signal sincerity.

a. Duplicity in Rome

The world of _Coriolanus_ seethes with hollow pretence, and Antium
proves to be no different from Rome. In Rome, all sections of society are
equally acquiescent in any form of deception for personal or political
advantage. The tribunes exhibit an unremitting attitude of self-serving
villainy. In order to further their own ambition they manipulate the
plebeians, coaching them in their part in the premeditated baiting and
eventual downfall of Coriolanus:

_Bru._ Could you not have told him –
  As you were lesson'd –

  ... Thus to have said,
  As you were fore-advis'd

  _Sic._

  _Br._ And when such time they have begun to cry,
  Let them not cease, but with a din confus'd
  Enforce the present execution
  Of what we chance to sentence.

  _III.3.19-22_

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Bertrand Evans terms the tribunes ‘the people’s misleaders’, and comments on the manner in which they ingratiate themselves with both sections of Roman society. He claims that they are ‘to blame for the reversal of the hero’s fortunes . . .’. Indistinguishable and interchangeable, Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus are equally reprehensible; the only unambiguous constancy they demonstrate throughout the drama is their bitter malevolence towards Coriolanus for the threat he poses to their ambitions. In this they never deviate, and exploit every situation to their own advantage. Like the plebeians, whom they constantly incite and prepare, their speech in public often has a rehearsed, choric quality, and they often speak in unison:

\[\text{Men.} \quad \text{Do you two know how you are censured here in the city . . .?} \]
\[\text{...} \]
\[\text{Both Trib.} \quad \text{Why, how are we censur’d?} \]
\[\text{Men.} \quad \text{Because you talk of pride now – will you not be angry?} \]
\[\text{Both Trib.} \quad \text{Well, well, sir, well . . .} \]
\[\text{What then, sir?} \]

\[\text{II.1.19–25, 38} \]

Histrionic duplicity is not confined to the tribunes and the plebeians: the patricians are equally insincere. Volumnia would dissemble with her very nature in order to achieve her ends (III.2.62-64). She envisages scenarios for her son and attempts to coach him in his part, in much the same way as the tribunes rehearse the people. Menenius, and even Cominius, are prepared to condone counterfeit attitudes if they judge the outcome to be worth the deception:

\[\text{Men.} \quad \text{Put not your worthy rage into your tongue; One time will owe another.} \]
\[\text{...} \]

\[\text{III.1.241–2} \]

\[\text{Com.} \quad \text{I have been i’ th’ market-place; and, sir, ’tis fit You make strong party, or defend yourself By calmness or by absence; all’s in anger.} \]
\[\text{Men.} \quad \text{Only fair speech.} \]
\[\text{Com.} \quad \text{I think ’twill serve, if he Can thereto frame his spirit.} \]

\[\text{III.2.93–97} \]
Aufidius, too, is motivated by self-interest. At first he freely admits his hatred for Coriolanus:

\[ \text{Mar.} \quad \text{I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee}\]
\[ \text{Worse than a promise-breaker.} \]
\[ \text{Auf.} \quad \text{We hate alike:} \quad \text{I.8.1–3} \]

When it suits him to do so, Aufidius masks his true feelings of hostility and envy in excessive words and the simulated emotions and expressions of camaraderie:

\[ \text{O Marcius, Marcius!} \]
\[ \text{Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart} \]
\[ \text{A root of ancient envy . . .} \]
\[ \text{A thousand welcomes!} \]
\[ \text{And more a friend than e'er an enemy;} \quad \text{IV.5.101–103, 145–146} \]

Later, all his old antagonism emerges as he reveals his long-term plans to destroy Coriolanus: 'When, Caius, Rome is thine,/Thou are poor' st of all; then shortly art thou mine' (IV.7.56–57).

Coriolanus stands apart from everyone, universally misunderstood and maligned because he alone refuses to, indeed cannot, moderate his speech to suit the occasion, flatter, or feign an attitude in order to gain an advantage. Bertrand Evans asserts:

\[ \text{If Menenius, Volumnia, Titus Lartius, and the otherwise wholly admirable Cominius were but once to scold the hero for his attitude itself towards the people, we might be justified in taking their view as the dramatist's directive to ourselves. But they never do so; they demand only that the hero mask his attitude. In the final assessment of the body of evidence, then, their testimony deserves hardly more weight than that of the tribunes and the citizens.} \]
\[ \text{Shakespeare's Tragic Practice, p. 323} \]

The drama depicts a world rife with hypocrisy in which no class or person is exempt. In this atmosphere of dissimulation and opportunism, Coriolanus's - and Virgilia's - straightforward honesty is indeed, 'too noble for the world' (III.1.255).

For Coriolanus 'action is eloquence': although he prefers actions to words

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he expresses himself with equal truthfulness through language or conduct. In using the phrase (III.2.76), Volumnia obviously intends a direct antithesis between true meaning or intention, and assumed, deceptive gestures. Her motive is to coach Coriolanus in rhetorical, and especially in gestural tactics, which are calculated to delude. This is no different from the accustomed mode of behaviour in Rome: simulation distorts the truth at all levels of society. Volumnia maintains that gestures, as well as words, should be used with artful subtlety, that verbal subterfuge and gestural affectation are acceptable means of achieving politic or selfish objectives. True feelings should never be expressed, gestures should be adopted in order to deceive 'the eyes of th' ignorant' (76). She advocates that actions should be a spurious reinforcement of equally misleading words, never spontaneous, and always carefully rehearsed for calculated effect. Thus, for her, gestures and actions are imbued with the potential to influence men's minds more than mere words alone could do:

*Vol.*

If it be honour in your wars to seem
The same you are not, which for your best ends
You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse
That it shall hold companionship in peace
With honour as in war; since that to both
It stands in like request?

... I prithee now, my son,
Go to them with this bonnet in thy hand;

... Thy knee bussing the stones – for in such business
Action is eloquence, and the eyes of th' ignorant
More learned than the ears

III.2.46–51, 72–77

In her attempt to persuade Coriolanus to deceive the citizens, Volumnia adopts verbally the very devices she recommends. She uses all the guile at her command, deploying arguments and analogies which she thinks would be most convincing. At first she tries to disarm him, by aligning herself with him: 'I have a heart as little apt as yours' (29). She then refers to his prowess and policy in war, but again achieves no positive response. In fact, there is no indication throughout the action that Coriolanus is anything but
straightforward and trustworthy in war. He is never shown to adopt a strategy in order to deceive the enemy, nor need he do so. Volumnia confirms this when she realizes that that particular tactic yielded no advantage:

I know thou hadst rather
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf
Than flatter him in a bower. (90–92)

It is significant that although Coriolanus wages war without guile, Aufidius and the senators of Corioles are shown to hatch 'great pretences' in order to attack an unprepared Rome (1.2.20–25). Generally, throughout the drama, most words and actions resemble the assumption of roles with predetermined objectives; as such, they bear no relation to the truth and can be manipulated for deception.

Coriolanus understands that conduct which is not of his 'bosom's truth' is inherently damaging. He extends his aversion for any form of dissimulation to a profound perception that false actions and insincere words must impair or undermine his essential nature and so corrupt his being. He attempts to convince Volumnia and the other patricians of his fear:

Would you have me
False to my nature?... I will not do't,
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

III.2.14–15, 120–123

John Bayley suggests that there is both 'rigidity and insecurity... in the notion of a physical attitude producing its mental equivalent'. But insecurity is alien to Coriolanus; his assurance is absolute, born of an exceptional moral certainty: 'Rather say I play/The man I am' (15–16). The paradox inherent in 'playing' the man he is, expresses his understanding that for the patricians all conduct is assumed, that they 'play' their parts, 'play' the people they are at all times. He also expresses his inability to play any part except the man he is; he cannot act in any manner which does not express his own nature without artifice.

This is not a rigidity which derives from undiscriminating obstinacy: it is rather a deeply committed ethical stance in opposition to the corruption of

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values he sees in the society around him. In the midst of social and political changes which dispense with the prerogative and self-determination of the individualist, Coriolanus's heroic fortitude and moral certainty mark an independent refusal to compromise his integrity. His aversion to any form of hypocritical conduct arises not from a sense of insecurity, as Bayley suggests, but from a deep understanding that insincerity of word or deed can—and does—pervert. For this reason he cannot conform to modes of speech or manner which society may demand of him, unless such required behaviour entails no contradiction of his principles.

Coriolanus's conduct as a Roman warrior in battle accords with that which society expects and applauds, whereas his inability to adjust his conduct to suit various social or political situations—in fact, to act a part—earns general disapproval. In substance, what the patricians and plebeians demand is that he adopt a pose in order to conform to a questionable, although generally approved, mode of conduct. Neither group understands, nor regards as significant, the fact that such artifice is demeaning not only to each man's essential integrity, but to his role within the community, and ultimately, to the state. The irresolution and lack of principle at all levels of society result in irreparable damage to the substance of Rome—city and citizens:

the most valiant and therefore the most complete
Roman is banished the city by the cowardly and
dependence Roman rabble. . . . within the mood of the
play both Coriolanus' tragic sense of life and
Shakespeare's compel us to recognize that a compliant
hero would not then have played the man he was, and
would have been false to the nature that triumphed at
Corioli. 60

Coriolanus is constantly being urged by the patricians to speak and act in a manner deliberately calculated to conceal his contempt for the masses, as they do, in order to gain an advantage. They urge him to adopt a more conciliatory manner towards the plebeians and their tribunes:

Vol.
You might have been enough the man you are
With striving less to be so; lesser had been
The thwartings of your dispositions, if
You had not show'd them how ye were dispos'd,
Although his mother recognizes that he has never before performed a part, she nevertheless demands that he practise policy. She attempts to persuade him, promising her approval for such artifice:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said} \\
\text{My praises made thee first a soldier, so,} \\
\text{To have my praise for this, perform a part} \\
\text{Thou has not done before.}
\end{align*}
\]

In fact, Coriolanus has never shown any desire for his mother's praises, despite what is generally asserted:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I Cit.} \\
\text{soft-conscienc'd men can be content to say} \\
\text{it was for his country, he did it to please} \\
\text{his mother}
\end{align*}
\]


Volumnia fails to understand that her son's unwillingness to be other than he is, is based on a more fundamental imperative than a stubborn resistance to adaptation, as she implies in 'You are too absolute' (III.2.39). His hatred of pretence, of hypocrisy in social or political spheres, diverges radically from the common Roman viewpoint that 'virtue is merely civic and man's primary moral relationship is not to a witnessing conscience but to a witnessing public'. Coriolanus's viewpoint is in direct opposition to this. He is totally unconcerned about public opinion, and all his actions and words reliably reveal the man he is.

b. Disguise and change of garb

The assuming of carefully planned gestures in order to deceive is comparable with a radical change of clothes, the adoption of a disguise. In either case, the taking-on of a different mode of behaviour, or of different
garments, carries the implication that the inner man is being concealed, that what is presented is a deception. The essence of this perception accords with contemporary sixteenth and seventeenth century ideas: 'you must not thinke that these externall thinges, (I meane apparrell and iesture) bee the cheefest ornamentes for a Gentleman. For the inward vertues and perfections be in troth of most weight, and cheefly required'.

Coriolanus's distaste for the adoption of an attitude of mock courtesy while wearing the gown of humility, as urged on him by the patricians, is not a mere revolt against custom. The tradition of standing in the market-place, exposed and vulnerable, in order to display his wounds to the plebeians, and of suing for their votes, is deeply repugnant to him. His reluctance is not based, as Palmer suggests, on his contempt for the citizens or the fact that the tradition does not 'please' him (pp. 269, 270). His contempt for the citizens would not prevent him from fulfilling any obligation he regarded as consistent with his honour as a Roman. He is generally determined to preserve custom at all costs:

Therefore beseech you –
You that will be less fearful than discreet;
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on't;

III.1.149–152

Custom calls me to't.
What custom wills, in all things should we do't

II.3.114–115

In this instance, however, he feels as he does throughout the play, that affectation of any sort is inevitably discreditable. He feels that his role in this situation requires him to relate his deeds and assume a posture in order that the citizens may react to his words and wounds rather than to the reality of his deeds. He sees the ceremony as a charade which he must perform in order to demonstrate a false submission to popular opinion. There is a sense of intense urgency in his courteous, repeated requests to the patricians and tribunes, despite the fact that he normally does not approve of dispensing with tradition:

I do beseech you
Let me o'erleap that custom; ...
Please you
That I may pass this doing.

II.2. 133–134, 136–137

He is aware that the voices of the people are as unreliable as is their
behaviour, and that they therefore demean that for which they vote.

Normally dismissive of his wounds, he is now expected to parade them to the
citizens he cannot approve, as if his scars were 'for the hire/Of their breath
only!' (47–48). His wounds, honourably received in the valiant defence of
Rome, are to be publicly exhibited, while he must entreat 'in wholesome
manner' those for whom he feels no respect. He must abase himself
physically and verbally, in humble robes as a petitioner, acting a part which is
irreconcilably at odds with his judgement.

He neither desires the consulship nor does he need confirmation of his
exploits, and his perception of the inherent moral inconsistency of the
situation is evident in his choice of words: he cannot 'put on the gown', yet
'stand naked'. He expresses more than a fear of being unarmed: it is a
profound sense of physical, emotional, and worse, of moral vulnerability. He
feels that he is exposed to attack and is unable to defend himself or to assert
his true nature because he must behave in a prescribed manner. As he stands
in the market-place his bearing and words reflect his extrême discomfort. He
cannot demean his wounds with the flaunting of them, nor can he denigrate
his deeds with the proclaiming of them. He cannot offer his triumphs as
actions which should be rewarded.

J.L. Simmons suggests that

no scene in Shakespeare more challenges the
judgement and sympathy of the audience than that in
which Coriolanus stands before the people in the gown
of humility . . . one cannot imagine any of
Shakespeare's noble characters meeting this test
morally unscathed . . . the action, words, and even
costume assigned to Coriolanus are, he feels, absurdly
indecorous, creating an insidious discrepancy between
the role and his natural capacities. Coriolanus will
therefore fail, both as an actor and as a man'.

Shakespeare’s Pagan World, pp. 37, 39

In fact, however, Coriolanus does not fail. He knows that he cannot act a part;
he can only be himself, and he succeeds, as always, in being true to his

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essential self. His speech is as blunt as ever, but, given his extreme discomfort, his words are a fairly restrained reflection of his true feelings for his role and for the citizens:

3 Cit. You must not think, if we give you anything, we hope to gain by you.
Cor. Well then, I pray, your price o' th' consulship?
1 Cit. The price is to ask it kindly.
Cor. Kindly, sir, I pray let me ha't.
... Your good voice, sir; what say you?

The citizens accept his words at face value, and cordially give their voices: 'The gods give you joy, sir, heartily!' (108). His distaste for the sham of the ceremony is apparent, yet his conduct is comparatively controlled, so that the plebeians do indeed grant him the consulship, without the required showing of wounds. He therefore does not fail, either as a man or as an actor.

Coriolanus fulfils his obligation and complies with custom, but neither needs nor desires the accolades: 'Better it is to die, better to starve,/Than crave the hire which first we do deserve' (110–111). Having discharged his duty, and played his part, he is impatient to be true to himself, to recognize himself once again, to act as he sees fit, and not as required:

Cor. May I change these garments?
Sic. You may, sir.
Cor. That I'll straight do, and, knowing myself again,
Repair to th' Senate House.

In Shakespeare's dramatization of the scene, J.L. Simmons sees 'his most drastic change' from Plutarch's account. He suggests that 'Shakespeare's Coriolanus is therefore prophetic when he infuses the elective process with the language of beggary and bribery, two transactions that demean and pervert the already intolerable... Roman morality'. The demeaning ritual reflects the 'tainted paradox' of honours as a reward for virtue, of remuneration for being always, in essence, what each Roman should be.

It is significant that this most humiliating procedure is enacted in the market-place or Forum, a suitable place for negotiation. Coriolanus extends the sense of 'hire' (II.2. 147) from the meaning of payment for use, or wages

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for service, to encompass that of reward or of material gain as motive for action; he thus infuses the term with the derogatory implication of a mercenary soldier. The sense of negotiation and bartering is emphasized in the repetition of 'if', as a prerequisite condition to a transaction:

1 Cit. Once, if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him.
2 Cit. We may, sir, if we will.
3 Cit. ... for if he show us his wounds
... so,
if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.

II.3.1–9

The trading analogy continues in the vocabulary of commerce: 'your price o' th' consulship?' (72), and of gambling: 'a match, sir' (78). Bargaining and traffic continues, as Coriolanus is given voices in return for friendship (101–102), his wounds are owed to his country (103–104), he has to beg for that which he has already won (111). The transaction is completed as Coriolanus enumerates battles and wounds as he would the items and prices of merchandise. The scene embodies a perception that Coriolanus is a commodity to be exploited and profited from:

For your voices I have fought;
for your voices bear
Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six
I have seen and heard of;

123–126

In the ritual, Coriolanus is required to play a part which has been enacted before by past Roman heroes. He is instructed how to dress, speak and act, as if it were necessary to educate or rehearse him in the proper conduct of a hero. But Coriolanus instinctively, scrupulously and constantly behaves as a hero should behave. It is therefore an ironic paradox: a consummate hero, forced into a histrionic simulation of a hero.

When Coriolanus adopts mean apparel in Act IV scene 4, it is a voluntary choice, in contradistinction to his enforced wearing of the gown of humility. He chooses to behave as he does, and the temporary disguise represents no compromise of, or threat to, his integrity. He can, as John Bayley suggests, join the Volscians and remain essentially himself; he can 'go over to the enemy,
becoming, as it were, his own name, and remaining in the process more than ever himself. He does not do this, however, as Bayley suggests, only because he is so much a product of Volumnia's 'egocentric will... that he can detach himself from the very principles that his upbringing was supposed to inculcate' (p. 151). Rather, and more significantly, he is able to don mean apparel and to go over to the enemy ranks, while assiduously maintaining his integrity, not because he is a product of Volumnia's will, but because he has always refused to be her – or anyone else's – puppet. He always remains true to his own principles; whether a Roman or a Volscian, he stands apart from the commonalty, isolated by his refusal to dissimulate, his individuality and independence remaining essentially uncorrupted.

Coriolanus never specifically objects to the donning of mean apparel, or to the wearing of Volscian arms, as he does to the gown of humility, for in the voluntarily assumed garb of a beggar, or as a Volscian soldier, he is still free to speak and act as he sees fit. Custom does not dictate the manner in which he is to behave, nor does anyone attempt to persuade him to speak or act inappropriately with respect to his code of honour. Humble attire itself does not threaten his integrity; only the imposition of words, and especially of conduct, can mask, and so pervert his essential nature. Joyce van Dyke suggests that Coriolanus's adoption of mean apparel 'is a potent visual suggestion that something in the man himself... has changed' (p. 143). On the contrary, his spontaneously assumed disguise is evidence of the reinforcement of his habitual, constant determination always to be his own man on his own terms, to initiate, unprovoked, his own actions, and thereby to communicate truthfully his essence.

There is no suggestion in the drama – as there is in the gown of humility scene – that he feels demeaned by his actions, that his adoption of the guise of a beggar, or later, his wearing of Volscian arms, is repugnant or dishonourable to him. There is no sense, as there was in the earlier scene in the gown of humility, that Coriolanus is uncomfortable in his chosen roles in Antium: he jests easily with the servingmen, showing a ready capacity for banter and light-hearted puns. In fact, the drama highlights his continued martial successes, his popularity with the Volscians, the continued...
preoccupation of the Romans with his dominating individuality. Most significantly, his singularity and prestige are as apparent among the Volscians as they were among the Romans:

Auf. Do they still fly to th' Roman?
Lieu. I do not know what witchcraft's in him, but Your soldiers use him as the grace fore meat, Their talk at table, and their thanks at end;

IV.7.1–4
CHAPTER VI
The non-heroic community
1. Lack of principle and concord in the community

The Sophoclean tragic hero attempts to live according to precepts which are no longer appropriate to the community: aggressively intractable and arrogant, he is obsessed with maintaining personal, absolute standards of integrity and conduct which are incompatible with and incomprehensible to his society, which is shown to be undistinguished and irresolute at best, and unscrupulous at worst. He is disagreeable, even offensive in terms of the everyday, the non-heroic, for 'the pagan heroic ethos is antisocial, acultural, unchristian' (Ide, p. 10). He remains inextricably fixed in the attitudes of a bygone culture, intent on the demands of the heroic ideal. The perspective of Sophoclean tragedy presents the ordinary citizens in the light of these earlier categorical perceptions, in terms of which society in general is portrayed as unreliable, unprincipled, reprehensible. The clash of irreconcilable attitudes provokes insoluble conflict.

The Ajax clearly presents the lack of social cohesion or moral accord: hostility, resentment, and discord characterize those relationships which more properly should embody loyal co-operation for the general good. The hatred of the Atreidae for Ajax is reciprocated by his contempt for them. Each of the Greek leaders affirms his ill will towards Ajax:

**ODYSSEUS:** The man I hated, and I hate him still.

**MENELAUS:** He hated me: I him.

**AGAMEMNON:** he,

On earth or under it, shall be forever
My hated enemy.

11.78, 1136–1137, 1371–1372

Ajax despises their improbity and, confident of his valour and nobility, disregards their dubious authority:

Where is Odysseus now,
That sharp-eyed instrument
Of ill-doing, he,
The vilest creature in all our camp . . .
Let me but kill
That fox, and those two brother-kings
Who lord it over us –

11.380–382, 389–391
The Greek kings' unprincipled malevolence is based on a deep resentment towards Ajax for deliberately flouting their self-appointed leadership, and they openly admit as much:

**MENELAUS:** We couldn't rule him while he lived; but dead, Say what you will, we'll keep him in subjection Under our hands; he never in his life Obeyed a word of mine. 

Il. 1066–1069

**AGAMEMNON:** You claim, So I have heard, that we, my brother and I, Are not the rightful leaders of the Greeks On land or sea, you owe us no allegiance, And Ajax put to sea at no man's orders. 

Il. 1233–1237

Their malice is exacerbated by the well-known fact that Ajax more than once has risked his life to save them:

**TEUCER:** when you were penned within your fences ... And he came single-handed to deliver you — ... when fire was raging round your ships, ... who averted that disaster? 

Il. 1274–1280

The antagonism between the Sophoclean hero and his society is engendered by the clash of incompatible moral attitudes and aspirations. The heroic temperament, fiercely resolute, asserts an inflexible, individual moral code: society, unprincipled and inconstant, demands co-operation and compromise. Conflict is inevitable. The citizens, including and largely defined by, the members of the choruses, manifest no fixed moral attitude: 'one suspects the chorus in Sophocles of being an intentional symbol of the inadequacy of everyday morality to judge the ultimate questions'.

Society in general is characterized by irresolution in conduct and ethical commitment.

In the Ajax, the reaction of the chorus to Ajax's predicament betrays their fear of adverse public opinion and their moral and physical cowardice. They are self-centred, concerned only for their own safety, and express neither sympathy nor support for their leader:

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CHORUS: It is plain. There is no escaping and the story is loud in the mouths of the people, I fear what is coming upon us.

Jebb's translation is even more explicit: 'Woe is me, I dread the doom to come' (I.225). Their protestations of loyalty to Ajax: 'I could not live without you' (I.394), are exposed as meaningless words only by their prior expression of their true fears:

The time hath come for each of us to veil his head and betake him to stealthy speed of foot

And pull for sea, for safety From the wash of the angry vengeance Of our two leaders, The sons of Atreus.

Jebb, ll.245–246

Watling, ll. 247–251

After Ajax's suicide their immediate selfish preoccupation is even more blatant, rather than any real distress for their leader's fate:

Dead! O master, master! This is the end, The end of our homeward sailing, Ay, death for all of us

ll.897–900

The lack of constancy and courage, and the inclination of the chorus to dissemble is analogous with the conduct and attitudes of the Romans in Coriolanus. As Volumnia advises Coriolanus to mask his 'bosom's truth' in submissive and insincere words, so the chorus urge Ajax to conceal the thoughts of his 'true soul' as they attempt to deflect him from his chosen course of action, despite their acknowledgement that his words and purpose are honest. Jebb's translation emphasizes the unashamed tendency to expedient rather than honest behaviour. Their pleas to Ajax to temper his speech and conduct have a purely selfish basis, although they admit that his viewpoint is sound:

For the gods' love, yield to counsel, and learn wisdom!

Jebb, I.372

Ajax, none can deny you have spoken frankly

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And like your true self. Yet do not be hasty;
Forget these bitter thoughts, and let your friends
Win your submission.

Watling, ll. 483–486

No man shall say that thou hast spoken a bastard
word, Ajax, or one not bred of thy true soul. Yet
forbear: dismiss these thoughts, and suffer friends to
overrule thy purpose.

Jebb, ll. 481–484

Although an open mind, an ability to see both sides, and even a
willingness to compromise may be necessary attributes in an adaptable,
developing society, in terms of heroic commitment to absolute standards
these qualities denote moral inconstancy. 'In its tragic form that insistence on
the autonomy of will and ideal rejects all compromise and chooses death or
suffering over submission or conformity'. Therefore, within the heroic
context, the willingness of the community at large to adjust, to change, or to
attempt to persuade the protagonist to do so, must be recognized as a
discreditable lack of moral resolve. This is explicit in the remarks of the
chorus, above, to Ajax. They acknowledge that he has expressed sound and
valid opinions, and those which are, significantly, of his 'true soul'. Yet, in
the interest of personal safety, they try to convince him to speak and act
differently, to mask his true feelings.

In the Antigone, Creon's injudicious, authoritarian governance is
opposed by Antigone's conscientious disregard of his edict. His dictatorial
attitude, like that of Agamemnon and Menelaus in the Ajax, is based on a
selfish desire for personal supremacy rather than a genuine concern for the
common good: 'He whom the State appoints must be obeyed/To the smallest
matter, be it right – or wrong' (ll. 666–667). Ismene's lack of courage, her
disinclination for assertive action, is mirrored by the inability of the chorus to
stand resolute on any issue. The Theban elders never express any decisive,
unshakeable conviction, any permanent moral position. They may side with
Creon in emphatic censure of Antigone's 'stubborn spirit' and foolishness,
and show a calm, detached acceptance of her impending death, yet later they
express seemingly sincere compassion for her, and later still declare severe
condemnation of Creon's sole guilt:

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She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish
Not to give way when everything's against her

Her death, it seems, is certain.

But here is a sight beyond all bearing,
At which my eyes cannot but weep;

The guilt, no other man's
But his alone.

Their initial reaction to Creon's edict is one of submission rather than absolute approval: 'Your word is law' (1.215). Jebb's translation emphasizes even more strongly their acknowledgement of Creon's authority and power, while intimating a vague sense of apprehension: 'Such is thy pleasure . . . thou hast the power, I ween, to take what order thou wilt.' (11.211-214).

After Antigone defies Creon's edict they unreservedly censure her 'pride of heart and the sin/Of presumptuous tongue' (ll. 597-598). Jebb's translation of 'folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart' (l. 604), clearly conveys their compliant attitude and viewpoint – in Creon's presence – that Antigone's death-sentence is due to her self-willed temper (l. 875). They express their pity for her plight only when Creon is out of hearing. Jebb's version at this point indicates their apparent dilemma, as allegiance to their sovereign's order gives way to sympathy for Antigone:

But now at this sight I... am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty, and can no more keep back the streaming tears, when I see Antigone

Jebb, ll. 800-805

Their opinions are characteristically cautious and ambivalent; they tell Antigone that she will go to her death with 'glory and praise' (l. 807), for 'reverent action claims a certain praise for reverence', although 'an offence against power cannot be brooked' (Jebb, ll. 871-875). Only after Teiresias persuades them of Creon's culpability do they finally express their unequivocal belief that Creon should immediately release Antigone and bury Polynoeices with due reverence:

Release the woman from her rocky prison.

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Set up a tomb for him that lies unburied.  

Their reaction to Creon's edict has varied from humble acquiescence and pliant submissiveness to outspoken criticism. Only at the end do they assert with conviction that the guilt is 'his alone' (l. 1260), that 'his own misdeeds' have caused the triple tragedy (Jebb. ll. 1257–1260). This final viewpoint, after much uncertainty, is the one which is validated by the drama: Creon, not Antigone, is at fault. The chorus's inability to adhere with any firmness to an opinion reveals their lack of strongly-held principles, and serves to throw into relief Antigone's intense insistence on maintaining her inflexible moral stand.

Like all Sophoclean choruses, those of the Antigone and the Ajax evoke the ethos of the whole society, the character of the community-at-large, and as such present a widespread degree of undedicated obtuseness, a lack of insight, and a wavering ethical commitment. It is significant that the chorus of the Antigone is present in every scene of the drama, with the exception of the initial scene between Antigone and Ismene. As the decision taken by Antigone to defy Creon's edict and her subsequent action are revealed very shortly, the moral irresolution of the chorus cannot be accounted for by their ignorance of important facts:

SENTRY: The corpse ... someone has just Buried it and gone.

ll. 245–246

CHORUS: Can she have rashly disobeyed The order of our king?

Enter the SENTRY, bringing ANTIGONE guarded by two more soldiers.

SENTRY: We've got her. Here's the woman that did the deed.

ll. 379–381

In the Ajax, similarly, the chorus is present in every scene except the slaughter, which is outside the action of the drama, the first scene between Athena and Odysseus, and the suicide of Ajax; scenes which are, in fact, witnessed by no other characters. The chorus are, however, present in every other scene, more than are any other of the characters, especially Tecmessa and Teucer, who do not manifest the lack of discernment, and moral

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inconsistency of the chorus.

L.A. MacKay notes the pervading 'motive of bribery' in the *Antigone*:\(^3\) this, indeed, can be extended to encompass any form of inducement to act in an unprincipled manner, or attempt to influence conduct for questionable reasons. The general imperfections of a society at odds with the integrity of the hero, and the debasing of motivation to the realization of personal advantage are features of Sophoclean tragedy which are closely reflected in *Coriolanus*, in which Rome is a city 'full of hatred, contempt, and envy'.\(^4\) The motive of bribery characterizes the general atmosphere of deception and machination: the tribunes manipulate the plebeians in order to deny the consulship to Coriolanus, and the patricians hide their feelings of contempt for the citizenry and urge Coriolanus to insincere behaviour in order to gain personal advantage. The aspects of commerce and bribery are accentuated in the citizens' words, and in Coriolanus's perception of the implicitly demeaning and remunerative aspect in the custom of suing for votes in the market-place (pp. 180–181, above).

a. The ethos of Rome

There can be no compatibility between the citizens of Rome for there is at all levels a distortion of intent, as tactics are planned and duplicity abounds. The plebeians distrust the patricians, the patricians despise the plebeians, and the tribunes hate everyone. The plebeians are too irresolute and too malleable to present any decisive attitude of their own, apart from a constant resentment against the patricians in general and Coriolanus in particular. The tribunes and patricians have unambiguous feelings of deep antagonism for each other, and contempt for the masses, feelings which they mask behind words and actions which form a hypocritical veneer of spurious, fragile congeniality. The atmosphere of personal, social, and moral unreliability represents the rot which permeates Rome at all levels of society.

*Coriolanus*, like the *Antigone*, is a city tragedy: most of the action and all the fundamental concerns of the drama relate to conduct which threatens the city and the traditions of a heroic past. Rome is an integral element in the drama, and attains a distinct identity and function which shapes, and is

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shaped by, its citizens. Against the traditional ideals of Romanitas are set the instability and selfish duplicity of all sections of the society. The attitude of the Romans towards their city reveals their unheroic personal motives and embodies the character of the whole community. Rome and Roman are central concepts in the drama, and the manner in which the citizens refer to their city is significant. An analysis has been made of the number of times the words 'Rome' and 'Roman/s' have been used in the text, and by whom. In addition, the relevant possessive pronouns have been noted. A similar, more approximate count has been made of the various synonyms used for 'Rome' and 'Roman', again noting the use of pronouns. From these counts, and the qualifying emotive intentions for the use of the various nouns, adjectives and possessive pronouns, certain conclusions can be drawn as to the connotations of 'Rome' and 'Roman' within the drama, and to the manner in which the use of the words betrays the significance of Rome as a concept to the different characters and sections of the communities.

According to the counts made (see Appendix II, b), the patricians, excluding Coriolanus, use 'Rome' and 'Roman/s' some forty-five times, of which only five are used with the possessive 'our', and the remainder are used impersonally, or with reference to Coriolanus. This reveals a certain lack of personal affinity with the city, and a want of faith in, or indifference to the concept of an attainable Roman ideal. They use 'home' six times in some forty lines (II.1.95–137), five of which are synonyms for Rome, a telling indication of the sudden patriotic fervour stimulated by Coriolanus's martial triumphs. Rome at this point becomes to them a most intimate environment, a welcoming haven: their security is guaranteed by Marcius's successes. They revel in the possibility of his multiple wounds, counting them as their own reasons to celebrate:

Men. Ha! Marcius coming home?...
      Hoo! Marcius coming home!...
      Is he not wounded? He was wont to come home wounded.

95, 99, 110–112

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On's brows, Menenius, he comes the third time home with the oaken garland.

All sections of the community welcome him home, 'all tongues speak of him' (195), and Rome seems to be, temporarily, a hospitable refuge. Significantly, 'home' and 'house' are used far more often in Coriolanus than in any of the other tragedies, and in none of the others is 'home' used to such an extent to symbolize native land or city.

Volumnia uses 'Rome' and 'Roman/s' a mere three times in V.3.135-181, yet from ll. 103-181 uses some twelve different emotive synonyms for the city. Her insistent, relentless use of these synonyms - 'our country ... our dear nurse ... our streets ... thy country ... home ... our city' - with the evocative adjectives or pronouns, is a subtle and calculated manoeuvre to make an emotional impact, and to persuade Coriolanus. Cominius uses 'your Rome' to the tribunes (IV.6.99-100), demonstrating the manner in which references to Rome can carry a significance far beyond that of the actual words: he patently intends to convey the perception that the Rome of the tribunes is far from the glorious Rome of the past. Menenius's reference to Hercules (100-101) carries the implication further: his identification of Coriolanus with the legendary hero denigrates the Rome of the tribunes and their 'apron-men' (96-97). In fact, the patricians have not behaved much better than the plebeians have, nor have they contributed substantially to the glory of Rome.

'Rome' and 'Roman' are used to an almost inordinate extent by Rome's enemies, a revealing symptom of their rancorous preoccupation with Rome (Appendix II, b). In Act IV scene 3, a scene of only forty-eight lines, 'Rome' and 'Roman' are used four times in thirty-eight lines by the two traitors, a paradoxical confirmation of the debasing of all that should appertain to Rome. The repeated use of the words, with the traditional heroic expectations, set within a scene of deception and treachery, makes a cynical comment on the emptiness of the Roman ideal:

\[\text{Rom.} \quad \text{I am a Roman; and my services are, as you are, against 'em.}\]

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In three scenes, Act IV scene 5, Act V scenes 2 and 3, all of which occur in enemy territory, 'Rome' and 'Roman' are used a total of thirty-one times, mostly by the enemy, or as a stratagem by Volumnia to influence Coriolanus. Significantly, in all three scenes, only two adjectives are used: 'ungrateful Rome' by Aufidius, and 'our Romans' by Coriolanus (IV.5.130, V.3.44). Coriolanus uses 'our Romans' in an ironic parody of the cajolery the Roman women might use to persuade him to spare Rome. Rome is, most of all, before and during Coriolanus's exile, 'ungrateful'. It is a city - a home - which repaid his triumphs with banishment, and on which he attempts to take his revenge. His reference to 'our Romans' at this time does not denote a feeling of kinship: they are merely the emotive words he assumes the Roman matrons will use. In this he is correct: Volumnia uses these tactics later in the scene. The words 'Rome' and 'Roman' are used obsessively, seven times in the thirty-eight lines of Act I scene 2, by Aufidius and the Volscian senators, as blows of destruction they would rain on Rome. Somewhat paradoxically, 'Rome' and 'Roman' are used some sixty times in enemy territory, or outside of Rome, more than half the total amount used by all characters. The insistent use of 'Rome' and 'Roman' by enemies of Rome, by Volscians, spies and traitors, lends a sense of disorder to the ideal and the reality of Rome: Rome, and Roman values are debased by being repeated by those who intend harm.

The tribunes use synonyms for Rome some thirteen times (Appendix II, c), of which seven are impersonal, four apply specifically to Coriolanus, and only one to themselves. Significantly, they use synonyms twice as much as they use 'Rome' or 'Roman': their sense of high-minded personal involvement with the city and its ideals is minimal. The only times they use a possessive pronoun relative to themselves, 'our city' and 'our Rome', are both in Act III scene 3, at lines 102 and 105, at which points their intention is to manipulate the emotions of the citizens and to banish Coriolanus, to emphasize his alienation from Rome, their city. Sicinius's self-important speech is one long pretentious sentence, an affected attempt to simulate legal language, to express worthy sentiments about Rome, to identify himself with all that Rome should be, and to appeal to public spirit: 'For that he has – /As much as
in him lies—... we, /Ev’n from this instant, banish him our city, ... never more /To enter our Rome gates’ (94–106).

The plebeians, including messengers, officers and traitors, use synonyms some ten times, seven of which are relative to Coriolanus and only one to themselves, a tally which is similar to that of the tribunes. Their sense of an intimate bond with, or commitment to Rome and her ideals is equally limited; they conceive the city to be Coriolanus’s Rome rather than their own, despite their assertion that the city is the people (III.1.199-200). This attitude is especially noticeable when Coriolanus is heard to be advancing on Rome at the head of Volscian troops. All sections of the population refer to the city in a far less personal manner, as if expressing a disregard for obligation, a sense of severance from the city due to the ignominy pertaining to Coriolanus’s banishment.

After the report of Coriolanus’s advance on Rome, the city is referred to by name or various synonyms without adjectives some forty times: 'Rome' is used approximately thirty-six times, 'the city' three times, 'the state' twice. 'Rome', or synonyms with adjectives are used some twenty times, of which fourteen are used by Volumnia in her calculating attempt to influence Coriolanus to spare Rome. In some eighty lines, Volumnia uses every possible emotive synonym to assault Coriolanus’s emotions and undermine his resolve: 'his country's bowels ... our country ... our dear nurse ... our streets ... thy country ... home' (V.3.103–181). After the news of the enemy approach, there is a conspicuous attempt by patricians and tribunes to distance themselves from the city, as if by so doing, they might not be held accountable for the impending disaster. Cominius speaks of 'the city ... his country ... your Rome', Menenius of 'the city, ... your gates', and Sicinius of 'your country'. Only the messenger, who reports the advance but does not attempt to apportion blame, refers to Rome in a proprietary manner 'our territories'.

Coriolanus uses synonyms for Rome some twenty-two times. Of these, about half are used with adjectives denoting a degree of goodwill and kinship: 'My country ... our large temples ... our streets ... home'. He uses the less intimate 'Rome' more in exile. Before his exile he uses 'Rome' five times and familiar synonyms fourteen times, whereas after exile the count is

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reversed: 'Rome' is used thirteen times, and synonyms only five times.
'Rome' embodies the best of the past and the worst of the present. The word, the naming of the city, can evoke the past ideals and glory which Coriolanus attempts to maintain, but may also call attention to the present reality of the city: the insincerity and unreliability at all levels of society. In Coriolanus's mouth the city can assume either identity. Before his banishment, Coriolanus invests the name with all the inherent pride in the glory that was, and should still be, Rome. The juxtaposition of the hated enemy's name, the nobility of the Roman general, and an appeal to the fellowship and heritage of the Roman troops, shows his optimistic determination to summon forth from the undutiful soldiery a valiant response in the name of the ideal of Rome:

There is the man of my soul's hate, Aufidius, 
Piercing our Romans; then, valiant Titus, take 
Convenient numbers to make good the city;

I.5.10-12

Before he is exiled, the sense of Rome's potential excellence emerges whenever he names the city: 'Holding Corioli in the name of Rome' (I.6.37). After his banishment, however, Coriolanus names his former home with scorn, bitterly recognizing the gulf between past ideals and present reality:

I would they were barbarians, as they are, 
... not Romans, as they are not

III.1.238-239

Exiled from Rome, his references to the city are generally associated discreditably with its enemy, and reveal the detachment, bitter disappointment, and contempt he now feels for his 'cank'red country':

suffer'd me by th' voice of slaves to be 
Whoop'd out of Rome ... 
Let the Volsces 
Plough Rome and harrow Italy; ... 
We have made peace 
With no less honour to the Antiates 
Than shame to th' Romans;

IV.5.91, 77-78, V.3.33-34, V.6.79-81

Similarly, the manner in which he mentions Rome without specifically naming the city can communicate the affection and pride he feels or, latterly, the scorn:

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As for my country I have shed my blood
and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country

The adjective 'thankless' nullifies the positive emotion of 'my' and qualifies the reference to Rome, investing it with discreditable unreliability and ingratitude. This emphasizes his sense of alienation from Rome, his sense of loss of personal affinity with his city, his birthplace (see p. 261, below).

The general use of 'Rome' and 'Roman' and of synonyms before and after his exile, by all characters, reinforces this view. Before exile 'Rome' and 'Roman' are used fifty-one times, while they are used sixty-four times after exile; synonyms for 'Rome' are used forty-nine times before exile and thirty-one times after. It is as if, less familiar and less related to the ideal of Rome, the citizens compulsively name the city, recognizing their own degeneration, in an unwitting attempt to recall or recover past greatness.

Rome, for Coriolanus is a most personal Rome; synonyms for Rome with specific reference to Coriolanus are used by other characters some twenty-four times, an indication of the deep, private rapport he is perceived by everyone to have with the city:

2 Off. He hath deserved worthily of his country
4 Cit. You have deserved nobly of your country
Bru. How youngly he began to serve his country
Men. many an ounce - he dropt it
for his country
Com. Who, as I hear, mean to solicit him
For mercy to his country
Auf. your city Rome -
I say your city -

This sense of intimate possession extends either positively or negatively throughout the citizenry; possessive pronouns are used deliberately to convey a sense of belonging or, conversely, a sense of estrangement. Cominius intends to inspire his soldiers with an appreciation of the glory inherent in being Romans, an incitement to behave in a manner worthy of their birth:

Breathe you, my friends. Well fought; we are come off
Like Romans

I.6.1–2

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When he praises Coriolanus, he invests Rome with all the courage of its
hero, and makes it too, a most personal city, home of each of its citizens: 'We
thank the gods/Our Rome hath such a soldier' (I.9.8–9). Rome acquires an
identity by implication or association: it is 'our state' when identified with the
triumphs of Coriolanus (II.2.48), and 'your gates' when Menenius attempts to
provoke in Coriolanus loyalty and concern for Rome (V.2.70). Yet the city also
becomes 'our city... our Rome gates' for the opposite reason: to suggest that
Coriolanus the traitor should be banished from the noble city of Rome
(III.3.102, 105).

The sense of past glory, of the ideal that should still distinguish Rome,
contrasts with the varied implications of the tarnished reality, the constant
unrest, the unreliability, disloyalty, and violence. Rome's most notable
citizen and saviour is banished, yet he alone embodies the essence of all that
Rome should be; he is as substantial, as constant and invincible as are the
walls and monuments of Rome, as the ideals of true Romans should be: he is
a rock, an oak, a cornerstone of the Capitol (V.2.105, V.4.1). Life in Rome is
rigorous, and uncompromising images and language characterize the city and
her citizens. Yet there is a paradox between the unyielding imagery, relentless
action and rigid setting of the drama, and the capricious and opportunistic
instability of the Roman citizens. Beneath the harsh intransigence are
continual undercurrents of shifting values, changing loyalties, and fickle
hypocrisy, which typify the destructive disorder at the heart of Rome. The
stability of all that should be most fixed in a powerful state is undermined by
unceasing turbulence.

b. The Roman citizens

In Coriolanus every character willingly dissembles in some way, or is
persuaded to act or speak in a manner which is contrary to his convictions.
The prevailing ethos is one of hypocrisy and exploitation. The tribunes
shamelessly exploit the plebeians for their own advantage:

\[\text{Sic.} \quad \text{You should have ta'en th' advantage of his choler} \\
\text{Bru.} \quad \text{And pass'd him unelected.} \\
\text{Did you perceive}\]

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He did solicit you in free contempt
When he did need your loves;...?

The patricians are blatant to each other about their contempt for the plebeians, yet hide these feelings from the citizens, and attempt to persuade Coriolanus to do the same:

*Men.* I would they were in Tiber.
What the vengeance, could he not speak 'em fair?

*Vol.* I would dissemble with my nature where
My fortunes and my friends at stake requir'd
I should do so in honour.

There is a constant ebb and surge of changing opinions, and a juggling of roles. Only Coriolanus and Virgilia manifest fixed values, reliable conduct. Only they are never persuaded to speak or act in a manner which would be alien to their intrinsic principles. Everyone else in Rome and in Antium, across all social classes, plots and patches, schemes and dissembles; the predominant atmosphere is one of moral disorder generated by selfish consideration.

Sicinius asserts that the city comprises the people (III.1.199), and although this is accurate in a much more comprehensive and unflattering context than he intends or understands, the behaviour of the plebeians contributes significantly to the general atmosphere of instability in Rome. From the outset the plebeians are hostile to the patricians, whose view of them as confused, unreliable, and easily swayed is confirmed in the action:

1 Cit. First, you know Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people.

All. We know't, we know't.

I.1.6-7

6 Cit. He has done nobly, and cannot go without any honest man's voice.

7 Cit. Therefore let him be consul....

3 Cit. He's not confirm'd: we may deny him yet.

Citizens. We will so; almost all
Repent in their election.

II.3.130–131, 206, 251–252

In acquiring the tribunes to represent their interests, the capricious plebeians

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acquire a voice which is dishonest, and which is able to manipulate their irresolution for its own ends. Inconstant and gullible, the citizens betray their own fickle opinions, and ultimately their own representatives:

Plebeians.  Come, come, let's see him out at gates; come!  
The gods preserve our noble tribunes!  

III.3.143-144

1 Cit.  For mine own part,

When I said banish him, I said 'twas pity.

2 Cit.  And so did I.

3 Cit.  And so did I; and, to say the truth, so did very many of us.

IV.6.141-144

Like the choruses in the Ajax and the Antigone, they manifest no firm opinions of their own, and are easily influenced by any plausible voice of apparent authority. Coriolanus examines more profoundly than did Julius Caesar a society in which the 'mutable, rank-scented many' (III.1.66) have no judgement, no understanding of themselves, of their position in society, or any ability to evaluate their own good.

The city relies on the integrity of all citizens for its very existence, yet the shifting values of the plebeians menaces the city from within more perilously than does the enemy from without. Gary Schmidgall suggests that Shakespeare's mid-period works, culminating in Coriolanus, embody a questioning of the values of society, a 'consistent expression of the littleness, ignorance, and vacillation of man'. In Coriolanus especially, there is much emphasis of these negative qualities in all sections of Roman society.

J.L. Simmons perceives in the Rome of Coriolanus a 'bewildering moral environment' compared with that presented in the source, in which he remarks that Plutarch presents 'nothing to perplex our moral bearings' (p. 21). In Coriolanus the diminished respect for the ideals of the society and for the man who upholds them, the degradation of the society as a whole, serve to elevate and emphasize the protagonist's integrity. Shakespeare consistently abases the plebeians in comparison with their presentation in the source material: from this, it is obvious how the plebeians, indeed Roman society as a whole, is to be perceived. Coriolanus's notion of the plebeians as the 'shames of Rome' (I.4.31) is corroborated by their behaviour throughout the

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must these have voices, that can yield them now
And straight disclaim their tongues? . . .
I'll give my reasons,
More worthier than their voices . . .
being press'd to th' war,
Even when the navel of the state was touch'd,
They would not thread the gates.

III.1.34–35, 119–120, 122–124

J.L. Simmons comments on the moral irresponsibility of the citizens:

No member of Shakespeare's audience would deny
Coriolanus's philosophical and political belief that the
people, collectively, epitomize instability and
mutability. It is not to the point to show Shakespeare's
undeniable affection for individuals or the certain
glimmers of insight among the members. Any such
democratic defense in fact misses the force of the
epithet 'many-headed': the richer the diversity of
voices, the more unpredictable the concerted voice.

(p. 41)

The portrayal of the multitude as gullible, ungrateful and unreliable, and
of the potential danger of civil discord to the well-being of the state, is
consistent with current thought on the subject; it is not a view peculiar only
to Coriolanus. Barnabie Rich contends that there is

no broile more noysome and hurtfull to any weale
publicke, then that which falleth out betweene the
Magistrates, and the Commons about government: . . .
we should call to mind the history of antiquity . . .
government: . . . shaken again through dissention and
discord rising and falling out betweene those of ancient
Nobilitie and the meanest sort of rascall and peevish
people . . . The multitude of the people . . . are
ignorant of the best things . . . disirous of change,
hating still what is present . . . neither can there be any
thing profitably ordain'd by the confused fury of the
multitude . . . Although popular love be light, their
hatred is heavy, and it little avails to have walls . . .
when the hearts of people are estranged. 14

There can be no more apt comment on the fickle conduct of the populace in
Coriolanus, with regard to their confused feelings towards Coriolanus, the
manner in which they are unable to determine or adhere to any fixed
opinion:

2 Cit. Would you proceed especially against Caius Marcus?
1 Cit. Against him first; he's a very dog to the commonalty.

I.1.25–26

Mess. I have seen dumb men throng to see him
... and the commons made
A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts.

II.1.252–258

Plebeians. It shall be so, it shall be so! Let him away!
He's banish'd, and it shall be so.
...
Our enemy is banish'd, he is gone! Hoo-oo!

III.3.106–107, 139

Sir William Corne-Waleys remarks that men's natures are 'ignorant, which impotencie leaves a wauering disposition easily seduced ... apt to beleue a faire tale, and as apt to beleue weake reasons, strong'. In their irresolute wavering and their muddled reactions to the devices of the tribunes, the plebeians in Rome exemplify this statement.

The patricians despise the plebeians, yet are themselves no more admirable, nor more beneficial to Rome than are the commons. Volumnia epitomizes the unacceptable extremism of Roman aristocratic values, devoid of any innate altruistic integrity, any tender or sincere emotion. Pride, nobility, and valour are so perverted in her that she lacks any proper maternal, even humane qualities. She revels avidly in her son's victories and wounds, enumerating them almost as her own triumphs:

Vol. O, he is wounded, I thank the gods for't.
...

Men. Where is he wounded?
Vol. I' th' shoulder and i' th' left arm;
there will be large cicatrices to show the people when he shall stand for his place.
...
He had before this last expedition twenty-five wounds upon him.

II.1.113, 138–141, 145–146

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If indeed she is considered to embody the ideal of Roman values, the merit of that ideal must be queried, as the reality is shown, in Volumnia, to be manifestly reprehensible. In her, any such ideology is based on an unacceptable distortion. Her blatant avidity for her son's honour and fame is as repugnant as is her insincerity in her dealings with the citizenry. Disapproval of, even contempt for their cowardice and instability is vindicated to some extent in the drama: her attitude of pretence, of false benevolence, is not.

Volumnia hides her revulsion for the proletariat behind a hypocritical mask, and attempts to influence Coriolanus to do the same, in order to achieve 'the buildings of [her] fancy'. She does not contradict Coriolanus when he remarks that she

was wont
To call them woollen vassals, things created
To buy and sell with groats;

Instead, she remarks that he should have 'put [his] power well on/Before [he] had worn it out' (17–18). There is no indication in the action that Volumnia has valid reason to hate the masses, other than an imagined aristocratic superiority. Coriolanus's contempt for the plebeians has its roots in his certain knowledge and experience of their cowardice and unreliability, and of his own integrity and conduct, but Volumnia has no such grounds or right to judge them. She is totally self-centred in her ambition, and her egotistic boasts reveal more than she realizes:

I, considering how honour
would become such a person — ... was
pleas'd to let him seek danger where he
was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him

Her unsuccessful efforts to control both Coriolanus's and Virgilia's conduct unambiguously reveal their steadfast integrity and her lack of principle. When she criticizes Coriolanus for being too absolute (III.2.39), in fact too inflexibly honourable, and advocates that he should use words and gestures learned by rote, merely 'bastards and syllables/Of no allowance to [his]
bosom's truth' (55-57), she reveals her own hollow ethic.

Menenius, like Volumnia, hides his true feelings for the commons, although his motive is not as uncharitable as hers is. His opinion of the people as 'multiplying spawn' is more often than not masked by the benign manner he adopts, and which he, too, advises Coriolanus to assume in order to gain advantage:

**Cor.** 'Some certain of your brethren roar'd, and ran
From th' noise of our own drums."

**Men.** O me, the gods!
You must not speak of that. You must desire them
To think upon you.
...
Pray you speak to' em, I pray you,
In wholesome manner.

II.3.52-55, 58-59

To the tribunes Menenius most frequently employs a conciliatory tone, although his true feelings of repugnance do, on occasions, emerge:

If, by the tribune's leave, and yours, good people,
I may be heard, I would crave a word or two;

III.1.282-283

Why, then you should discover a
brace of unmeriting, proud, violent, testy
magistrates - alias fools - as any in Rome.

II.1.38-40

The patricians, in fact, match the inconstancy of the plebeians and the artifice of the tribunes. They are willing to alter their attitudes, to simulate in order to delude, or to adjust to circumstances which may be to their advantage. In Antium, as in Rome, there is deception and deceit, as Aufidius hides his hatred and plots Coriolanus's downfall.

In the pervading atmosphere of unreliability, only Coriolanus adheres to a stringent ethical code. It is a moral standard which incorporates the best of traditional Roman values into an intensely personal mode of being, but which does not, as does Volumnia's code of conduct, deny human feeling. He exalts the Roman ideal into a unique standard of heroic integrity, which is at odds with both plebeian and patrician conduct. The demands of his position as required by all sections of society conflict with his personal ideal, and highlight the irreconcilability between the ideal and the reality in Rome, the

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impossibility of any accord in the community. Coriolanus's attitude towards the citizenry is essentially no different from that of the other patricians, but he alone is unable and unwilling to dissemble, to disguise his true feelings for the people, in order to achieve a political advantage. His inflexibility is the positive manifestation of a principled constancy of purpose, and as such embodies none of the negative aspects of selfish or ambitious motive.

Although the plebeian irresponsibility, and the general patrician insincerity adequately exemplify the unprincipled nature of the Roman community, it is most especially in the presentation of the tribunes that Shakespeare defines the depths of unscrupulous perfidy which menaces Coriolanus. Their lack of moral integrity ultimately prevails over all classes, and embodies a blanket manifestation of the universal ethical inadequacy. In the entire range of Shakespeare's plays it is impossible to find another pair of individuals, or even one individual, whose words, deeds, and personalities are so unrelievably repugnant and whose total image is so destitute of a redeeming quality. Their self-serving malevolence and furtive animosity towards all classes and individuals in Rome, affirm the destructive malady which is prevalent throughout the society.

The first appearance of the tribunes implicitly exposes their role in the drama. They enter at I.1.225, but stand silent and watchful, remaining on stage together after the citizens and patricians have left. Their speech reveals their ill will towards Coriolanus and their fear of his growing reputation:

*Sic.*

Was ever man so proud as is this Marcus?

***

*Bru.*

Mark'd you his lip and eyes?

***

The present wars devour him!

250, 252, 257

The seeds are laid for their manipulation of the 'giddy censure' (266) for their own ends. In Act II scene 1, Sicinius and Brutus are once again present on stage, withdrawn to one side, silently watching and listening: *[Brutus and Sicinius go aside (II.1.89 S.D.)*. Once again, after all have departed, they come forward to discuss what they have heard, furtively revealing their contempt for all classes, their fear that Coriolanus's new-won popularity will put an

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end to their office (195–249). They initiate a scheme to engineer the people's feelings and Coriolanus's rage in order to ensure his downfall, and their own continued position. From then onwards, their every word and action is shown to be towards this end: 'as to set dogs on sheep -' (247)

The tribunes' moral inadequacy is manifested by their devious conduct, their deficient sense of obligation towards Rome, and by their contemptuous indifference towards their compatriots. Throughout the action, however, and in all sections of the community, with the usual exception of Coriolanus and Virgilia, common good is never a motive for action. Even the patricians show callousness towards their fellow Romans, and ultimately a lack of conscience or commitment for the good of Rome, as both they and the tribunes exploit the plebeians for their own ends.

It is significant that the only characters specifically designated as Romans in the speech prefixes or stage directions are a traitorous spy, and contemptible scroungers, who stealthily pilfer loot before or instead of fulfilling their obligation to Rome in the field. These characters and their conduct constitute implicit but effective commentary on the atmosphere of disloyalty and unreliability which is prevalent in Rome. Despite his assertion, 'I am a Roman' (IV.3.4.), the traitor Nicanor represents all that is most base, and idealistically most un-Roman, yet which paradoxically, in the drama, characterizes the Romans. The logical supposition therefore must be that the essence of Roman-ness in the world of Coriolanus embodies the prerequisite qualities of unreliability and betrayal.

The meeting of the Roman and Volscian traitors, their obvious long-standing fellowship, and their continued progress together, support the view that the world of Antium is not essentially different from that of Rome (IV.3.44-48: SD). Lack of principle and selfish concern are the predominant attributes in both communities. The insincerity of the Roman patricians towards the plebians is matched by Aufidius's deviousness towards Coriolanus, and the instability of the Roman citizens is paralleled by the mutability of the Volscian masses. In Antium, hoi polloi are no more steadfast or reasonable in their opinions, no more reliable in their conduct, than are their Roman counterparts: society in both states is unprincipled and

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treacherous. The Volscian troops, no less than the Roman, change their allegiance to suit the exigencies of the situation. As in Rome, so in Antium, Coriolanus is hated, then admired and acclaimed, then once again hated and destroyed. The Volscian troops 'fly to' him, talk of nothing but his exploits (IV.7.1-4), the people attend his triumphant return to Antium 'with great shouts' (V.6.49 S.D.), but later they join the conspirators in demanding his death:

_All the people._ Tear him to pieces. Do it presently. He kill'd my son. My daughter. (121-123)

Inconstancy is not limited to the masses: the 'rank scented meiny' is not the only group which behaves as a mob in Coriolanus. Each group of the citizenry in its variable reactions exhibits the unreliable capriciousness of a rabble: reversals and betrayals permeate society at all levels. The willingness of the patricians to mask their true feelings for the tribunes and the plebeians, their refusal to concede openly that Coriolanus's attitude is in truth no different from their own, and their consistent attempts to force him to modify his conduct, align them almost permanently in opposition to him. They convey the impression of a crowd ranged against him, if not blatantly, then at best positioned in some grey moral area between him and the tribunes. In Act III scene 3, from line 58 to the end of the scene, as the tribunes, echoed by the plebeians, goad Coriolanus with insults, no patrician attempts with any resolution to oppose the tribunes' malevolence, with the exception of Cominius's ineffectual, fumbling attempt:

_Let me speak._
_I have been consul, and can show for Rome_  
_Her enemies' marks upon me. I do love_  
_My country's good . . ._  
_Speak that —_  
Then if I would  
110-116

Later, however, under threat of attack from Coriolanus and the Volscian troops, both Cominius and Menenius are most outspoken in their censure of the tribunes and the plebeians, while Menenius also admits the patrician blunder, and, in a sense, their complicity in Coriolanus's banishment:

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Com. O, you have made good work!

[...] You have holp to ravish your own daughters and
To melt the city leads upon your pates

Men. You have made good work,
You and your apron men;...

Com. You have brought
A trembling upon Rome, such as was never
S' incapable of help.

Both Tri. Say not we brought it.

Men. How! Was't we? We lov'd him, but, like beasts
And cowardly nobles, gave way unto your
clusters,
Who did hoot him out o' th' city.

IV.6.81-84, 96-97, 119-124

c. Social retrogression

There is a paradox inherent in the portrayal of the lack of principle in the community. The society is one which has evolved from the individualistic, élitist heroic ethos to one which is more democratic, moderate, and co-operative. The developing society, however, from the standpoint of the heroic, is shown to be less cohesive or altruistic than it should be. Society evolves, yet regresses into a less magnanimous manifestation of a community.

Coriolanus's contemptuous view of the people of Rome is corroborated throughout: there is a constant sense of the fluctuation of fidelity, of the ultimate futility of trusting any relationships:

Cor. Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seems to wear one heart,
[...] shall within this hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity;

IV.4.12-18

Society is governed by less than noble attitudes; mass and individual deceit, envy and egoism turn men away from concern for their fellow man and the common good, to behaviour which threatens each man's essential nature and the community at large. Charles Segal remarks:

Tragedy ... deals with situations where the division between civilisation and savagery no longer seems to

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apply. Where this division is disturbed, so is the very nature of man and his humanity. Tragedy no longer locates the boundary between the civilized and the savage on the frontiers of society... but brings it within the polis itself, within the very hearts of its rulers and citizens.

*Tragedy and Civilization*, p. 30

In these terms society is ruled by a less restrained, less civilized impetus. John Velz comments on 'Shakespeare's response to Greek political philosophy... [in] his sense of the polis as the core of civilisation... ringed round with a protective wall, outside of which the dark forces of barbarism lurk... [in which] one may imitate barbarism by oneself negating the values of the polis'.

In *Coriolanus*, as in the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, as the fundamental principle of civilized society is eroded by the unheroic nature of man, by his inability to stand firm by himself against duplicity, the community threatens to degenerate into uncivilized savagery. The foreboding of destruction to all that Rome should be, is inherent throughout the drama in the continuing imagery of the bestial and the cannibalistic:

*Cor.*  I would they were barbarians, as they are, Though in Rome litter'd; not Romans, as they are not, Though calved i' th' porch o' th' Capitol

*Men.*  ... Now the good gods forbid That our renowned Rome, whose gratitude Towards her deserved children is enroll'd In Jove's own book, like an unnatural dam Should now eat up her own!

III.1.238–240, 290–294

*Vol.*  Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, And so shall starve with feeding.

IV.2.50–51

The inhuman brutality of the images is reinforced by the sense that the unprincipled behaviour which causes the destruction of Rome is an uncontrolled and malignant pollution spreading and damaging from within. The city, proper locale of secure civilization, thus becomes for all citizens and especially for *Coriolanus* an ignoble and threatening place, governed by a form of unreliable and inimical mob rule, by barbarous, treacherous and callous attitudes.

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Coriolanus abandons his birthplace and is abandoned by it. Nothing is as it should be; values, expectations, and people are subject to irresponsible alteration:

_Mess._ It is spoke freely out of many mouths –
How probable I do not know – that Marcius,
Join'd with Aufidius, leads a power 'gainst
Rome . . .

_Men._ This is unlikely.
He and Aufidius can no more atone
Than violent'st contrariety.

IV.6.65–74

As all values which should appertain to a cohesive community are upset, so the ultimates for communal preservation become meaningless and inverted. Peace and war become spurious, as moral bearings are lost. The peace at the end of the drama is more ominous than the dissension in the beginning, founded as it is on lies, hypocrisy, and compromise. Rome does not, despite outward signs, sit 'safe and still' without Coriolanus (IV.6.37). Immediately after the news of the impending advance on Rome, each section of the community blames the other, all deny their part in Coriolanus's banishment, and the seething ill will between all citizens once again threatens the city from within.

The presentation of man's instability in _Coriolanus_ accords with the equivalent perception in Sophoclean tragedy: man's potential to integrity, to the heroic and the excellent, is opposed everywhere by the general inclination towards lack of principle and destructive violence. The _polis_ in Sophoclean tragedy, as the Republican state in _Coriolanus_, is a supposedly civilized settlement, protected by walls and enlightened values from the hostile and the savage; yet there is the ever-present danger of destruction from internal civic improbity, self-interest, and lack of accord. In the _Ajax_, Agamemnon's refusal to allow Ajax to be buried is motivated by injured pride and bitter resentment: it is, too, an impious outrage against the laws of humanity. His determination to desecrate the body further by treading on it exposes savage and barbarous elements which could pollute society, and which Odysseus recognizes:

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ODYSSEUS: For the love of all the gods, think twice
Before you do so rash and vile a thing . . .
Yet, when there was a time to hate,
I hated him.
AGAMEMNON: Good reason to tread on him
Now he is dead!

Compare Jebb:

OD. For the love of the gods, take not the
heart to cast forth this man unburied so
ruthlessly . . .
'tis not he, 'tis the law of Heaven that
thou wouldst hurt. When a brave man is dead,
'tis not right to do him scathe
– no, not even if thou hate him . . .
yet hated him, when I could honourably
hate.

AG. And shouldst thou not also set thy heel on
him in death?

Jebb, ll. 1332–1333, 1343–1345, 1347–1348

In the Antigone, Creon, supposedly the source of reliable law and order,
and the embodiment of the moral and political ethos of the polis, proves to be
insensitive to, and fanatically disregards the demands of enlightened
humanity. His determination not to bury Polyneices looks backwards,
towards a more barbarous age, an uncivilizing of society, through an
indifference towards the qualities of tolerance and benevolence. Confusion
and conflict must, and do attend this conduct. Antigone recognizes the
pollution Creon must incur to himself and to Thebes if his edict to leave
Polyneices unburied remains unopposed. She knows that the ‘unwritten,
unalterable laws’ (l. 460) are more important than human law, which often
derives from self-importance and error. Teiresias confirms her perception,
telling Creon that the blight upon Thebes is his doing (l. 1016). Jebb's
translation 'this sickness on our state' (l.1015) reinforces the sense of damage
to the fabric of society brought about by an unprincipled, wilful decision.

In Coriolanus, error and unreliability are shown to be widespread
throughout the community: the conduct of all classes and most characters
contributes substantially to the devaluation of traditional Roman ideals, the
erosion of the existing social structure. No section of the population is capable
of determining a course of action which would be beneficial for Rome. No

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group, nor any individual, manifests sound political awareness, devoid of self-interest. Only Coriolanus's political views indicate a genuine concern for the good of Rome, a perceptive understanding of the defects pervading Roman society, its customs and laws. His political acumen is an aspect of his personal ethic and is manifested by a deep anxiety about the unworthiness he sees all around him, the real threat it poses to Rome.

Coriolanus's viewpoint is sound, although his concern is rooted in archaic concepts: he is convinced that the best course for Rome is to resist change, to maintain the traditional ideals and standards of conduct. Firmly fixed in the heroic past as he is, any suggestion of change necessarily carries an implication of adjustment or compromise, and presents a danger to the status quo, the time-honoured mode of conduct in Rome. Thus political change embodies the upheaval of all that he perceives to appertain to the absolute, heroic – albeit outdated – concept of Rome. He recognizes clearly that Rome's ruin must result from the discord of two antagonistic authorities (III.1.109–112). He alone perceives the internal menace to Rome and her citizens, discerning the deterioration of that judgement and integrity which should be the essential attributes of the Roman character.

Coriolanus denounces the patrician lack of insight and judgement as much as he does the plebeian unworthiness. The 'unwise patricians' and 'reckless senators', he says, do not perceive the danger inherent in the authority of the new officers (90–97). His alarm is well-founded: the tribunes' self-serving ambition is exposed as they manipulate popular opinion against Coriolanus more in fear that they may lose their new power than in concern for the good of Rome: 'our office may / During his power go sleep'. His practical experience of the plebeians' 'unstable slightness' (148), their unreliability in war and unpredictable vacillation in peace, accounts for his understanding that they cannot be depended on to act as Romans, to protect the reality or the ideality of Rome. He proves to be correct: 'To share political power with people who don't possess intrinsic power, the power to know, judge and act in accordance with the high Roman ideal, is base, an ultimate betrayal'.

Chapter VI
2 Public Opinion

a. The unreliability of the *vox populi*

The general fallibility of all sections of the community suggests that their
discernment and therefore their opinions correspondingly must be uncertain.
In Sophoclean tragedy in general, the conduct and opinions of the chorus
reflect the lack of discrimination and of moral conviction of the whole
community. Whitman maintains that it is an oversimplification to assert
that the hero is reprehensible because he is censured by the chorus: it is,
rather, that he is 'acting in obedience to a true law which is well beyond the
vision of those who observe him . . . [who express only] commonplaces and
clichés'. Opinions expressed about the hero within the drama must be set
against what is shown in the action, for the tragedies and their heroes are
more substantial than would be indicated by the opinions of characters whose
perception and conduct are shown throughout the drama to be suspect.
Whitman confirms this view: 'if we trust the chorus, Sophocles wrote about
nothing by the evil effects of stubbornness. The mind of the chorus . . . is not a
sufficient moral guide to Sophocles', and remarks further that the chorus 'are
very bad judges in general'.\textsuperscript{21} They are equally unable to determine a resolute
mode of conduct for themselves, as they are to evaluate the moral essence of
the protagonist.

The chorus in the *Antigone*, the elders of Thebes, are morally indecisive,
are arbitrarily concerned about Antigone's pride and stubbornness, and they
fail to 'reckon the moral destruction [she] would have met had she obeyed
[Creon's] decree'.\textsuperscript{22} They alter their viewpoint throughout the drama, opting
for security and restraint rather than a resolute moral position which may go
against popular opinion or appear to contradict Creon's decisions. Whitman
observes of the chorus: 'Theirs is a detachment without judgement, a moral
receptivity without moral will . . . not until Creon is crushed do they decide
that he was morally wrong'.\textsuperscript{23} Their opinions, therefore, whether on moral
issues, or about the character of the protagonist, must be questioned: they
cannot be considered to reflect the dramatist's viewpoint. They criticize
Antigone's inability to compromise, but their remarks clearly expose their
own lack of courage and deficient moral resolve. They are able to entertain
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two opposing opinions simultaneously, that 'Creon is both right and wrong; so, too, is Antigone' (Jebb, p. xxvi). Their inability to adopt a committed stand on any moral question, and to maintain that stand, is emphasized throughout the drama:

There is something to be said, my lord, for his point of view,
And for yours as well; there is much to be said on both sides.

Il. 724–725

Moral irresolution is not limited to the chorus: even Creon, so inflexible at the outset, changes his mind about punishing Ismene, about the nature of Antigone's sentence, and finally, about everything he has said or done:

all the silver of Sardis
And all the gold of India will not buy
A tomb for yonder traitor . . .
My mind is made; 'twas I imprisoned her
And I will set her free.

. . .
O the curse of my stubborn will!

Il. 1038–1040, 1111–1112, 1269

In the *Ajax*, the reputation of the hero as a great warrior, who has inspired respect and esteem among his followers and his enemies, is confirmed in the dialogue. The chorus express the confident reliance they had in Ajax's ability to safeguard them from danger, and their realization of their vulnerability after his death:

From the fear in the night and the flying arrow
Ajax could shelter us; today
Grim fate has claimed his life; tomorrow
What but sorrow
And bitterness lies in our way?

1213–1217

The opinions of Agamemnon and Menelaus, their attempts to tarnish his reputation, fail to modify the impression of Ajax as a splendid hero, wronged by gods and compatriots. The kings' insults and their refusal to allow his body to be buried communicate their rancorous animosity and pettiness, rather than any valid defamation of Ajax. Menelaus, less senior, but more domineering than his brother, is obsessed with Ajax's lack of obedience and

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of respect, despite the fact that Ajax owed him neither: 'he never in his life/Obeyed a word of mine' (ll. 1068–1069). In frustration at not having been able to rule Ajax while he lived, Menelaus is determined to 'keep him in subjection' after death (ll. 1066–1068). Agamemnon, Captain General of the Greek army, has the right but not the moral judgement to decide the question of burial. He states his undying hatred for Ajax, and attempts to disparage Ajax's courage and nobility, to influence popular opinion against him:

Who is this man . . .  
Has he been anywhere,  
Fought anywhere, where I have not?

ll. 1240–1242

After Teucer's vindication of Ajax's courage, and his reminder to Agamemnon of the occasions on which Ajax saved the king's life, Agamemnon repeats his malicious intentions and suggests that, irrespective of Ajax's good reputation, former hatred is 'Good reason to tread on him/Now he is dead!' (l. 1350). The kings are shown up in the argument to be spiteful and ungenerous, and their continued abuse of Ajax after his death further emphasizes their lack of principle, and devalues their opinions.

Public opinion in Coriolanus is as unreliable as it is in Sophoclean tragedy. D.J. Gordon remarks that 'Name is Fame, is Honour, and is won by deeds; in Rome, by deeds in war' (p. 40). Marcius wins his agnomen in honour of his martial triumph in Corioli. It is awarded, as is his undisputed military reputation, by the citizens of Rome in recognition of his prowess on the battlefield, his defence of Rome. His reputation, however, for being 'chief enemy to the people', for ambition, for arrogant boasting and for tyrannical behaviour, derive in part from his words and actions, but to a greater extent from the opinions of the general population. James Calderwood concurs that Coriolanus's 'symbol of . . . repute', his agnomen, granted by the citizens of Rome 'as a public symbol . . . is of less importance to him than the meaning which he himself injects into it' (p. 219).

Coriolanus is aware, as the Roman community and the audience should be, that honour should be dependent upon inner, personal estimate rather than on opinion or award. Public acclaim can be a measure of true worth, but
need not necessarily be so, nor is it certain guarantee of quality. Conversely, public censure is not an infallible reflection of disrepute. Coriolanus is peculiarly unconcerned about public opinion; he considers the preservation of his personal ethical standards to be more essential and of more significance than any mark of popular esteem could be.

D.J. Gordon points to the ancient view which declares public opinion to be inconsequential: 'Aristotle is concerned to show that... honour – is not the “good”. It is the end of the political or public life, but it cannot be the final good because it is extrinsic to the subject: it is thought to depend on those who confer honour rather than on him who receives it'. If honour is to depend on the relationship between individual and community, it must depend most essentially on the ability of the community to recognize and accord honour, on the competence of the community to make a reliable value judgement on a fellow citizen. Similarly, censure by the members of the community must presuppose that their own fundamental moral principles are sufficiently sound as to validate such criticism. External opinions of value must derive from unbiased and trustworthy judgement.

The quality of reliance on decisive action rather than on dubious report is one which was approved, even recommended, by both ancient and seventeenth century thought. D.J. Gordon asks: 'what certainty does opinio hold? If it holds none, then what is the basis of fame, reputation, renown, which is opinion?' (p. 47) He quotes Cicero and Montaigne on the unreliability of the vox populi: Cicero states that the popular voice is a 'united judgement of fools and knaves', while Montaigne decries the 'judgement of our inclinations and actions... [by] the idle breath of the vaine voice of the common sort and base raskalitie...'. Barnabie Rich, in 1606, concurred that reports and opinions are of little value:

For the bodie giveth more credite to the eie, then it doth to the eare, & men are rather moved to one good example which, they see with their owne eyes, then a thousand wordes testified by reports, and therefore whosoeuer he bee that commandeth, ... must winne his opinion from well doing, and not by well saying.

Thomas Twyne wrote of the lack of discretion of the multitude: 'whatsoever
the multitude thynketh, is vayne, whatsoever they speake, is false, whatsoever they dislyke, is good, whatsoever they like, is evyll, whatsoever they commend, is infamous, whatsoever they doo, is foolyshe.27 Early seventeenth century literature abounds with insistence on the inadequacy of the multitude, the fallibility of popular report or opinion.28

The notion of widespread error and unreliability of judgement, and therefore of opinion, within the community is applicable to the ethos of Coriolanus. J.L. Calderwood remarks:

> if the social order has become corrupt and there is nothing external to self with which the nobility can be identified, then nobility itself becomes susceptible to corruption . . . . For although Brutus may say that Coriolanus seeks “fame” (I.1.28 ff.), Coriolanus himself seems only too aware that fame is meaningless unless it is received from a society worthy of rendering it.

(p. 218)

However, the noble character, if inherently heroic, confident and principled, need not necessarily 'become susceptible to corruption', as Calderwood suggests: that he is so perceived by the dubious opinions of that society does not confirm the fact. If nobility – heroic areté – is based not on opinion but on actual worth, there can be no danger of corruption by praise, criticism, persuasion, or threat, from an unworthy society.

Opinions expressed by members of that society cannot be taken to be authorial. In order, therefore, to comprehend the fundamental moral issues of the drama, and especially the undistorted character of the protagonist, 'our own integrity of judgement must, first, set no limit to the moral sensitiveness we ascribe to the tragedians; and second . . . it must respond with an equally direct and independent personal judgement of characters and situations . . .29

This judgement must be formed within the precise context of the drama. Although fundamental moral standards do not change essentially from age to age, the application of those standards may vary: thus archaic heroic assumptions shape an understanding of the heroic character and society in Sophoclean tragedy. If the protagonist is portrayed as irreconcilably in opposition to his community, and the community is shown to be morally unreliable, then the opinions and reports of that community must be suspect,

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and cannot be accepted as indicative of the moral standards underlying the drama. Most characters merely 'betray their own biases' and limitations when they speak of Coriolanus, rather than adding substantially to his portrait.\textsuperscript{30}

Consistent with the character of Sophoclean tragedy, Coriolanus is essentially a one-man drama; the hero is the focal point and centre of attention and activity of the whole.\textsuperscript{31} D.J. Enright notes that he 'must be the most talked-about character in Shakespeare', and lists the characters who discuss him, and the 'curiously large number of explicit judgements' made about him.\textsuperscript{32} There is, indeed, no character in the drama who does not talk, or express opinions, about him. From this mass of discussion issues universal censure; he is the most unanimously condemned of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Everyone criticizes his attitude, words or actions. Even Virgilia, most devoted and loyal of wives, adds her pleas to those of Volumnia, and thereby implies a gentle condemnation of his intentions. After Volumnia's harsh verbosity and her peremptory assertion to Coriolanus 'Trust to't, thou shalt not', Virgilia's 'Ay, and mine,' is a tolerable although surprising objection. She qualifies her opposition, however, by implicitly reminding him of her devotion: she is his beloved wife, who bore his son to preserve his name:

\begin{quote}
Ay, and mine,  
That brough you forth this boy to keep your name  
Living to time.
\end{quote} 
V.3.125-127

His son's remarks are more defiant, echoing Volumnia's aggressive attitude: "A shall not tread on me! /I'll run away till I am bigger, but then I'll fight' (127–128). Bertrand Evans comments on the discussion of the protagonist in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies, and the inordinate amount of such scrutiny in Coriolanus:

\begin{quote}
a considerable amount of discussion of the hero's character takes place . . . . In all the tragedies such discussions . . . are among our major sources of information on the hero; they are, in short, the serviceable, indispensable devices by which the dramatist establishes our view of the protagonist. But in Coriolanus discussion of the hero by other participants assumes an unprecedented proportion and serves a purpose that goes far beyond the usual. 
Shakespeare's Tragic Practice, pp. 307–308
\end{quote}

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Michael Goldman concurs: 'in no other Shakespearian play do people analyse another character in the fashion they repeatedly employ in *Coriolanus* (p. 74). The multitude of opinions about Coriolanus, valid or not, emphasize the general inability to comprehend or to define the hero's essence. The fact that most of the criticism points to his pride as his chief vice does not indicate, as Bertrand Evans observes, that 'Coriolanus is a man of remarkable simplicity' (p. 309), but implies, rather, an impertinence on the part of those judging him. The general tendency shown by most characters is to debase merit to those qualities which are more appropriate to their own deficient understanding and moral principles.

Michael Goldman suggests that incomprehension accounts for Aufidius's 'feeling of bewilderment' as he attempts to define Coriolanus's essence variously as noble, proud, lacking judgement, inflexible, feared and hated, 'one of these . . . not all'. Aufidius's speech reflects a feeling of confusion, of incompetence to define an enigma, and constitutes, Evans suggests, 'the finest single assessment' by any character in the play of Coriolanus's essence (p. 308). Although Aufidius's description of Coriolanus encompasses many of his positive and negative qualities, and is fairly, if incompletely accurate, it is neither a discriminating nor a dispassionate estimate of Coriolanus's nature. Even if it is the finest estimate in the play as Evans suggests, this is a dubious credit: no one in the drama understands Coriolanus. If Aufidius's assessment is of any value at all, it is in the communication of his own bewilderment rather than of Coriolanus's essence. Aufidius's judgement as always, is clouded by his avowed and unremitting hatred for Coriolanus. Throughout the drama, opinions are not reliable, and authorial comment is not directly accessible outside of indications within the drama. The substance of Coriolanus's character must therefore be discerned exclusively from his own words and actions.

Opinions of the hero stem initially from the necessity of the limited, the ambitious, and the envious to downgrade that which they cannot understand, and which they therefore hate or fear. Even Menenius's descriptions of Coriolanus as a dragon or a god (V.4.14, 24), unsubstantiated in

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the drama, reveal an old man's incapacity to understand the essential nature or motivation of the heroic character. Whether he is dehumanized, deified, or criticized in human terms, the welter of descriptions, censure, and opinions reveal the bafflement of everyone in Rome, and indeed in Antium, about Coriolanus.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{b. Discrepancy between report and event}

Reports of Coriolanus's words and actions, or motives suggested for his conduct, like opinions which cannot be corroborated in the drama, are of no real value for an understanding of his character. The reality must remain exclusively that which is seen and heard of him at first hand. The comparison of reports and opinions with the actual words and actions of Coriolanus, serves to emphasize the misrepresentation and the blatant error of popular opinion at all levels of society.

Like the typical Sophoclean hero, Coriolanus's independence of being needs no confirmation from others. He is as sure of his moral standpoint, his prerogative to be and to act as he sees fit – despite the opinions of others – as is Antigone; neither Ismene's timorousness, the chorus's warning, nor Creon's threats have any effect on her chosen defiant course of action:

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\textbf{ISMENE:} & May the dead forgive me, I can do no other  
But as I am commanded; to do more is madness.  
\ldots  
\textbf{ANTIGONE:} & Go your own way; I will bury my brother;  
\textit{ll. 62–66}  
\textbf{CHORUS:} & She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish  
Not to give way when everything's against her.  
\textit{ll. 475–476}  
\textbf{CREON:} & Did you know the order forbidding such an act?  
\textbf{ANTIGONE:} & I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.  
\textbf{CREON:} & And yet you dared to contravene it?  
\textbf{ANTIGONE:} & Yes.  
\textit{ll. 449–451}  
\hline
\end{tabular}

Coriolanus has the same confident moral certainty, and is equally able to disregard public opinion: neither public praise nor public condemnation can exert any influence on his principles or his conduct.

The opinions of the plebeians, from the sixth line of the play, are
prejudiced and unsound. Their changeability reflects their moral uncertainty, and their rancour towards Coriolanus is fuelled by his unconcealed scorn for them. Their reasons and conclusions, however, are irrational: Coriolanus is neither chief enemy to the people (I.1.6-7), nor is he personally and solely responsible for their hunger (I.1.9-12). Equally, his murder would not necessarily guarantee the plebeians all the corn they might want, at their own price (I.1.9–10). Shakespeare's close conformity in Coriolanus with North's translation of Plutarch emphasizes those departures he made from the source: in degrading the plebeians, he correspondingly discredits their judgements. The unreliability of the commons, based as it is on inadequacy, embodies a potential to harm. Their wavering opinion can be – and indeed is – manipulated by those more malevolent and more astute than they are: by the tribunes in Rome, and by Aufidius in Antium. The inherent and real danger of public opinion is effectively shown in Coriolanus: in Rome at the point of exile, and in Antium at the point of murder.

The plebeians are a 'thoroughly unreliable lot', but the tribunes are worse: they are 'unrelievedly repugnant'. More crafty than the plebeians, the tribunes' opinions are infinitely more malignant and their potential more deadly. There is no real evidence in the drama that Coriolanus, if elected consul, would become excessively oppressive or cruel, as they claim he would. More concerned with their own interests than that of the citizens, they are determined to blacken Coriolanus's name and so ensure their continued authority. At every opportunity they insist on his 'tyrannical power' (III.3.2):

\[ Bru. \] Get you hence instantly, and tell those friends They have chose a consul that will from them take Their liberties, make them of no more voice Than dogs \[ II.3.210–213 \]

\[ Sic. \] You are at point to lose your liberties. Marcius would have all from you; \[ III.1.194–195 \]

Coriolanus does express severe disapproval of the appointment of the
tribunes, and their consequent influence over the citizens, but his fears for Rome are shown to be not without foundation. There is no certain evidence, however, that he would put an end to the tribunate, or oppress the citizens. In fact, despite his antagonism towards them, he has no political ambitions, would rather serve Rome than rule (II.1.193–194).

Everything the tribunes say about Coriolanus is warped; even Brutus's description of Coriolanus's triumphal entry into Rome ridicules and disparages the occasion. The crowds pressing to see Coriolanus are belittled: the 'prattling nurse' and the 'kitchen malkin' vie with priests and patrician women for places among the throng of commoners (II.1.195–211). The adjectives Brutus uses caricature the multitude, implicitly suggesting that the clamorous acclaim for Coriolanus is absurd and therefore worthless. The comparison of this malicious description with the more objective account of the same event by the messenger, is a powerful indication of the vilification which perverted and self-serving reports can achieve. The messenger's report contains no bitter or offensive adjectives: there is, instead, a sense of the excitement and celebration of the event, as the commons make 'a shower and thunder with their caps and shouts', and ladies, maids, matrons, and nobles enthusiastically acknowledge Coriolanus (252–258). Where Brutus suggested 'whatsoever god ... slily crept into his human powers', the more generous messenger freely compares Coriolanus with Jove's statue (209–210, 256).

The tribunes manipulate the political situation by circulating baleful rumours, and opinions which are calculated to wreak havoc in Coriolanus's life, and in Rome. Condemnation of the tribunes, consistent with that portrayed in the drama, was expressed in contemporary literature: 'in Rome ... the ... Tribunes, ... whose furie and indolency ... sedition and troubles brought the state to utter destruction'. In their efforts to discredit Coriolanus for their own ends, the tribunes perpetrate unjustified wrong not only against him, but against the state. Unsubstantiated and harmful public opinion is shown to be manoeuvred in Rome by the tribunes and in Antium by Aufidius, to become an alarming reality. In both cities Coriolanus is condemned as a traitor, and is first banished from Rome and later murdered in Antium, as mass opinion is manipulated.

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Although the tribunes' malevolence is instrumental in the tragedy of Coriolanus, no section of Roman society is blameless. If the fundamental unreliability of the plebeians, and the improbity of the tribunes discredits their opinions, a similar mode of evaluation must be applied to cast doubt on the validity of the patricians' opinions and reports, since their principles and conduct too, are censurable. Menenius, although he is not as harsh or devious as Volumnia, is also tainted with the patrician desire to appease the multitude at the expense of personal integrity of purpose, to patch 'with cloth of any colour' (III.1.252-253). His artful exploitation of the belly-fable to suit the occasion is 'an exquisite piece of political and theatrical tactics'. This artifice must suggest the possibility that Menenius's report of his encounter with the banished Coriolanus will be similarly biased and imprecise. In fact, his version of the meeting is charged with his determination to tell a good tale and with his undoubted feelings of disappointment and self-pity. His description of Coriolanus as a dragon, an engine of war, an embodiment of power, a deity, are all images created in his own mind:

Men. This Marcius is grown from
man to dragon; he has wings, he's more than a
creeping thing.

Sic. He lov'd his mother dearly.

Men. So did he me;
... the ground
Shrinks before his treading.
... He wants nothing of a god
but eternity, and a heaven to throne in.

V.4.13-24

Coriolanus is never shown thus, and the actual dramatized encounter corrects the impression of inhumanity conjured up by Menenius's description.

In Act V scene 2, Menenius's pretentious preamble to the Volscian guard and Coriolanus (56-75), reveals the old man's exaggerated sense of his own importance and of the dramatic potential of the situation. He is not entirely devoid of genuine emotion -- 'O my son! my son!' -- but the wordy tenor of his speech counteracts any sense of unalloyed sincerity:

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you shall perceive that a Jack guardant cannot office me from my son Coriolanus ... 
behold now presently, and 
swoon for what's to come upon thee. The glorious 
gods sit in hourly synod about thy particular 
prosperity, and love thee no worse than thy old father 
Menenius does!

V.2.58–65

He claims to have been 'hardly moved to come' to Coriolanus but for the assurance that none but he could 'move' him (67–69). The repetition of 'move' significantly encapsulates the emotion Menenius intends to arouse in Coriolanus and the old man's objective to induce Coriolanus to change his attitude. He subtly appeals to Coriolanus's feeling for Rome: 'I have been blown out of your gates with/sighs' (70–71), in an attempt to stimulate pity for Coriolanus's 'petitionary countrymen' (72).

Although Coriolanus appears to be stern and unforgiving towards Menenius, and his words harsh, there are clear signs of the intense emotion he feels. His assertion 'wife, mother, child I know not' (78) implicitly associates Menenius with those that Coriolanus loves most. Despite the denial, the specific mention of his family reveals that he does, indeed, remember and think of them. His remark to Menenius that his 'affairs are servanted to others' (79) is a pointed reminder of the awkward situation. Whatever he may wish to say to the old man, Coriolanus is aware of the necessity for caution in the presence of Aufidius, and for the observance of his obligation to the Volscians. In reality, Coriolanus's tender emotions are barely concealed; he openly admits his love for Menenius three times to Aufidius and the Volscians (85, 86, 89), and demonstrates his understanding consideration with a letter written in anticipation of the meeting. Once again, the comparison of the actual with the reported event exposes the pitfalls inherent in regarding opinions, rumours or reports as reality.

Cominius, an honourable and respected warrior, employs an impressive compound of fact and rhetorical exaggeration in his eulogy to Coriolanus (II.2.80–127). His stated intention is to amaze, to frighten, and to impress. He has told Coriolanus previously that he will report his deeds in an awe-inspiring manner:

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Where senators shall mingle tears with smiles;  
Where great patricians shall attend, and shrug,  
I' th' end admire; where ladies shall be frightened  
And, gladly quak'd, hear more; where the dull tribunes,  
That with the fusty plebeians hate thine honours,  
Shall say against their hearts, 'We thank the gods  
Our Rome hath such a soldier'.

I.9.1–9

The explicit facts are verifiable: Coriolanus's youthful emergence as a superior warrior and his recorded triumphs:

At sixteen years,  
When Tarquin made a head for Rome, he fought  
Beyond the mark of others; . . .
  
he bestrid

An o'erpress'd Roman and i' th' consul's view  
Slew three opposers; Tarquin's self he met,  
And struck him on his knee . . .

And in the brunt of seventeen battles since  
He lurch'd all swords of the garland.

II.2.85–99

Oratorial skills and enthusiastic hyperbole, however, enliven the account with impressive, imaginative metaphors: Coriolanus is described as 'a vessel under sail . . . a thing of blood . . . a planet' (104, 107, 112). The report is essentially correct, the language rousing and evocative, exaggerated for effect and the occasion. Cominius's later depiction of Coriolanus is similarly emotive, but this time the report is not substantiated by recorded facts, by action in the drama, nor is there any indication that he has received this information. His account is a deliberate attempt to frighten the citizens he holds accountable for the imminent disaster. Coriolanus is pictured as a god, a thing, is compared with a butcher; Rome will be consumed by fire, Roman women will be raped. There is, however, no event or report in the drama which could validate Cominius's alarming allegations:

You have holp to ravish your own daughters and  
To melt the city leads upon your pates,  
To see your wives dishonour'd . . .

Your temples burned . . .  

he leads them like a thing  
Made by some other deity than Nature

IV.6.82–100

Cominius's report of his meeting with Coriolanus to plead Rome's cause,

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significantly also not dramatized in the action, on evidence of his previous
descriptions must be viewed with caution: it is vivid, even melodramatic,
and is calculated to cause a sensation, but there is no indication that it is
precisely based on fact. Without substantiation within the action of the
drama, it is possible to discern in Cominius's version of the encounter those
details which are most likely to be undistorted, and those which appear to be
coloured by his mental anguish and bitterness. Coriolanus probably spoke to
him, called him by name (V.1.9), and forbade Cominius to address him by
name. Cominius was apparently unable to conceal completely his
suppressed feeling for his erstwhile general and friend, but attempted to
disclaim his instinct by distancing himself from all former ties with the
rejection of his names: "Coriolanus"/He would not answer to; forbade all
names' (11–12). Cominius's imagination seems then to have taken over, as
he portrays Coriolanus as 'a kind of nothing, titleless' (13) who would admit
no identity 'till he had forg'd himself a name i' th' fire/Of burning Rome'
(14). He does not report Coriolanus actually making this threat, although he
does relate as statements other replies in which Coriolanus recalls the
ingratitude and punishment meted out to him by the Romans: 'he replied . . .
his answer to me was . . . he said' (19, 24, 26).

Coriolanus's remarks about not sparing Rome for the sake of his 'private
friends' (24), if accurate, are in part a harsh sentence and in part a valid
comment. All the citizens of Rome have proved to be unreliable and
self-centred: in the sense of a purification and renewal of the city, all
unworthy members should be erased if Rome is to rise again to former
glories. Professor Brockbank comments: 'this burning will be a
consummation and a purgation, the supreme proof of Martius' virtus and a
cleansing from Rome of its base elements'. The rest of Cominius's report
(63–69) is similarly embroidered; Coriolanus may have sat on a gold chair, but
the hatred in his eyes and his lack of pity are subjective perceptions:

I tell you he does sit in gold, his eye
Red as 'twould burn Rome, and his injury
The gaoler to his pity.

63–65

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Significantly, the only two words which are explicitly designated as spoken by Coriolanus are the prohibition of the use of his name (11), and his faint 'rise' (66). In the absence of dramatized confirmation, it would be possible to envisage a scene with only these words spoken by Coriolanus: his silence in Act V scene 3, in the face of Volumnia's entreaties would justify this conclusion. The remainder of the report could then be considered to be based on the words, emotions, and impressions of a despairing old man. Cominius fails to realize that his account of his brusque dismissal by Coriolanus is more revealing of Coriolanus's pent-up emotions than of his heartlessness:

'Twas very faintly he said 'Rise'; dismiss'd me
Thus with his speechless hand. What he would do,
He sent in writing after me;

66–68

Brian Vickers comments on the general 'magnification of Coriolanus by the patricians [which] results always in a kind of gigantism', in order to have 'a marketable political image... a superman figure on their side'. He points too, to the 'disproportion between the event and the analogies used to describe it' (p. 22). It is especially the invalidity of the opinions and reports about Coriolanus which is significant, inasmuch as those opinions do not reveal authorial comment on the character of the protagonist, but rather relate to the unreliability of those who express such opinions. Both excessive adulation as remarked by Vickers, and excessive criticism must be viewed with caution in the comprehension of Coriolanus's character. Depending on the speaker's attitude towards the hero, Coriolanus's heroic attributes become demeaned or exalted: integrity may be seen as arrogant pride or godlike majesty.

Opinions are as dubious, reported events as distorted in Antium as they are in Rome. Once he has pledged his support to the Volsclians, Coriolanus gives the same resolute and constant loyalty to his adoptive country as he did to Rome. Yet he is once again overwhelmed and destroyed by fluctuating public opinion and distortion of facts. Aufidius has personal reasons to envy and fear Coriolanus. He and Coriolanus hate each other 'alike', but whereas Coriolanus magnanimously admits his admiration for Aufidius, the Volscian...
leader reveals his malicious jealousy and spite, his intention to overcome Coriolanus by fair means or foul:

Mar. I sin in envying his nobility;  
And were I anything but what I am,  
I would wish me only he.  
. . . He is a lion  
That I am proud to hunt.  
I.1.228–230, 233–234

Auf. Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor  
More than thy fame and envy.  
I.8.3–4

Mine emulation  
Hath not that honour in't it had; for where  
I thought to crush him in an equal force,  
True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way,  
Or wrath or craft may get him. 
I.10.12–16

His deep-seated resentment is fuelled by Coriolanus's long-standing martial superiority and increasing popularity among the Volscians:

Auf. Do they still fly to th' Roman?  
Lieu. . .  
Your soldiers use him as the grace fore meat,  
Their talk at table, and their thanks at end;  
And you are dark'ned in this action, sir,  
Even by your own. 
IV.7.1–6

Auf. All places yield to him ere he sits down,  
And the nobility of Rome are his;  
The senators and patricians love him too.  
28–30

Aufidius asserts that Coriolanus has manipulated the Volscian esteem with insincere flattery:

I rais'd him, and I pawn'd  
Mine honour for his truth; who being so heighten'd,  
He watered his new plants with dews of flattery,  
Seducing so my friends; and to this end  
He bow'd his nature, never known before  
But to be rough, unswayable, and free. 
V.6.21–26

There is no evidence of this flattery, seduction, or submission in the action; in fact, Coriolanus's reaction of extreme distaste to Volumnia's suggestion that he flatter the Roman citizens (III.2), must alert an audience to the

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implausibility of Aufidius's allegation. Such is Coriolanus's reputation for defiant independence that even one of the Volscian conspirators is forced to raise an objection to Aufidius's assertion:

3 Con. Sir, his stoutness
When he did stand for consul, which he lost
By lack of stooping –

27–29

The true facts do not suit Aufidius's stratagem: he interrupts the man, claiming 'that I would have spoke of' (29). He then evades the subject and continues his planned diatribe against Coriolanus, much as Agamemnon disregards Teucer's vindication of Ajax's valour, and continues his attempt to dishonour Ajax.

Ultimately Aufidius's avowed intent to destroy Coriolanus by unfair means if he cannot succeed fairly, is realized. His previous admissions that his ' emulation/Hath not that honour in't it had', that 'or wrath or craft may get him', and that even 'against the hospitable canon' he would wash his fierce hand in Coriolanus's heart, are ominous predictions of what actually occurs. His description to the Volscian nobles of Coriolanus's supposed treachery is demonstrably false: the malicious distortion can be evaluated by a close comparison of the reported encounter with the actual dramatized scene in which Coriolanus meets the Roman women. After the meetings with Cominius and Menenius, but prior to that with the women, Coriolanus tells Aufidius that he must be sure to report to the Volscian lords how straightforward and honest Coriolanus has been. Aufidius's reply confirms the integrity of Coriolanus's past conduct, and reveals, prematurely, the lies and false accusations in Aufidius's later report to the Volscian lords:

Only their ends
You have respected; stopp'd your ears against
The general suit of Rome; never admitted
A private whisper – no, not with such friends
That thought them sure of you.

V.3.2–8

During the encounter with the women, Coriolanus takes special care that his conduct should be scrupulously correct and not open to misinterpretation or criticism: 'Aufidius, and you Volsces, mark; for we'll/Hear nought from

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Rome in private' (92–93). After he has heard Volumnia's plea and made his agonizing decision, he once again consults Aufidius, who admits, despite himself, to being 'mov'd withal' by the encounter (191–194). Later, however, to the Volscian lords, Aufidius relates the event with rancorous misrepresentation. He claims that Coriolanus has 'perfidiously... betray'd' Volscian interests, has ceded Rome to his wife and mother without due consultation with Aufidius (V.6.91–100). His report is a baleful distortion of the event. He deliberately exaggerates Coriolanus's distress with derogatory verbs: 'betray'd... given up... breaking... whin'd... roar'd' (92, 95, 98). He repudiates Coriolanus's honest attempts to include Aufidius and the Volscians in the encounter and the outcome, to 'hear naught... in private' (V.3.98), conveniently forgetting that he has previously acknowledged that Coriolanus 'never adm'ted/ A private whisper' (6–7). He falsifies Coriolanus's open endeavour to 'frame convenient peace' as a perfidious betrayal without consultation. In fact, in addition to insisting on Aufidius's presence throughout all the encounters with Romans, Coriolanus specifically defers to the Volscian's judgement before the final decision about the peace terms is made:

But, good sir,  
What peace you'll make, advise me.  

196–197

Aufidius's calumny achieves its desired effect: the citizens of Antium, so recently marching jubilantly with Coriolanus into the city, become a murderous mob: 'tear him to pieces' (V.6.121). Once Aufidius's treachery, and the active ill will which bred it is recognized, a parallel can be drawn between the injustice done to Coriolanus in Rome and that done in Antium, by the malevolent inciting of popular opinion. Contemporary literature supports this attitude: 'for let the popular idoll be once crushed, none will sooner tread upon him then the people'.

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CHAPTER VII
The isolation and death of the tragic hero
1. The moral incompatibility of the hero and the community

The tragic predicament of the Sophoclean heroic individual is embodied in his ambiguous relationship with his community. Charles Segal describes this predicament as 'the problem of living an authentic life at times of social disintegration and widespread individual malaise.' The tragic hero manifests a highly personal ethical code, which he asserts defiantly in the face of all opposition and which is in direct conflict with, yet fundamentally more conscientious than prevailing authority. An understanding of his relationship with his society is based on a perception of how each reacts with and upon the other: how he collides with his world and how it contends with him; what he may try to do to his world and what his world ultimately does to him.

The Sophoclean hero is censured for being maladjusted and antisocial, unwilling and unable to concur with the laws or customs of his community, but his attitude is more correctly a confident commitment to his own moral certainty, his heroic individuality. Ajax challenges an unjust adjudication, and commits suicide in order to maintain his individual sense of honour. Antigone, too, defies the law, and faces certain death rather than not uphold those principles she knows to be essential to her own integrity and to that of any civilized, humane society. Her opposition to Creon's edict transcends the purely civil, and affirms the overriding significance of the ethical. In analogous fashion, Coriolanus's stand against the citizens of Rome denotes a resolute moral essence rather than insolent dissidence: his inflexible attitude is typically Sophoclean in its defiance of questionable social mores or political directive.

The tragic hero lacks the baser instincts so prevalent in his society and his complex relationship with that society is marked most essentially by moral conflict. Because he can neither conform nor adjust to attitudes which are incompatible with his integrity, he appears to be rebellious. Whitman states: 'For the heroic tends towards the "anarchic", . . . the heroic and the idea of society are not always at one— . . . [he is] a pariah of sorts, who at once excels [society] and is trodden down by it.' He may be destroyed by society but his inner nobility is never compromised. Whitman comments further: 'In at
least six out of the seven extant tragedies of Sophocles, the individual stands heroically in conflict with the world with which he is confronted' (p. 37). Although the tragic hero is regarded as fanatical and maladjusted, and is always at odds with, even ousted from his community, he is nevertheless potentially the saviour of the community in moral terms.

Society in the *Antigone* is dominated by the peremptory, the ambitious, and the cowardly. Creon's imperious imposition of an inhuman law, Ismene's faint-heartedness, and the chorus's indecisiveness, are set against Antigone's unwavering courage, her conviction of noble and just conduct. Her moral principles are essential to both personal and communal well-being: she attempts to preserve those fundamentals in human life which should form the basis of any civilized community. Her understanding of these values, her innate comprehension that no man should be able to enforce inhuman, and therefore uncivilized, laws in the misuse of power, places her in direct opposition with Creon and ultimately with her community. The personal integrity which underlies this unique political insight isolates her in a society which understands neither, and which punishes her for her adherence to her convictions, to principles which should be most essential to any humane, enlightened society.

In the *Ajax* there is similar opposition between the hero and his community. Agamemnon and Menelaus are resentful and vindictive; like Creon, they show a lack of concern for the claims of conscience and humanity. The fabric of civilized society is threatened by their determination to assert their own will over moral principles. Ajax, like Antigone, understands that the decisions of the majority or of those in command are not necessarily well-founded. He attempts to redress an injustice, and his battle is as much for the recognition of his personal merit as it is for the acknowledgement of those basic standards of integrity which should apply to each man, and to society as a whole. His concern for the probity of society is expressed in his realization that Agamemnon and Menelaus have been spared to 'rig another verdict' (Watling, l. 446), to '[procure] such a judgment against another man.' (Jebb, l. 449).

The political attitude of the Sophoclean hero is thus closely bound up with

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his personal ethical code: the health of the community is based on the individual integrity of each citizen. In order to adhere to precepts he instinctively knows to be right and just, the tragic hero willingly faces isolation and death as he pits himself against the state in the assertion of those precepts. He has no personal, political ambition; his concern is for 'a noble life before a long' (Coriolanus, III.1.153). Ajax expresses the same sentiment, to live nobly, or to die with honour:

Long life? Who but a coward would ask for it...?
Honour in life,
Or honour in death;

Il.475, 480–481

The perception of the antagonism between the heroic and the mean is consistent with both ancient and contemporary seventeenth century thought: Virgilio Malvezzi remarks: 'Excellency or perfect goodnesse, seemes to be an unfortunate thing.' Barnabie Rich quotes Diogenes: 'It was the part of wisemen to be alwayes contrary to the multitude', and states: 'The vulgar people, through their dull wittes and brutish nature, can not perceive what is profitable, either to themselves, or to their country, but the noble minde... through great foresight, prevents imminent daunger'.

The mutual antagonism between Coriolanus and the citizens of Rome results in his irreconcilable isolation within the community. Thomas van Laan states that 'though a native Roman, [Coriolanus] is even more out of place in his community than Othello was in his'. He suggests further, that although Coriolanus 'performs... brilliantly' his role as a Roman warrior, the part he is required to play as a compliant citizen in peacetime demands much more of him, which van Laan considers he is 'unable to produce'. He asserts that Coriolanus fails to fulfil additional social roles because he is unable 'to comprehend and accommodate the needs and demands of all elements of a highly complicated and potentially volatile political entity' that is Rome.

It is not, however, that Coriolanus is unable to fulfil or to understand the needs and demands of his community, as van Laan suggests, for he is an admirable Roman in every respect: in martial prowess, in nobility of purpose

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and conduct, and in proper concern for the welfare of the state. It is rather that he is unable to become as other Romans are, for in order to do so, he would need to compromise his heroic *areté*. The fault – in Sophoclean terms – lies within society and not with Coriolanus, and only he is able to perceive clearly the attendant moral and political destruction which threatens Rome and her citizens. His merit as a commendable member of his community should not – indeed cannot – be judged by his apparent failure to exemplify the persona which Roman society demands of him.

The drama emphasizes the lack of judgement and responsibility prevalent among all citizens of Rome. The demands which they make on Coriolanus reflect the sham, the lack of principle which exists beneath everything they say or do. It is less relevant to criticize Coriolanus on the basis of his inability to conform, than it would be to examine his relationship with Roman society from his point of view: this perspective will afford a more reliable understanding of his, rather than their attitude. Such an understanding must include the recognition that his estimate of the citizens is validated by the drama: if his contempt is justified then, by extension, his values and perceptions are admissible.

His personal relationships do not, as has been frequently suggested, denote a lack of humanity but rather tend to reflect his consistent moral responsibility and courtesy. He always shows due respect towards Volumnia, despite his obvious disappointment in her attitude, which he often reveals in thinly-disguised expressions of rebuke or impatience. His reminder to his mother of her real feelings of contempt towards the citizens carries an implicit condemnation of her hypocritical attitude and of her insistence that he should act as she does. When she persists, he is barely able to disguise his impatience and disappointment:

\[\text{Cor.} \quad \text{I muse my mother}\]
\[\text{Does not approve me further, who was wont}\]
\[\text{To call them woollen vassals . . .}\]

\[\text{Vol.} \quad \text{You are too absolute;}\]
\[\text{Tush, tush!}\]
\[\text{Cor.} \quad \text{. . .} \quad \text{Why force you this?}\]

\[\text{III.2.7–9, 39, 45, 51}\]

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His unfailing civility towards Valeria, his esteem and real affection for
Cominius and Menenius, even his magnanimous recognition of Ausidius as
a praiseworthy adversary, confirm his sensitive humanity. No one else in the
Roman or the Volscian worlds of the play exhibits these generous
characteristics, but it is, above all, his love for Virgilia, and hers for him,
which unequivocally reveal the merit of the man. In a drama which is
devoid of disinterested relationships, the love between Virgilia and
Coriolanus is a reciprocal testimony of human worth.

If a man's social essence can be ascertained by the manner in which he
conforms, by the degree of adaptability he displays within his society, then in
terms of the drama readiness to compromise, and hollow pretence should be
considered to be the hallmarks of a good citizen, a worthy Roman. In reality,
however, in such an atmosphere of contrived political manoeuvrings, the
misfit must be perceived as admirable. If the standards and conduct of society
as a whole are shown to be less than worthy, it is surely heroic to confront
and oppose those standards? It may well be, that 'from society's point of view,
identity is role', but if society's conduct and demands run contrary to high
moral standards, and if the hero's moral fibre is shown to be scrupulous, then
it is society which should be condemned rather than the supposedly aberrant
individual.

Although Coriolanus neither exemplifies nor embraces the manners and
mores of his community and remains resolute and apart, conscious of his
unique individuality, W.I. Carr considers that he embodies 'the weaknesses
of his culture' (p. 234). It is difficult to comprehend the manner in which Carr
imagines him to embody any qualities of his society, whether weaknesses or
strengths, when Coriolanus is patently antagonistic to the values and conduct
of each section of that society. Patrician intolerance and contempt for the
citizens is the only conviction he can be perceived to share with any members
of his society, but even in this, his attitude is founded as much on his
background and probable indoctrination as it is on his actual experience of
plebeian irresolution, lack of principle, and cowardice. If his attitude towards
the commons accords with that of other patricians, his unfailing honesty in
acknowledging his feelings does not. They are always hypocritical and

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evasive, while he is outspoken, even excessively abrasive, but always candid. Clearly in direct, constant opposition to all around him, he cannot be considered to embody the convictions of his community, whether admirable or censurable.

Carr does acknowledge however, that Coriolanus 'is the scapegoat for the failures in conduct which exhibit the quality of his world: dexterity without scruple, class pride without responsibility . . . . Anything we might understand by life is lacking, irrelevant to the central preoccupations of nearly everyone in the play' (p. 234). Criticism of Coriolanus within the drama reveals the innate self-interest of the Romans. He is accused of ambition by the tribunes who are motivated by self-interest, of pride by those who lack self-confidence or merit, and of inflexibility by those who dissemble and compromise. The essential nature of the state is forfeit to each man's individual interests and selfish objectives.

Coriolanus's relationship with his community is one of contrariety; morally he cannot tolerate prevalent social mores, and psychologically he is unfit for the role into which society places him. He is unsuited to public spectacle, intensely ill-at-ease whenever he is publicly commended or the centre of attention. He genuinely abhors extravagant praise, show, or reward and prefers always to maintain his own course in the manner he sees fit. He would rather be without official political status, free to be his own man, than be constrained by the demands of a consulship to behave in a politic and, to him, unacceptable manner. Although he is supremely confident and at home on the battlefield, Coriolanus is otherwise an essentially private man, forced at every turn, in every area of his life, into the public eye. In homecomings and partings, major decisions and personal encounters, in arguments with his mother or the most tender, intimate moments with his wife, he is constantly thrust into public display, too often under the gaze of the citizenry he so despises and which is so antagonistic towards him. He is constantly subjected to verbal or physical constraint, to instructions on how to behave. He is told to stay when he wants to leave, to sit when he stands, to speak in a certain manner, or not to speak. His behaviour, his words and his gestures are beleaguered by criticism, control, and instruction:

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[Coriolanus rises, and offers to go away.

Men. Nay, keep your place
1 Sen. Sit, Coriolanus

II.2.64 (S.D.)–65

Cor. What must I say?
'I pray, sir' – Plague upon't! I cannot bring My tongue to such a pace.

Men. Come, enough.
Bru. Enough, with over measure.
Cor. No, take more.

II.3.48–50

Cor. What must I do?
Men. Return to th' tribunes.
Cor. Well, what then, what then?

III.2.35–36

Vol. Go to them with this bonnet in thy hand;
And thus far having stretch'd it – here be with them –
Thy knee bussing the stones –

73–75

Com. Come, come, we'll prompt you.

106

Just as Rome is restricted within delimiting walls, claustrophobic and confined, so the Roman citizens attempt to dominate and crush Coriolanus's nature, to contain his very identity and to manipulate it into something other than it is. When Creon fails to master Antigone's nature, he attempts to curb her literally and physically by constraining her within a walled tomb. Coriolanus's banishment from Rome is a comparable reaction by the citizenry: what they cannot control must be cast out.

For Coriolanus, behaviour which he demands is inevitably that which is most consistent with his strict moral code, which is most advantageous for the community, and thus for the Roman state. He recognizes that the general attitude which is most contrary to his own, and which most sets him apart from the community – the moral unreliability prevalent in all sections of society – must result in the disorder of the whole social and political fabric of Rome. Like Antigone, Coriolanus understands that the bases of civilized society must crumble if fundamental tenets of honesty and reliability are sacrificed to self-serving ambition, questionable authority, or unprincipled...
conduct. It is not only with the plebeians, as James Calderwood suggests, that Coriolanus lacks 'a common set of values, feelings, allegiances, principles and knowledge' (p. 213), but with his entire community. The drama extends this lack of agreement to Coriolanus's subsequent relationship with his adopted community. The moral superiority which set him apart in Rome is again manifest in Antium, where Aufidius and the Volscian hoi polloi are as duplicitous and unreliable as their counterparts are in Rome.

Coriolanus has no selfish objectives and shows a sincere regard for the good of Rome through justice, honour and harmony. He recognizes that the tribunes are more concerned to use their position of authority for their own ends than for the good of the plebeians or of Rome. It is their petty ambition which stimulates their continued offensive against Coriolanus rather than any altruistic feeling for their state. Coriolanus attempts to alert the patricians and senators to the inherent danger to Rome in the tribunes' appointment, in power given to scheming, unprincipled officers:

Cor. Why, You grave but reckless senators, have you thus Given Hydra here to chose an officer That ... wants not spirit To say he'll turn your current in a ditch, And make your channel his?

III.1.91–97

His insight is allied with honest anxiety about, and desire for, Rome's prosperity:

my soul aches
To know, when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
The one by th' other.

108–112

Th' honour'd gods
Keep Rome in safety, and the chairs of justice
Supplied with worthy men! plant love among's!
Throng our large temples with the shows of peace,
And not our streets with war!

III.3.33–37

No one else in the world of the drama, in Rome or in Antium expresses such
unselfish and admirable wishes for the good of the state. He understands the danger in allowing the unreliable, irresolute mob any privilege, and foresees the hazard in entrusting the new tribunal position to men who are driven by selfish ambition, and are fundamentally unsuited to serve either Rome or the plebeians.

All the patricians are insincere in varying degrees in their behaviour towards the commons and the tribunes. They mask their true feelings, but the animosity on both sides is perilously close to the surface, and it is this lack of concord that must eventually weaken if not destroy Rome. Volumnia 'bears a closer resemblance to the rest of the patricians than to her son. One thinks, for example, of her willingness to compromise, her political duplicity . . . . But as a threat to Coriolanus's heroic identity, Volumnia is most like the plebeians'. Only Coriolanus shows an intelligent comprehension of the impending crisis for Rome, a crisis provoked as much by the perversion of the political innovations as by the internal discord and the moral mediocrity of all citizens of Rome. He recognizes no distinction between personal and political integrity; that which is relevant for the good of Rome should derive from that which is worthy in each man.

Coriolanus has the ability and perspicacity to be the leader of integrity that Rome needs, but the irreconcilable moral chasm between him and the community precludes any communication or co-operation. His disdain for the commons, albeit based on his actual experience of their unreliability, is a major impediment to any harmony between them, or to his appointment to a position of authority. He clearly perceives the granting of a powerful but unscrupulous voice to the plebeians through the appointment of tribunes to be potentially disastrous for Rome, an ultimate betrayal by the patricians of ancient Roman custom. 'There is no mistaking [his] intense moral concern', as he foresees the imminent danger to Rome, the menace to the integrity and endurance of the state. Although archaic, anachronistic, even politically retrogressive, his viewpoint is valid, given the current situation in Rome. He fears the 'dangerous lenity' must 'win upon power and throw forth greater themes/For insurrection's arguing.' R.S. Ide considers that 'it is not surprising that the most superior titan among Shakespeare's heroes is also

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the purest political theoretician in the canon' (p. 178). His political acumen has at its base a resolute integrity, his heroic areté, allied with an unselfish loyalty towards Rome.

There is, however, an irreconcilable and ultimately tragic contradiction of obligation, between his dutiful bond towards Rome and his commitment to his own truth. He recognizes that Rome is unavoidably dependent on the physical and moral reliability of its citizens. More politically astute than his compatriots, he perceives too, the universal improbity of the population and the consequent inevitable menace to the welfare of the state. For him there can be no compromise, and the conflict and banishment engendered by this situation results in personal and national tragedy.

2. Isolation within the community

The Sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, . . . an isolation . . . which imposes on the hero the full responsibility for his own action and its consequences. It is precisely this fact which makes possible the greatness of the Sophoclean heroes; the source of their action lies in them alone, . . . the greatness of the action is theirs alone. Sophocles presents . . . [the] 'tragic hero' . . . who . . . makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, . . . and then . . . ferociously, heroically maintains that decision.

The Sophoclean tragic hero is deprived of all support and must rely entirely on his own resources: he must stand on his own against his community. Although the discreditable behaviour of the general public, and their censure of the heroic individual expose their physical irresolution and moral uncertainty, the incessant hostility nevertheless embodies a real potential to harm. 'To be an individual in Sophocles is to have a special destiny apart from other men and to suffer a potentially dangerous, indeed fatal, isolation from the community.'

Antigone's moral conviction sets her apart from her community, but her single-minded commitment to integrity of conduct never wavers, although it incurs the criticism of all the citizens of Thebes. She perseveres in her solitary campaign, undaunted by her isolation within the community and the

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certainly of her death. She neither demands nor requires support, rejecting Ismene's tardy attempt to align herself with her sister's defiance:

**ANTIGONE:** You shall not die with me. You shall not claim That which you would not touch. One death is enough.

ll. 546–547

Compare Jebb:

**AN.** Share not thou my death, nor claim deeds to which thou hast not put thy hand: my death will suffice.

ll. 546–547

For the Sophoclean hero there can be no half-measures, no uncertainty, and no hesitation, however difficult and alienating his chosen path may be. Antigone is uniquely isolated from the Theban community, as much by her sex and youth as she is by her moral independence. Young, female, and heroic, she stands magnificently alone. Jebb considers that the opposition of a male chorus and a female heroine in the *Antigone* of Sophocles emphasizes her isolation: 'the Antigone of Aeschylus is not isolated by her action, but is escorted by a band of maidens who publicly avow their sympathy' (p. x). In contrast, the Antigone of Sophocles is more conspicuously alone: the chorus of elderly men are neither unequivocally sympathetic nor supportive. The general lack of understanding and the criticism of her attitude and conduct further increase the impression of her total alienation within the community; Antigone is described as:

The one and only traitor in our State –

her, alone of all the city, in open disobedience

Watling, l. 655; Jebb, l. 654

She is characteristically portrayed in a situation of confrontation: against Ismene, against a chorus of elders, against Creon. Never reticent or loath to express a vehement opinion, she is most often shown in a position of hostile encounter, surrounded by – yet isolated from – people who talk about her as if she were absent. During the guard's report of the flouting of Creon's edict (ll. 376–440), she stands alone and silent, encircled by the chorus, Creon, and the guard. She is isolated as much by her silence and her posture, with head down (p. 145, above), as she is by her subsequent indomitable defiance: 'Now
you have caught, will you do more than kill me?' (l. 498). The only tender emotion or understanding she receives throughout the drama is Haemon's reported embrace, unseen by the audience, and even that is in death:

MESSENGER: And, with his arms about her, there stood he
Lamenting his lost bride, his luckless love
ll. 1221–1222

Invariably alone, yet always in a crowd, her physical alienation is a manifestation of her moral singularity. She is unable and unwilling to compromise her inherent integrity, and widens the gap between herself and the Theban community, going at last to her inevitably solitary death, conscious of her utter loneliness:

No friend to weep at my banishment
To a rock-hewn chamber of endless durance,
In a strange cold tomb alone to linger
Lost between life and death forever.
ll. 856–882

Antigone's death is distressing, but achieves even greater pathos in her realization of severance from all human benevolence, her deprivation of the joys of love, friendship, marriage and motherhood:

Never a bride, never a mother, unfriended.
Condemned alive to solitary death.
ll. 911–912

She has no fear of death, but life is dear: she chooses death only because she has no moral alternative. If, at the point of death she would have expressed no regrets, her fate would have been less distressing, less touching in human terms. Jebb comments: 'Few things in tragedy are more pathetic than this yearing of hers, on the brink of death, for some human kindness...' (xxxii). Her yearning for human kindness emphasizes her total isolation and the extreme poignancy of her longing for fulfilment highlights the intensely human dimension of the heroic personality.

Ajax, too, is in an irreconcilable position of opposition with the Achaeans, his heroic areté as incomprehensible to them and the Salaminian chorus as is Antigone's to the Thebans. From the outset, and throughout the drama, there is hostility towards Ajax from those who should be allied with him. The

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Greeks have done [him] nothing but ill', he is Odysseus's 'enemy', the man he hates, Athena shows her malice despite admitting his excellence, and Agamemnon and Menelaus are implacable in their ill-will towards him, even after his death. He is always alone, 'hated of gods/ Hated of all the Greeks, hated of Troy/ And of this very soil' (ll. 457-458). His lonely suicide, the only death on stage in the extant Sophoclean canon dramatically accentuates his total desolation, and his words of loneliness and longing express his intense sense of bereavement:

O sunlight! O sacred soil of mine own Salamis, 
firm seat of my father's hearth! O famous Athens, and thy race kindred to mine!
And ye, springs and rivers of this land — and ye plains of Troy, I greet you also — farewell, ye who have cherished my life! This is the last word that Ajax speaks to you: henceforth he will speak in Hades with the dead.

[AJAX falls upon his sword.
Jebb, ll. 859-865

Ajax's absolute isolation is further emphasized by the reactions of those who should be most supportive. The chorus of Salaminian sailors, his ship-mates, reveal their instinctive self-centred preoccupation in their outbursts at critical points of the drama (pp. 186-187, above). After Ajax slaughters the oxen their immediate thought is for their own safety: 'I fear to share a bitter death by stoning, /smitten at this man's side' (Jebb, ll. 250-251). Even Teucer, Ajax's loyal half-brother and staunch champion against Menelaus and Agamemnon's posthumous abuse, reacts with immediate, perhaps unintentional selfishness to the news of Ajax's suicide:

And in the end I shall be thrust from the realm, and cast off, — branded by his taunts as no more a freeman but a slave. Such is my prospect at home; while at Troy I have many foes, and few things to help me. All this have I reaped by thy death!

Jebb, ll. 1019-1023

His outburst is mitigated by his honest anguish, and his determined effort to ensure for Ajax a consecrated burial and noble memory. Tecmessa, like Haemon and Virgilia, remains true and devoted, but none of them is able to

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check the imminent tragedy or, at the end, to alleviate the absolute physical isolation of the heroic individual.

’In Whitman’s view, the hero, ... experiences the deepest sense of self in isolation and suffering, and refuses to constrict the greatness of his nature and ideals to suit convention and so-called normality’. 12 Whitman states:

‘Professor Reinhardt fixed upon the isolation of the protagonist as the key to Sophoclean tragedy . . . . It is his own clear vision which isolates the hero and creates a gap between him and the rest of humanity’. 13 Knox defines heroic isolation: ‘the hero is a lonely figure: he is . . . “alone” . . . “abandoned, deserted”’ (The Heroic Temper, 32).

Lonely isolation within a hostile crowd is the characteristic status of the Sophoclean hero: he stands resolutely apart, constantly compelled to wage his conflict under the critical scrutiny of the community. Ajax’s humiliation is shamefully exposed, as the shocking results of his rage are revealed and discussed, and his solitary misery becomes public knowledge:

ODYSSEUS: We all think Ajax did it. Somebody saw him
Running wildly across the camp, alone,  
ll. 27–28

AJAX: Here is the bold, the strong,
The fearless fighter in the line!
See his brave handiwork
Among these innocent dumb beasts,
And laugh, laugh at his shame!
ll. 363–367

His indignity becomes unbearable, and he seeks, instead, an honourable death. Significantly, he withdraws to ‘a lonely place’ (Jebb, l. 815, SD) for his suicide, away for the first time from the eyes, the intrusion of those who are so hostile to him, or those who would deter him from his chosen course of action. Antigone’s defiant confrontation likewise, is waged in public as she is subjected to the prejudice and censure of the Theban community. Only Coriolanus, among Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, is similarly and relentlessly thrust into the public gaze, isolated, yet forced to enact his conflict and endure his humiliation in the midst of unsympathetic fellow Romans and, ultimately, the perfidious Volscians.

John Arthos believes that absolute isolation is a quality which is peculiar

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to the art of antiquity. The intense emotion and merit of ancient art, epitomized in the statuary, is conveyed by solitude, reflected in the 'simple loneliness' of the figures, and is an attribute equally manifest in the drama. He contrasts the solitary quality of classical art with the 'abundance of creation' characteristic of the art of the Middle Ages, and in particular with the same 'sense of abundance of life' in Shakespeare's plays, suggesting that Shakespeare's 'character of imagination and viewpoint [are] the very opposite of that exquisite solitude that is the hall-mark of ancient art'. In the main this is substantially correct, but it is striking that in Coriolanus Shakespeare comes closest to that concentration of effect, the splendid tragic isolation of the hero which is so much a feature of classical art, of Sophoclean tragedy. Coriolanus is rarely portrayed outside the public arena, seldom permitted to be alone, yet is invariably set apart within a throng, utterly excluded from sympathy or benevolence.

a. 'Solitarines': moral and physical singularity

Coriolanus's isolation within the Roman community is most fundamentally a measure and a dramatic manifestation of his moral individuality. Eugene Waith suggests – with reference to Heracles – that a striking feature of heroic stature and isolation is an indifference towards human bonds, a 'disregard for others . . . [a] self-absorption [which] is a concomitant of the primitive areté which makes obligations to others secondary to the hero's devotion to his own integrity'. It is not, however, indifference which alienates Coriolanus from his fellow Romans, but rather profound difference. His distinctness is expressed in moral and physical pre-eminence, in an inability to acquiesce in those social modes of conduct which are contrary to his integrity. In this sense he does indeed place his obligation to his own integrity above his observance of social mores or his accord with his compatriots. But his personal integrity is intimately bound up with his conception of correct behaviour for all Romans, and as such incorporates instinctive allegiance and responsibility to the state and its citizens.

His isolation is not, therefore, an essentially antisocial tendency, a

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character flaw, which causes Coriolanus to be unsociable, 'churlishe, uncivill, and altogether unfit for any mans conversation', as he is portrayed in Plutarch. North's translation uses the word 'solitarines' to describe what is viewed as a personality defect. Janet Dillon gives as an example of the Elizabethan concept of 'solitarinesse', 'devotion to self at the expense of society, as well as physical isolation . . . Any characteristic which indicated interest in the self . . . or which implied a morality that valued the self above the common good'. This is essentially the same as E. Waih's definition of selfish heroic isolation, above. Dillon claims further, that Coriolanus's alienation within his community is born of aggressive unsociability, an 'offensive . . . monstrous egocentricity', because he overvalues himself (pp. 146-147). More correctly, his social detachment is the resolute and self-confident aloofness of a singular individual, as certain of his own worth as he is of the insufficiency of all around him. His isolation does not, therefore, derive from an 'inward solitariness . . . inherent in his nature', as Dillon suggests, (p. 145), but is an enforced isolation as a result of the implacable hostility of the ordinary towards the heroic.

There is not one scene or situation in the drama in which Coriolanus is surrounded by supportive and/or appreciative compatriots, or in which he feels totally approved or at ease. Even in Act II scene 2, during Cominius's eulogy, Coriolanus is patently ill-at-ease, his discomfort palpable, his detachment from the assembly manifest:

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

II.2.73-75

In this scene, and during his triumphal entry into Rome (Act II scene 1), the apparent atmosphere of general acclaim is marred as Brutus and Sicinius lurk on the sidelines, furtively watching with bitterness, biding their time until they can 'darken him for ever' through manipulation of the commons. The lack of fellowship between Coriolanus and the community, the obvious bilateral rancour, has resulted in the characterization of Coriolanus as inherently uncivil; but this is Plutarch's, not Shakespeare's hero. Shakespeare
portrays Coriolanus – uniquely among his tragic heroes – as suffering the profound desolation of complete desertion, through no real fault of his own. John Arthos considers that the idea of genuine solitude was inaccessible to Shakespeare, as was

the idea of total abandonment every mortal in the Iliad took for granted. Not Lear or Macbeth or Othello, seeking for death, can conceive of the completeness of his exclusion from all care that the great figures of the ancient world accepted as the fact... the solitude [which] the ancients accepted as their native air.

Only Coriolanus experiences this utter ostracism; only in Coriolanus is there such an unrelieved confrontation between hero and community, such a total lack of understanding, of care or consideration as there is in Rome, and then again in Antium. With the inevitable exception of Virgilia – and he is largely deprived of her physical presence – there is no one on whom Coriolanus can depend, no one prepared to stand unequivocally by his side, as the Fool, Kent, and Edgar do during King Lear's exclusion from society.

In a position of conflict in peace and in war, Coriolanus's alienation from any amity deprives him of the natural expectation of dependable relationships within the community. The patricians fail to intercede substantially on his behalf when the tribunes contrive his banishment, and the desolation of his situation is unambiguous. Abandoned by Rome, he is more alone than ever before or after. Desertion by Romans within Rome constitutes a far more intolerable perfidy than does the duplicity of the Volscians in Antium. His deep disillusion, fuelled by a sense of utter alienation, is manifest in his despairing banishment of Rome, his vehement desire for a better world, his passionate determination to transcend, to live as a phenomenon on his own:

I banish you.
Despising
For you the city, thus I turn my back;
There is a world elsewhere.
... though I go alone,
Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen

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"Alone' resounds throughout the drama, an assertion of his isolation, his lonely incompatibility. It emphasizes his individuality, the heroic perseverance which separates him from all around him, and confirms his ability to stand on his own against countrymen or enemy: 'He is himself alone...Alone I fought in your Corioli walls...Alone he ent'red...though I go alone...Alone I did it.' His integrity sets him apart, and his indomitable attitude and single-handed triumphs within the walls of Corioles and against Aufidius epitomize his moral and physical singularity, and provide bases for verbal echoes of isolation throughout the drama.

Always isolated within a crowd, he is paradoxically always, yet never alone: in moments of torment or tenderness, in life or in death, he is denied privacy (pp. 237–238, above). The drama is characterized by constant tumult, uninterrupted discord and activity, yet the typically hostile throng surrounding Coriolanus merely serves to accentuate his solitary disjunction. His isolation is affirmed morally, physically, and verbally, and is as conspicuous in Rome as it is in Corioles or in Antium. Dramatically he is always confronting an individual or a hostile group, as in Act II scene 3, wearing the gown of humility, and Act IV scene 5, disguised in mean apparel: these scenes are powerful examples of his isolation within a crowd, visually distinct in appearance. They are, however, no more compelling than are the less obvious instances of isolation in which he is not distinguished by the wearing of a costume or a disguise, but is isolated from those around him by disparate attitudes.

He cannot hide his contempt for the plebeians, who 'like nor peace nor war' and 'every minute...do change a mind'. He realizes that his attitude must antagonize them, but is unable to moderate his words in order to court their good will. His opinion of the tribunes, expressed with equal candour, further alienates him from them and the citizens. The 'purpos'd thing', the plots which the tribunes hatch are contrived to ensure his continued conflict with the plebeians. His distinctness from the patricians derives from his inability to 'perform a part' in order to 'put [his] power well on'. As each

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situation emphasizes his moral and physical difference from everyone in Rome, his isolation is emphatically established. His later encounters, more hostile and more menacing, result in his banishment from Rome, and his murder in Antium:

*Sic.* We charge you . . .
Go see him out at gates . . .

*Auf.* But tell the traitor in the highest degree
He hath abus'd your powers.

***

*Conspirators.* Let him die for't.
***

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him! 20

Coriolanus is alone on the stage for a possible maximum of fifty lines throughout the whole drama.21 Otherwise, always surrounded yet always alone, he is formidable in his contemptuous hostility towards the plebeians in the first scene, audacious in his defiance of the enemy in Corioles, selfconscious and uncomfortable amongst the plebeians or the patricians, a stranger in Antium in Aufidius's home, resolute in his confrontation with Volumnia before the Volscian troops, and finally, once again, valiant as the only Roman among Volscians.22 Although Coriolanus may not be as isolated physically at his death as Ajax and Antigone are, effectively and emotionally he is as alone as they are. In Antium, banished by the ungrateful Romans, surrounded by hostile Volscians, he is even more alienated from understanding or consideration than if he were on his own. The antithetical relationship between him and whatever group surrounds him is further emphasized by the confrontational nature of the dialogue and action, the visual impact of the one against the many. He has to defend himself constantly against verbal onslaught or physical attack from both countrymen and foes.

b. Banishment

The callous banishment of Coriolanus from Rome is the inevitable culmination of his uninterrupted isolation within the city. Despite his defiant dismissal of Rome and the unworthy Romans, the lonely bereavement inherent in his situation is unmistakable. Never more isolated nor assailed,
even among Volscians in Corioles or Antium, he is in Rome abandoned by
those who owe him most.

'I banish you' is an expression of Coriolanus's deep despair, his
contemptuous renunciation of his city and its citizens. It is, too, an expression
of his superiority to those who have so ruined Rome for themselves and for
him. He leaves them to their uncertainty, their ignorance, their fear and their
cowardice, linking state and inhabitants in his bitter disillusion:

I banish you.

. . . Despising
For you the city, thus I turn my back;
There is a world elsewhere.

III.3.125-137

He turns his back in barely-concealed anguish on the city to which he has
devoted his life. 'There is a world elsewhere' resounds with desolate
melancholy, despite the brave assertion of conviction. Unable to elevate the
moral consciousness of the Roman population, unwilling to compromise his
own, he declares his defiant independence of his city by banishing those who
would banish him. Shakespeare deliberately emphasizes Coriolanus's utter
isolation; he leaves Rome resolute and alone, whereas Plutarch's Coriolanus
is accompanied by 'three or foure of his friendes'. Unconquered, he resolves
to seek a better – or different – world elsewhere. But there is to be no world at
all for him. Antium proves to be as incompatible with heroic individuality as
Rome was, its citizens equally untrustworthy.

Coriolanus may indeed '[define] his identity by Rome and Rome's ideals'
as Joyce van Dyke suggests, but this is only at a fundamental, idealistic, and by
no means immutable level. His integrity and identity are proof against the
destruction of Rome and Rome's ideals. He is able to banish the city which
fails him, without losing his innate worth. It is no act of cheap bravado, for he
can – and does – continue to be quintessentially himself, even without 'the
existence and co-operation of a viable Roman state'.

C.C. Huffman suggests the necessity of considering Coriolanus's
banishment

[as] Shakespeare's audience might have understood it.
Coriolanus is . . . forced into exile; the exile itself does

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not necessarily cause the audience to accept his guilt.

Indeed, in Shakespeare generally, banishment from Rome illustrates Rome's "ingratitude" to the individual for loyal service. Coriolanus... is in Shakespeare's treatment the victim of monstrous ingratitude.25

There are references in the contemporary literature to current attitudes towards banishment, and to Coriolanus, which confirm this view. Kenneth Muir quotes Richard Knolles's translation of Bodin: "how dangerous a matter it is in euerie commonweale to banish a great man" [and] goes on to mention Coriolanus, "who cast into exile, brought the Romans to such extremite...".26 Censure of communal ingratitude, of the ignominious expulsion of 'a great man', and compassion for his unmerited fate are not, however, sentiments which were exclusive to the Renaissance. Antigone's desolation is expressed in similar terms of profound loss and regret which constitute authorial comment on her heartless desertion by the Thebans: 'No friend to weep at my banishm ent... alone... my city, my home'.27

During his exile, Coriolanus's relationship with the community in Antium is as hollow and as fragile as it was in Rome. He is equally triumphant martially, equally acclaimed as a valiant leader (IV.7.1-4), but he is in Antium even more isolated than he was in Rome. In Rome he had the opportunity of the joyful comfort of Virgilia, the sustaining - albeit critical - love he bore for his city. Antium is patently not the 'world elsewhere' he so desperately sought, and although he performs the role his adopted country demands of him with honour, his forlorn alienation from any form of social communion is emphasized.

Coriolanus is not portrayed at first hand in Antium among the Volscians until the final scene. His conduct is variously reported by serving men, by Aufidius and his lieutenant, and by Romans. Once again, unconfirmed within the action, rumour and opinion do not necessarily guarantee the truth. Coriolanus is, as ever, the sole topic of conversation in Rome and Antium, but no one expresses sympathy or comradeship for him. To the Volscian servingman he is as a 'son and heir to Mars', feared and respected by the senators and Aufidius:

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Aufidius alleges Coriolanus's arrogant behaviour, yet admits his apparent loyalty and courage in the Volscian interest:

He bears himself more proudlier,
Even to my person, than I thought he would
... he bears all things fairly
And shows good husbandry for the Volscian state,
Fights dragon-like

In Rome Coriolanus is declared to be intent on 'revenge as spacious as between/ The young' st and oldest thing' (IV.6.66–69). It is as if he were deliberately set apart while in exile, to be scrutinized and commented on, but not to be integrated into congenial society.

The various descriptions of him as less or more than human achieve the objective not of delineating him, but of revealing his isolation from all around him, the irreconcilable disparity between him and them. It is not the arrogant pride of a dragon, the inhumanity of an automaton or the indifference of an idol or god, in Menenius's or Cominius's dubious descriptions, that horrify an audience.28 It is rather, a distressing perception of Coriolanus's deep torment, of the lack of understanding shown by his former compatriots, of the unutterable sense of loneliness in his actual dramatized encounter with the old man who was once his beloved friend, and of Coriolanus's desperate efforts to repudiate his profoundly harrowing emotions.

He prefaces his remarks to Menenius with a terse rejection of former ties: 'wife, mother, child, I know not', but he must, however, emphasize that his 'affairs/Are servanted to others' (V.2.78–79). He must publicly affirm his allegiance to the Volscians and his severance from Rome, in terms which will simultaneously disarm Aufidius, ameliorate the insult to Menenius, and yet be consistent with his own sense of integrity, his obligation to his adopted
country. Although his reference to 'forgetfulness' (82) appears to imply his loss of pity and feeling for the old man, he plainly intends a reminder to Menenius of Rome's ungrateful forgetfulness of valiant services. He is obviously more hurt than he admits by the ingratitude and harsh treatment. Cominius reports Coriolanus's description of Rome's request for pardon as 'a bare petition of a state/To one whom they had punish'd' (V.1.20–21). This, and Coriolanus's later allusion to his punishment by Rome and of the 'ingrate forgetfulness' (V.2.82), affirm the bitterness he still feels, the deep emotion which Cominius and Menenius fail to recognize, although their reports unintentionally capture Coriolanus's sense of lonely anguish in his exile.

The apparently incidental reference which Coriolanus makes to the love he felt for Menenius is profoundly revealing and is, significantly, not in Plutarch's account. He needs to declare his love twice, to confess it unambiguously to Menenius and Aufidius, despite his seemingly harsh treatment of the old man: 'Yet, for I lov'd thee, ... This man, Aufidius,/Was my belov'd in Rome' (85, 88–89). This, allied to the fact that he had previously prepared a letter to Menenius, 'for thy sake', and his open admission of emotion to Aufidius, also not in the source, betray his sense of isolation and bereavement in his exile. His subsequent acknowledgement of his 'crack'd heart' (V.3.9) to Aufidius betrays the extent to which the encounter with Menenius affected him, and the mental anguish that his necessary conduct towards the old man caused him. Yet, as always, aware of his duty and commitment, he behaves as the occasion and his integrity demand.

Rome's public and formal banishment of Coriolanus is reminiscent of the pattern of the outcast, the pharmakos, in ancient literature. Antigone is the scapegoat, the human sacrifice by means of which Thebes hopes to purify itself. The hope, however, is a self-deception: it is Creon, not Antigone, who is the source of pollution in the city, he rather than she who is shown to be guilty of dangerous obduracy. Teiresias tells Creon 'the blight upon us is your doing' (1016), which in Jebb's translation is even more explicit of the desecration and disorder that Creon has caused:

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And 'tis thy
counsel that hath brought this sickness on our state.
For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been
tainted

Jebb, ll. 1014–1017

The seer tells Creon to revoke his command: 'Only a fool is governed by
self-will./ Pay to the dead his due. Wound not the fallen' (ll. 1029–1030). But
Creon refuses to yield, displaying the stubborn pride of which Antigone is
accused throughout the drama:

all the silver of Sardis
And all the gold of India will not buy
A tomb for yonder traitor.

ll. 1038–1040

He defiantly asserts that nothing will 'frighten me from my determination/
Not to allow this burial' (ll. 1042–1044).

Coriolanus, like Antigone in Thebes, is made to bear the burden of the
inadequacies and unworthiness which the community itself embodies. He is
the only Shakespearean tragic hero who is so publicly and unanimously
banished; only he is formally sentenced to exile in a ceremony which is in fact
a theatrical travesty of legality, engineered by the tribunes.

To the patricians he exemplifies all the real, but disguised hatred they feel
for the plebeians and the tribunes, and the noble integrity and moral
constancy which they lack. Menenius admits that in his dealings with the
tribunes and plebeians he is prepared to use any means, however duplicitous,
to achieve his ends, to patch 'with cloth of any colour'. His acknowledgemen
of Coriolanus's integrity is expressed as a criticism of such conduct:

Pat. This man has marr'd his fortune.
Men. 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;

III.1.251–257

Volumnia, like the other patricians, criticizes her son's honesty by admitting
her own scheming hypocrisy. She regards the plebeians with disdain but
masks her contempt in order to gain an advantage, commenting that such
behaviour is a manifestation of her astuteness:

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She, too, accuses Coriolanus of being 'too absolute' (39), too uncompromisingly outspoken. She recommends that he hide his feelings and express himself to the people as all the patricians do, in insincere lies: 'not by your own instruction, / Nor by th' matter which your heart prompts you' (52–57). The patricians are unabashed in their encouragement of dissimulation and opportunism. They recognize that Coriolanus's conduct is different from theirs, although their attitudes are similar, and criticize his candour rather than his sentiments. Their censure of his too noble, absolute manner implicitly acknowledges their moral deficiency: they nevertheless make him responsible for the defects they fail to see in themselves.

To the plebeians Coriolanus manifests the courage and constancy they are unable to attain. Their cowardice and irresolution cause them to demand of him those same qualities, as if, by conceding to popular opinion or by displaying inconstancy he might embody the required Roman character; otherwise he is seen as anti-Roman, the enemy: 'Yield, Marcius, yield . . . Our enemy is banish'd, he is gone!' (III.1.214, III.3.139). The tribunes point to his ambition, while theirs is blatant and his unproved: his instinctive understanding of the harm inherent in their appointment and his real concern for Rome above personal ambition reveal, through the comparison, the tribunes' artful machinations and aspirations. Despite Sicinius's pompous 'I do demand', Coriolanus is prepared to comply with his charge to

submit . . . to the people's voices,
   Allow their officers, and . . .
To suffer lawful censure for such faults
   As shall be prov'd upon you.

III.3.43–47

Coriolanus's reply 'I am content' is surprisingly unaggressive and tractable, given his opinion of the tribunes, their office, and the people. It is proof of the sincerity of his wish for probity, amiability and peace in Rome, for 'worthy men . . . love among's . . . shows of peace . . . not . . . war!' (34–37). Despite his

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determined effort to co-operate and to ignore Sicinis's pretentious manner, the unfounded accusations are finally too much for Coriolanus to bear. He has neither attempted to assume tyrannical power, nor has he been traitorous (63–66), and his retaliation is immediate and violent, as the tribunes knew it would be.

In casting Coriolanus out, all sections of the Roman population feel they exorcize the specific ills which in fact they themselves manifest, but fail to recognize as their own. He is not guilty of the allegations, Rome does not '[sit] safe and still without him' (IV. 6.36–37), after his banishment. The reported picture of a peaceful and happy city (1–9), carries with it the implication that the removal of Coriolanus has accomplished an elimination of the flaws, conflict, and corruptions in the community. In truth, however, at the first hint of impending danger, all the ills of society resurface: discord and tension break out as each section of the community accuses the other of having been instrumental in Coriolanus's banishment. The events immediately following Sicinius's report of 'present peace/ And quietness of the people' (2–3), provide striking contradictions. The 'happier and more comely time' (27), as hollow and insubstantial as the apparent benevolence between the citizens, is abruptly shattered. The tribunes accuse the messenger of rumour-mongering:

*Sic.*

'Tis this slave –

Go whip him fore the people's eyes – his raising,

Nothing but his report.

...

**Bru.**

Rais'd only that the weaker sort may wish

Good Marcius home again.

60–62, 70–71

The patricians accuse the tribunes and the plebeians, and the plebeians claim to have been opposed to Coriolanus's banishment:

**Men.**

You have made fair hands,

You and your crafts! You have crafted fair!

**Com.**

You have brought

A trembling upon Rome . . .

Both Tri.

Say not we brought it.

1 Cit.

I ever said we were i' th' wrong when we banish'd him.

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2 Cit. So did we all. 118–121, 155–157

Even Cominius reflects the general lack of true commitment to Rome and Roman ideals, as he blames the tribunes for the impending disaster and distances himself from their Rome: 'He'll shake/ Your Rome about your ears' (99–100). Nevertheless, both he and Menenius acknowledge their failure to show support for Coriolanus when he most needed it:

Com. for his best friends, if they
Should say 'Be good to Rome' – they charg'd
him even
As those should do that had deserv'd his hate,
And therein show'd like enemies.

Men. 'Tis true;

... We have deserv'd it. 112–115, 139

Utterly alone, banished by the city he has served so honourably, Coriolanus recognizes the transient nature of all human relationships. Harry Levin suggests that the meeting between the Roman and Volscian spies, in Act IV scene 3, carries an 'implication that Coriolanus is taking the same road to espionage and betrayal'. On the contrary, the scene is a direct indication, and a most damning confirmation, of the deviousness and the unreliability of individuals, and of human relationships, in the world of Coriolanus, an implicit contradistinction between Coriolanus and the citizens of Rome and Antium.

It is paradoxical that in this world of deceit all actions and conversations are overt, albeit duplicitous: the drama is singularly lacking in soliloquy. There is only one aside in the drama, as Aufidius comments on Coriolanus's reaction to Volumnia's pleas and discloses his plan to ruin Coriolanus and so elevate himself:

Auf. [Aside] I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour
At difference in thee. Out of that I'll work
Myself a former fortune. V.3.200–202

No one except Coriolanus has a soliloquy: he has one while he is alone on stage during the suing for votes in the gown of humility (II.3.109–121) and Chapter VII
another, more significant, as he approaches Aufidius's house in Antium, banished from Rome and dressed 'in mean apparel, disguis'd and muffled' (IV.4.1–6, 12–26). The only true soliloquy in the drama, the latter is necessarily invested with exceptional meaning; it reveals his spiritual and physical isolation, his deep sense of the faithlessness of all men, their words and bonds. In this mood of disillusion and isolation he ponders the seemingly inevitable breakdown of all relationships, his loss of trust in the integrity of his fellow man. It is not so much a lament as an accurate expression of the bleak sterility of all human passions, values, and bonds:

O world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,  
. . . who twin, as 'twere, in love  
Unseparable, shall within this hour,  
On a dissension of a doit, break out  
To bitterest enmity; so fellest foes,  
. . . by some chance,  
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends  
And interjoin their issues. So with me:

12–22

These are not the words of an antisocial, insensitive solitary, but of a perceptive, caring, and desolate individual, expressing his despair at the inadequacy of the human condition. His later, bitter condemnation of 'the cruelty and envy of the people', of his 'thankless country', and the 'dastard nobles' who all forsook him, is confirmation of the depth of his resentment at the perfidy of the Romans and their lack of loyalty (IV.5.70, 74–78).

Ajax expresses just this sense of desolation and disillusion about his world. Like Coriolanus, he recognizes his alienation from the world of inconstancy. Like Coriolanus, he perceives that even 'the most sacred oath/ Is fallible' (649–650), that all human bonds and sentiments are treacherous. He, too, comprehends that 'the long unmeasured pulse of time moves everything' (646). Jebb comments on l. 646: 'the emphasis is on the power of time to enfeeble and destroy, rather than to produce', and his translation captures this barren realization:

All things the long and countless years first draw from darkness, then bury from light;

II. 646–647
Ajax's sense of the unreliability and impermanence of all that should be most enduring and trustworthy incorporates the thought that he is not exempt from this generalization, for, like Coriolanus, he is provoked to malevolence towards former allies by their ingratitude and antagonism towards him:

I now know this, that while I hate my enemy
I must remember that the time may come
When he will be my friend; as, loving my friend
And doing him service, I shall not forget
That he one day may be my enemy.
Friendship is but a treacherous anchorage

II. 677–682

The unique integrity, the constancy of purpose of the Sophoclean hero isolates him in an environment in which he alone appears to comprehend the general instability. In his tragedies Sophocles portrays 'tragical self-knowledge . . . deepened and broadened into a comprehension of the shadowy nothingness of human strength and human happiness'. It is this distressing perception of the fallibility of man, the unreliability of his motives and conduct and of his bonds of friendship or duty, which Coriolanus expresses in his soliloquy, and which so intensifies the bleak deprivation of his banishment.

3. Exile and death
a. Conduct of the ousted hero

Condemned to exile from his native Rome, isolated and stateless, Coriolanus cannot continue to categorize himself entirely according to his origin. Although he is certain at all times of the way in which he should live in order to remain true to his inherent nature, he cannot now continue to live as a Roman, ousted from Rome. He must, therefore, in essence forge for himself a new persona, with regard to bonds and responsibilities — at least those external bonds and responsibilities by which he must live his life on a daily level. In this sense, he is indeed, 'titleless', but is not — nor can he ever be — 'a nothing' (V.1.13), for his certain knowledge of his own essential identity never wavers: inherently he cannot and does not change. The force of circumstances which compels him to re-create for himself a new identity —
albeit extrinsic to his reality – effectively makes him, in this aspect only, 'author of himself' (V.3.36).

Prior to the delegation from Rome led by Volumnia, Coriolanus boldly asserts: 'my birthplace hate I' (IV.4.23). Rome is, throughout the drama, a most personal, intimate city for Coriolanus. In his soliloquy he attempts to distance himself from Rome by refusing to name the city, by referring to it as an anonymous home town. It is most significant, however, that he nevertheless uses the possessive pronoun 'my' and the emotive synonym, 'birthplace', which are perhaps more revealing of his inward feelings than he realizes, or might wish. However he may aver his hatred for his birthplace, an undeniable sense of intrinsic connection asserts itself in an intimation of the bond he still feels for Rome: it is, and always will be, his native land, from which he may be severed physically, but never emotionally. He declares that his love is now 'upon/This enemy town' (23-24), but this time his reluctance to name the town constitutes an aversion, a refusal to dignify Antium by naming it, except as an inconsequential, unidentified enemy town which, paradoxically, he claims to love. This attitude emphasizes his fundamental sense of dissociation from Antium, his lack of personal feeling for the city, which retains for him the connotation of what it was previously, and will always remain, despite his questionable assertion of affection, an enemy town.

He may vow to fight against his 'canker'd country' (IV.5.90–91) and even does so, while Rome is the abstract focus of his bitterness, the distant source of his ordeal. Ultimately, however, he is at heart a Roman, with no innate relationship with Antium or the enemy, from whom he ultimately distances himself by referring to them as 'your Volscians' (V.6.116). While he is totally alienated from any immediate association with Rome, the city becomes a symbol for his hatred. But when his wife, mother and son confront him, he is forced to recognize that Rome is after all more than just a name he can easily repudiate. It is his birthplace, the city where family and friends live, and the encounter triggers the realization that he cannot reject those ties of blood and loyalty he has attempted to disclaim. His bold assertion to Menenius 'wife, mother, child, I know not' (V.2.78), is later nullified by his immediate and
emotional response to the sight of those he would deny:

My wife comes foremost, then the honour'd mould
Wherein this trunk was fram'd, and in her hand
The grandchild to her blood. But out, affection!
All bond and privilege of nature, break!

V.3.22-25

He finds he cannot, after all, break 'all bond and privilege of nature'.

Incomparable yet human, Coriolanus – like the Sophoclean hero – is nevertheless 'intensely earthy and impassioned, more deeply rooted in the truths of blood, family, honor, and instinct, than [his] antagonists'.

Antigone's open defiance of Creon's law is motivated by her love for her brother. She considers that her moral duty is to execute Polyneices's burial as an honourable and pious devotion, an 'unwritten, unalterable' law which must be respected above any human law (ll. 459–460). She perceives this not as an abstract directive, but as a deeply personal injunction to honour and protect a beloved brother from posthumous indignity, if necessary in direct opposition to man-made state law. Jebb emphasizes that Antigone 'is fulfilling one of the most sacred and the most imperative duties known to Greek religion; and it is a duty which could not be delegated' (p. xxv). The duty is equally Ismene's, as 'nearest kinsfold of the dead', but Ismene lacks the heroic integrity and resolute determination of Antigone: her inadequacy is shown up by her sister's undaunted dedication to principled and humane conduct.

Antigone's fulfilment of her inescapable obligation to her brother cannot be considered to be perverse self-will as Creon and the chorus assert it to be. It is an acknowledgement of piety and family devotion which Creon's edict denies. Jebb notes that 'the audience for which Sophocles composed the Antigone would regard Creon's edict as something very different from a measure of exceptional, but still legitimate, severity. They would regard it as a shocking breach of that common piety which even the most exasperated belligerents regularly respected' (p. xxiii).

Coriolanus's decision to save Rome, like Antigone's decision to bury Polyneices, is based on the claims of natural bonds. The deputation from Rome unbearably identifies the proposed assault on an up till now distant

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and dissociated city, with the reality of destruction of individual family members. His abortive attempt to live as if he were author of himself reveals the depth of his desolation, the bitter anguish he feels at the betrayal by all who should have been most supportive and constant, but he finds he cannot, after all, deny his roots and origins. His reaction is analogous with that of Antigone, who is forced to acknowledge her humanity, to lament her lost potential as wife and mother: 'Never a bride, never a mother' (I. 911). Coriolanus, like Ajax and Antigone, expresses his regret that his life must be forfeit to the demands and general impercipience of the community. He senses the same lack of sympathy, the same self-centred concern that Ajax and Antigone do among their compatriots. The lack of charity and widespread censure to which he is subjected in human society extends, Coriolanus believes, into the realm of the divine, as the gods deride his futile attempt to deny his dependence on natural relationships. He perceives that such a repudiation of his most fundamental bonds is abnormal behaviour, the 'unnatural scene' on which 'the gods look down, and . . . laugh' (V.3.184-185).

Antigone experiences a similar sense of ridicule, and reproaches the chorus for mocking her attempt to define her unique essence. She feels that they deride her reference to the correspondence between her fate and that of Niobe who was doomed, like Antigone, 'to a piteous death on [a] rock/ . . . which embraced and imprisoned her . . . /As she wasted and died' (II.813-858). She stresses the analogy: 'such was her story, /And such is the sleep that I shall go to' (816–817). The chorus, obtuse as ever, offer platitudes instead of the compassion she seeks:

\[
\text{the greater the glory,}
\]

\[
\text{To share the fate of a god-born maiden,}
\]

\[
\text{A living death, but a name undying.}
\]

II. 850–853

Antigone's anguished cry reflects her sense of total alienation from any understanding or sympathy:

\[
\text{Mockery, mockery! By the gods of our fathers,}
\]

\[
\text{Must you make me a laughing-stock while I yet live?}
\]

II. 856–857

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Jebb notes: 'her thought had been, “my doom is terrible and miserable as Niobe’s”: but the Chorus had answered, “It is indeed glorious for thee to be as Niobe”. She had looked for present pity. They had comforted her with the hope of posthumous fame’ (Note, ll. 834–838). Ajax, too, suffers a sense of being mocked, and expresses his humiliation in the knowledge that he is set apart, subject to shame and derision:

Here is the bold, the strong,
The fearless fighter in the line!
... And laugh, laugh at his shame!
... Where is Odysseus now,
... Shall he laugh at me now?

Il. 365–369, 380–383

Indignity is intolerable to the Sophoclean hero, but even more punishing is the cruel exclusion from any warm consideration or kindness. Absolute and exceptional, he is alone in life and death.

A.P. Rossiter feels that the conclusion of Coriolanus is 'flat, hurried, twisted off and depressing... inconclusive, ... unsatisfying...' which, he believes, is 'how History goes', rather than tragedy.33 Infinitely more than depressing, however, the conclusion of Coriolanus is profoundly tragic.

Philip Vellacott considers that 'the achievement or expression of integrity at the cost of life, and the neglect of integrity that is due to moral failure, are both the proper subjects for tragedy' (p. 10). Thus, all suffering endured in the preservation of heroic integrity and in defiance of moral inadequacy, and the consequent alienation and death of an extraordinary individual, are tragic expressions of the waste of the highest human potential.

The conclusion of Coriolanus is inconclusive and unsatisfying as Rossiter claims it to be only if an attempt is made to comprehend the tragedy in terms of explicit everyday morality. Coriolanus's unbending adherence to a deeply personal ethical code is unambiguously portrayed throughout the drama. The inability to understand his peculiar heroic integrity by every character except Virgilia, is equally elucidated. Nothing changes in Act V scene 3; Volumnia misinterprets Coriolanus's attitude much as she and everyone else have

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misunderstood and misinterpreted his conduct throughout the action, and
Coriolanus reaffirms and maintains his moral position as he has done before,
continually.

Volumnia chooses to ignore or misconstrue the conscientious
commitment which Coriolanus specifically mentions at the outset of their
meeting. His pleas that her thoughts should be noble, that she should prove
'to shame invulnerable' (72–73), are directed as much to his mother as to
himself: he is aware that the encounter will be difficult, and trusts that he will
be able to conduct himself with honour. He particularly mentions that he
cannot accede to requests to spare Rome, because he now owes allegiance to
the Volscians, and that Volumnia should not therefore regard his denial as
'unnatural':

The thing I have forsworn to grant may never
Be held by you denials. Do not bid me
Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate
Again with Rome's mechanics.

80–84

The reference to his futile past efforts to come to any sort of agreement with
the ungrateful citizens of Rome should alert Volumnia to his deep, enduring
sense of hurt and betrayal. But she is as insensitive as ever to all but her own
concerns. She impatiently silences him, 'O, no more, no more!' (86), loath to
hear anything which might conflict with her wishes and planned strategy.
She acknowledges that he has said that he cannot grant that which they
would ask, but persists 'yet we will ask' (87–89). Despite his explanation, she
nevertheless accuses him of 'hardness' (91), choosing to interpret the expected
denial as callousness on his part rather than as a committed moral stand. Her
verbal assault incorporates appeals to his family feeling, his pity, his honour;
his tactics are devious and varied. Having silenced him, she now challenges
him to speak, with a subtle reference to his filial duty, and disparagement of
his nobility, suggesting that he has assumed merely the niceties of honour
without due performance:

speak to me, son.
   Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,
   To imitate the graces of the gods, . . .

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'Why dost not speak?'
148–153

Coriolanus initially attempts to silence Volumnia: 'I beseech you, peace!' (78). He knows from past experience that, once started, she is impossible to check, and attempts to forestall a tirade. She prevents him from giving further explanations and launches into an artful harangue, calculated to break down the sternest resolve. With only one interruption, she rants on for eighty-two lines (94–125, 131–182). She employs wiles which are framed to stir his pity, his love, his patriotism for Rome, his shame and, finally, his indignation and passion:

our raiment
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile . . .
Making the mother, wife, and child, to see
The son, the husband, and the father, tearing
His country's bowels out . . .
   Alack, or we must lose
The country, our dear nurse, or else thy person,
Our comfort in the country . . .
   if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
Whose repetition will be dogg'd with curses;
   . . .
Come, let us go.
This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Corioli, and his child
Like him by chance.


She finally ceases, and Coriolanus stands, holding her hand, silent and motionless, overwhelmed by the verbal and emotional onslaught. The dramatic impact of the tableau vivant, especially after such a prolonged spate of verbosity, is more intense and evocative than any words could be.

Critics have complained that the audience, never privy to the workings of Coriolanus's mind, cannot discern the reason behind his apparent change of viewpoint while he stands silently, holding Volumnia's hand. Supposition of meaning beyond the words and action of the drama is unnecessary and futile. Coriolanus's silence is no surprise; he has always fled from excess words. E.A.M. Colman confirms this:

Neither Romans nor Volscians are within reach of

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understanding his moral predicament... for the reader or viewer of the play his predicament has been made abundantly clear before and during the Volumnia scene. So there was no need for Shakespeare to put into Coriolanus's mouth a last-minute explanation... the gap between everyday reality and the hero's vision of his own destiny cannot be bridged.

'The End of Coriolanus', p. 2

The dramatic significance of Coriolanus silently holding his mother's hand does not represent the breaking-down of Coriolanus's imputed inflexible pride and callous inhumanity. It is rather his instant of realization that in order to preserve his heroic integrity he must grant Volumnia's request, and must also adhere to a decision and a course of action which must eventually cause his death. He must recognize, as he later confirms (pp. 272–276, below), the claims of natural human bonds, and must frame a convenient peace for both Romans and Volscians without compromising his inner truth or his inescapable moral obligation – however questionable that obligation may seem – to either Rome or Antium. It is not so much that Coriolanus gives way to Volumnia's pleading, as the fact that he answers her insistence with a treaty which is "fitting, commodious", not merely expedient'.

Coriolanus is silenced as much by his emotional response to the sight of his wife, his mother, and his son – if not by Volumnia's words – as he is by the harrowing decision he knows he must make. There is no easy way out: he knows, even before Volumnia speaks, that he will have to make a decision which will test to the utmost his 'nobleness' (72). After the declamatory vehemence of his mother, the violence, the constant controversy and activity throughout the drama, this moment of total stillness – the emotional and moral heart of the drama – is profoundly moving and dramatically effective. Coriolanus's dilemma, and his deep distress are evident, even before his poignant words. He has never needed words; now, as ever, his silence, his actions, and his eventual eight lines of dialogue (182–189) express his intense emotion more than any fine rhetoric could. It is at this moment more than any other that Coriolanus perceives his utter and irreparable isolation, his severance from all human compassion, from all hope. Whitman states: 'The

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feeling we call alienation is probably the loneliest of all feelings, universal, yet all but inexpressible; its true language is silence, yet it is one of the principal fountains of poetry' (The Heroic Paradox, p. 136).

The scene represents therefore, neither a yielding, nor an essential change in Coriolanus from savage callousness to merciful humanity. Shakespeare clearly modifies Plutarch's account of the prior episode of Coriolanus's petition to Cominius to spare an enemy's life, changing the 'wealthie man' in the source to a poor man, in order that Coriolanus's compassion should be emphasized early in the action. His sensitivity and humanity are perceptible from an understanding of the man rather than from grand, public words or display. At moments of deep emotion he never resorts to extravagant gestures or words. His relationship with Virgilia, intense and enduring, is affirmed merely by some twelve lines throughout the drama, but these sparing phrases reveal unambiguously the strength of his love:

My gracious silence, hail!

... Come, my sweet wife...

... Best of my flesh,

O, a kiss

Long as my exile

II.1.166–170, IV.1.48, V.3.42–48

His innate courtesy to Valeria, lyrical and expressive, 'the noble sister of Publicola, / The moon of Rome' (V.3.64–67), is as indicative of a generous, benevolent spirit as is his constant concern for Menenius and Cominius. The meeting with Cominius is not dramatized in the action, and although the old man intends to emphasize Coriolanus's lack of humanity and pity, his report of the event inadvertently reveals Coriolanus's emotional and sympathetic response (pp. 225–227, above). As he does later with Menenius and with the women, Coriolanus discloses the intensity of his feelings in silence, or with the minimum of words.

Coriolanus has vowed to remain as he always was (IV.1. 51-53), and so he does. Descriptions of him as callous and inhuman are false reports, shown not to have substance in the drama. The rancour he feels for Rome proves to be well-justified: he has been treated contemptibly by the Romans and is

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ultimately treated similarly by the Volscians. This is the tragedy of Coriolanus. His determination to take revenge on an ungrateful Rome, to fight 'against [his] cank'red country', is not an arrogant, malicious decision (IV.5.88-92): it is the characteristic reaction of the Sophoclean hero to gross indignity or injustice. The citizens of Rome have rewarded his nobility with insults and ultimately with exile. He is tormented by the ingratitude of the Romans, and his vengeance on Rome is the manner in which he seeks to redress the wrong. He offers his 'vengeful services' to Aufidius in order that he, Coriolanus, may be able to settle old scores with Rome (IV.5.88-90, 82-84).

Ajax reacts with similar disillusion and vindictiveness in response to the injustice of the award of Achilles's arms to Odysseus. He vows to avenge the insult, and attempts to destroy the Atreidae in revenge:

ATHENA: You broke a lance with the two sons of Atreus?
AJAX: And once for all. Those two will never again Insult the name of Ajax.

ll. 90–94

Later, after he realizes that 'the hard-eyed daughter of Zeus . . . sent the plague/ Of madness' (452–453), his desire for revenge against the Atreidae is as implacable as ever. On the point of suicide, he calls on the Eumenides, the Furies who hound sinners:

The stern, unresting Furies, see this death
And know that the sons of Atreus brought it on me:
And wipe them out utterly with deaths as vile
As their vile selves. Go to it, you swift avengers;

ll. 841–845

His fierce vindictiveness is more savage, but is comparable with that expressed by Coriolanus. Jebb notes that "'Benefit thy friends, and hurt thy foes", was the received Greek maxim' (p. xxxix). Knox comments:

In the baleful wrath of Achilles, his self-absorbed brooding on the affront to his self-esteem, his anger against those who have wronged him and those who would turn him from his chosen path . . . – here is to be found the model and even the formulas of the Sophoclean tragic situation.

The Heroic Temper, p. 52

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However bitter he may feel about the ingratitude or the injustice meted out to him, the Sophoclean hero faces the prospect of certain death with nobility, with a sense of anguish, but always with an instinctive perception of the resolution and integrity he must manifest.

b. Integrity in the face of inevitable death

Fundamental to every Sophoclean tragedy is an agon, or struggle, which most essentially embodies the protagonist's determination to adhere to his physis, his innate heroic identity: a conflict in which he may lose his life, but not be defeated morally. The hero's death is subject to decisions and tactics which he may strenuously oppose, but which are beyond his control to change. Realization of this impasse embraces a recognition of the inevitability of his death. Even then for the Sophoclean hero, there can be no compromise, no submission in his unavoidable yet chosen course of action.

Ajax expresses this sense of finality; the repetition of his certainty of death, and the interminable length of time he has been away from Salamis communicate his despair and desolation:

I have been too long among you,
Too long at Troy. You will not see me again —
Not see me alive. Ay, mark this, everyone —
You will not see me again.
Never again . . .
This is the last of Ajax

ll. 415-419, 420

Jebb's translation conveys even more poignantly the lonely alienation Ajax feels, the certain knowledge of his death:

long time, long time and very
weary have ye known me tarrying at Troy; but no
more shall ye know me, — no more with the breath of
life:

Jebb, ll. 413-415

He is resolute, nothing can deflect him from the action he knows he must take in order that his integrity be maintained:

but let there be no weeping
This side of the threshold. Quick, out of my sight!
Dirges and canticles are no prescription

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For ills that need the knife. Il. 577–580

The chorus choose to interpret Ajax’s words: ‘now my edge is blunted/By a woman’s soft persuasion’ (652–653), as a decision to continue to live and to submit to the will of the Atreidae: ‘I have learned my lesson... not to be disrespectful/To the sons of Atreus’ (668–670). Ajax, however, remains true to his individual moral code, and it is this constancy which compels his death. He cannot live dishonoured, ‘beset by endless evil’, and prefers rather to die with honour: ‘Honour in life/Or honour in death’ (480–482). His resolution for death is obvious, but the obtuseness of the chorus characteristically results in their misinterpretation: ‘Now I could jump for joy’ (698). Ajax has told them unambiguously, five times, that they will not see him again and their misunderstanding is evidence of their impercipience, their preoccupation, as always, with their own safety.

Antigone is equally certain of the course of action she must follow and shows no hesitation, although she anticipates that her decision must precipitate her death. She accepts her death as a confirmation of her achievement, and faces it with courage and honour: ‘Why then delay?’ (500). Unmoved by the certainty of death, assailed by the threats of Creon, the pleas of Ismene, and the criticism and advice of the chorus, she stands firm. She is as unflinching in her acceptance of her inevitable death as Ajax is, even before she buries Polyneices, and she resolutely informs Ismene of her decision:

This is no idle threat;
The punishment for disobedience is death by stoning.
So now you know.
...
Go your own way; I will bury my brother;
And if I die for it, what happiness!

Il. 35–37, 66–67

Afterwards, proudly defiant, she affirms her purpose and action: ‘life was your choice, when mine was death’ (555). Her certain death holds no terror for her, for she has upheld that which is most important to her being: her firm commitment to principle and integrity of purpose, her obligation of devotion to her brother. Knox comments on the Sophoclean hero’s resolute
integrity in the face of certain death:

The hero chooses death. This is after all the logical end of his refusal to compromise ... in Sophoclean tragedy the hero faces an issue on which he cannot compromise and still respect himself. Surrender would be spiritual self-destruction, a betrayal of his physis; the hero is forced to choose between defiance and loss of identity. And in the Sophoclean hero the sense of identity, of independent, individual existence, is terribly strong. ... In the crisis of their lives, abandoned by friends, ringed by enemies, ... they have nothing to fall back on for support but this belief in themselves

*The Heroic Temper*, p. 36

Coriolanus anticipates his exile and death, but, like his Sophoclean counterparts, is not intimidated into conduct which does not accord with his moral principles. He is as outspoken as ever, indomitable in the face of ignominious misrepresentation, of almost certain death:

Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger
But with a grain a day, I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word

III.3.89-94

Like Ajax and Antigone, he is undaunted in the confrontation of his expected death. After his betrayal by the Roman community he acknowledges the certainty of man's insincerity and treachery, which must eventually cause his downfall: 'O world, thy slippery turns!' (IV.4.12–26). By implication, he thus anticipates his eventual betrayal in Antium.

His profound distress and isolation in Act V scene 3, are visually and verbally manifested. Withdrawn in his silence, he confronts Aufidius and the Volscians on the one hand, and Volumnia and the Roman delegation on the other, besieged all the while by Volumnia's uninterrupted barrage of words. Ultimately, holding Volumnia's hand, he is faced with the sure knowledge of his death. His anguish is not for the fact of his death, which he can accept with equanimity, 'but let it come' (189): it is a reawakening to the full realization of what he must lose. He has once before been dispossessed of his existence as an honoured Roman, of his family and friends, but now once

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again, all his suppressed emotions have been rekindled, and especially his intense love for Virgilia, and he must immediately lose her again, with everything that is most important to him. However, he will not forfeit his heroic integrity; the terms he makes, and his deference to Aufidius's judgement ensure that he preserves the principles which define him.

His distrust of words is reiterated in his observation to the women: 'you shall bear/A better witness back than words' (203–204). Words throughout the drama have not been good witness for Coriolanus: they have generated more peril for him than has physical assault. He is not persuaded by Volumnia's relentless words, but rather by the sight of those dearest to him, particularly his wife. His first words are a touching disclosure, a declaration of Virgilia's physical, emotional, and moral significance for him, and incidentally, her precedence for him, over Volumnia: 'my wife comes foremost' (22). She is his 'best', not of his flesh, yet utterly one with him: in love and in integrity they are exceptional, complete, united. It is, above all, the sight of her which reminds him of the desolation of his situation.

In Coriolanus's reply to Volumnia lies the certain knowledge of his impending death, yet he does not shirk from the decision of what must be done. His silence and his sparing eight lines of dialogue express his deep distress and certain knowledge of his fate, but he does not deviate from conduct commensurate with his sense of honour.

O mother, mother!
What have you done? . . .
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 prevail’d,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come.

182–189

A comparison with Plutarch's version of the scene emphasizes the tragic nobility and integrity of Shakespeare's hero. His first words illustrate this: Plutarch's hero 'could refraine no lenger, but went straight and lifte her up, crying out: Oh mother, what have you done to me?' Shakespeare's Coriolanus, less demonstrative but no lessanguished, stands silently, motionless, then, with the repetition of 'O mother, mother!' expresses much

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more simple, sincere emotion, and much less selfish concern. He does not immediately accuse Volumnia of his own personal ruin, 'to me', as he does in Plutarch's version.

In Plutarch, he tells her that she has won a happy victory for 'your countrie', whereas in Shakespeare it is 'to Rome'. The naming of the city conjures up a sense of past glory, and a recollection of the ingratitude shown to him, whereas in Plutarch he implicitly dissociates himself from the home which is now hers — or theirs — rather than his. The outcome in Plutarch will be 'mortall and unhappy for your sonne', while in Shakespeare Volumnia has prevailed 'most dangerously' with Coriolanus, 'if not most mortal to [him]', but he does not 'see' himself 'vanquished by [her] alone', as Plutarch's hero does. The total impression in Shakespeare's drama is more restrained, more heroic, less self-absorbed, and infinitely more heartfelt and touching. Shakespeare's hero consults Aufidius, then, most tellingly, cries out 'O mother! wife!' (199). There is no such indication of his pent-up emotion in Plutarch's version of the encounter, nor does Plutarch's hero show the heroic integrity and resolute acceptance of inevitable death that Shakespeare's does.38

He defers to Aufidius to frame the terms of the treaty, thereby publicly confirming that his conduct cannot be construed as traitorous towards the Volscians. His manner towards Aufidius is courteous, even deferential, giving the lie to Aufidius's prior assertion that Coriolanus 'bears himself more proudlier,/Even to my person, than I thought he would' (IV.7.8–9). Coriolanus addresses him: 'Now, good Aufidius ... And, sir, ... But, good sir,/What peace you'll make, advise me.' (V.3.191, 195, 196–197). The respect he accords the Volscian general is unstudied, as he asks Aufidius if he, in Coriolanus's place, 'would ... have heard/A mother less, or granted less' (192–193), and invites Aufidius to advise him on the peace terms. He shows fortitude in deciding not to return to Rome, but rather to honour his present obligations, and he appeals to Aufidius to support him in this decision: 'and pray you/Stand to me in this cause' (198–199).

Coriolanus's silence, and eventual response in this scene is no more an indication of a change of attitude, or a relinquishing of moral principles, than

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is Ajax's speech to Tecmessa and the chorus, although the chorus choose to interpret it as such. Death for the Sophoclean hero is always an easy alternative to the compromise of his integrity, the loss of his heroic essence. Coriolanus recognizes that his death is imminent and inescapable, but characteristically shows no hesitation in his committed resolution to conduct himself as he always has done, with honour:

While I remain above the ground you shall Hear from me still, and never of me aught But what is like me formerly.

IV.1.51–53

He has pledged to be of faithful service to his adopted country, and remains true to his word: 'T'll do his country service . . . [I] cannot live . . . unless/It be to do thee service . . . My affairs/Are servanted to others'. He dismisses any consideration of returning to Rome, which might represent a manner in which he could delay or even escape death: 'For my part,/I' ll not to Rome, I' ll back with you' (V.3.197–198). He knows that he must find a solution which will obviate the necessity of violence to Rome, and more specifically to his own family, which will keep trust with Aufidius by honouring his pledge of service to the Volscians, and which will not involve any adjustment of his personal code. He neither yields nor alters his principled attitude in his predicament.

Coriolanus devises a treaty which allows him to acknowledge his innate bond with Rome, and his moral responsibility to the Volscians, while adhering scrupulously to his essential truth. He remains with the Volscians, continuing in the performance of his duty and acquitting himself nobly. He is therefore justified in his subsequent assertion to the Volscian elders:

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.

(V.6.71–74)

Duty-bound, he is still their soldier, reporting to them his victories at the head of their troops. The treaty he devises with Rome does not imply a traitorous change of allegiance any more than did his move from Rome to

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Antium. The move was virtually forced on him: banished by the ungrateful Romans, dislocated and alone, there would have been limited options available, few chances of finding a world elsewhere. His bitter feelings of injury and antagonism towards Rome need not necessarily alter, for him to frame a treaty to spare Rome. He may disclaim love for Rome, yet he cannot deny natural familial bonds, his intrinsic roots.

Repudiating affection, he nevertheless feels for Rome the indestructible instinct for a birthplace, which can acknowledge, but not overlook or excuse improbity. He may despise Rome for what it has become, for what it has done to him, but he is most essentially, a Roman. He reasserts this fact exultantly when he proclaims his unique heroism in Antium:

If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli.
Alone I did it.

V.6.114–117

His elemental bond with Rome, however, does not prevent him from honouring his present overriding obligation to the Volscians with the loyalty his integrity demands.

In Antium, betrayed once again as he was in Rome, the lies, imputations and insults of Aufidius are more than Coriolanus can bear. He must set the records right before the true facts of his deeds are obliterated beneath a welter of misrepresentation. He dies as he lived, defending to the last his heroic integrity. His death is particularly ignominious, and Shakespeare makes the dramatic version even more brutal and shocking than it is in the source. In Plutarch’s version, Aufidius does not insult Coriolanus as he does in the tragedy, nor does he stand on Coriolanus’s body. In the Life, ‘they all fell upon him, and killed him in the market place, none of the people once offering to rescue him’, whereas in the drama he is verbally and physically abused by Aufidius. Professor Brockbank notes that in Antium ‘there is popular acclaim but no popular conspiracy in the play’, further evidence of Shakespeare’s alteration of his source material in order to affirm Coriolanus’s nobility: acclaim by his former enemies is a powerful indication of worth.

There may not be, as Professor Brockbank remarks, widespread popular

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conspiracy in Antium as there was in Rome, but there is a conspiracy, and, more significantly, there is fickle betrayal, which accentuates the unreliability he is once more surrounded and overwhelmed by. The 'great shouts of the people . . . [split] the air with noise' as they welcome him home (V.6.49SD, 52).

Yet the same people, swayed by Aufidius's artfulness, clamour for their former hero's blood: 'Tear him to pieces. Do it/presently' (121–122).

Coriolanus's murder is savage and despicable, but more than anything it is Aufidius's vile maltreatment of Coriolanus's body which shocks:

*Conspirators.* Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!

[The Conspirators draw and kill

Coriolanus, who falls. Aufidius stands on him.

131, SD

Coriolanus's disregard of his certain death, his vehement confirmation of his nobility in the face of overwhelming odds, and the additional outrages to his body in the drama effect a most tragic conclusion, which embodies issues and responses relevant to heroic Greek epic and tragedy. As such it presents 'the conflict of one hero with the society of his lesser peers, and with events that assail his conscious integrity, a statement of the tragic predicament'. It is an assertion of the inextinguishable heroic essence: excellence in comparison and destructive conflict with the common is an authentic testimony to that which is most tragic in human aspiration.

Once again, as in Rome, Coriolanus is cruelly betrayed by those he has served so scrupulously. Aufidius's self-interest, bitter resentment, and unprincipled opportunism are the same emotions which provoked the tribunes' treachery in Rome in Act III scene 3. Although Jacqueline Pearson considers that the end of *Coriolanus* is a 'deliberate anticlimax', she does indicate the manner in which 'Act V scene 6 . . . parodies Act III scene 3’. The later scene may indeed recall the earlier, as J. Pearson notes, but it is in no sense a travesty, nor is the conclusion anti-climactic; it is unambiguously tragic. The desolation and the sense of outrage is intensified as Coriolanus is subjected for the second time to an unmerited, invidious attack. The later scene contributes to a perception of the dangerous and tragic potential of the perfidy and callous inhumanity in human nature, 'the tragic insight that

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stamps the hero’s life with its hallmark of loneliness, suffering, death. Coriolanus’s situation in Antium has not substantially altered from that in Rome. Still the target of envy and spite, he is constantly compelled to defend himself verbally and physically against supposed allies and declared enemies.

Aufidius has vowed ‘I’ll work/Myself a former fortune’ (V.3.201–202), and in Act V scene 6 he accomplishes his desire to sully Coriolanus’s reputation, to regain his former prestige through his foe’s death. His determined intent is to ‘potch at him in some way,/Or wrath or craft may get him’ (I.10.15–16), and this should alert an audience to the probability of stratagem in his arraignment of Coriolanus. As the ‘drums and trumpets sound, with great shouts of the people’ to welcome Coriolanus back to Antium, Aufidius and the conspirators, like Sicinius and Brutus in Rome, are withdrawn from the excitement, resentful and scheming:

1 Con. Your native town you enter’d like a post,
And had no welcomes home; . . .

3 Con. Therefore, at your vantage,
Ere he express himself or move the people
With what he would say, let him feel your sword,
Which we will second.

V.6.50 SD– 60

They plan to forestall Coriolanus’s true version of his conduct with lies, to murder him, and so to ‘bury/His reasons with his body’. To this end Aufidius has already written a letter to the lords (62–63). Immediately after Coriolanus reports his triumphs and peace terms, Aufidius forestalls further impressive details with the insults he knows will enrage Coriolanus. He reminds the Volscians of the humiliation they suffered at Coriolanus’s hands in Corioli, accuses him of perfidious betrayal of Volscian interests, of shameful tears (118–119, 85–96). Aufidius’s distortion of the encounter with the Roman women is blatant: Coriolanus did not deny ‘counsel o’ th’ war’ (97), nor did he whine and roar, or break his oath (98, 95). Coriolanus reacts as Aufidius knew he would, and Aufidius’s ‘wrath or craft’ succeeds.

Coriolanus’s feeling of confident superiority to those who oppose him and his inflexible commitment to his principles are characteristics which recall the attribute of heroic megalopsychia which Aristotle described, and which

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included magnanimity, high-mindedness, noble courage and greatness of heart. Jacques Hurault quotes Aristotle: 'It is the dutie of Prowesse to be utterlie undismaied with the feare of death, to be constant in suffering adversitie . . . to chuse rather for to die with honour, than to live with dishonour . . .' He asserts the necessity for firmness of purpose, and comments on the distinction between prowess and magnanimity: 'Resolution is requisit in a man of prowesse and valor: for the very substance of prowess, is to be resolut . . . Prowesse respecteth chiefly the perils of warre, and magnanimitie respecteth honour'.

As noted above, Act V scene 6 may recall Act III scene 3, but more fundamentally the later scene recaptures the spirit and substance of Act I scene 4, in which Coriolanus is alone in Corioli: once again he is alone in a Volscian town, defiantly facing insuperable odds. In Antium, however, as he has anticipated, his death is inevitable, but his noble determination and courage remain undiminished.

4. Posthumous confirmation of areté

The concept that the hero may achieve an enduring existence through the memory of his nobility is one which evolved with the development of the heroic ethos. Sophocles made the assumption peculiarly his own. The Sophoclean protagonist's inalienable right to the ranks of the heroic is confirmed during his life by his adherence to his integrity against all opposition, and is vindicated after his death in the recognition of his nobility by his previous detractors and enemies. This is concomitant with the acknowledgement in the drama – either tacitly or overtly – that not only is he innocent of the faults of which he has been accused, but that these, in fact, more properly belong to his opponents and accusers.

Ajax is accused of pride, wilfulness, and defiance of the law by Menelaus, and by Agamemnon of disregarding lawful process:

MENELAUS: This was a man once proud
And full of fire . . .
We couldn't rule him while he lived . . .
When common men
Dare to defy the powers set over them,
They show their evil nature.

AGAMEMNON: at this rate
There'd be no setting up of law at all

Yet both Menelaus and Agamemnon are implicated in the wrongful withholding of Achilles's arms from Ajax, and they are guilty too, as Odysseus reminds them, of impious violation of the law in their denial of burial to Ajax. Teucer confirms that Menelaus cheated Ajax of the award of arms 'by rigging votes against him' (ll. 1138). Jebb's translation 'thou ... suborned votes, to rob him' (1135) stresses the sense of an unlawful filching. 'Hatred' and 'violent will', Odysseus tells Agamemnon and Menelaus, are not reasons to disregard justice, to do 'so rash and vile a thing' as refuse burial (1332–1335). He affirms Ajax's nobility, and the violation inherent in their intended conduct:

It is against all justice
For you to treat him with contempt. God's laws,
And not the man himself, you would annihilate.
Even if you hate him, it is against all justice
To lift your hand against a good man dead.

Odysseus freely admits his former hatred for Ajax, that Ajax was 'the bitterest enemy [he] had' (1338), yet after Ajax's death he acknowledges his erstwhile foe's undeniable nobility (1355). He declares that although 'there was a time when [he] too hated him ... [Ajax's] goodness/Outweighs his enmity by far' (1336, 1357), reaffirming that Ajax rightly deserved to be awarded the arms of Achilles:

I could not bring myself
To grudge him honour, or refuse to admit
He was the bravest man I ever saw,
The best of all that came to Troy,
Save only Achilles.

Odysseus's magnanimity, his determination to accord Ajax the burial worthy of his honour form the 'true climax of the drama' (Jebb, p. xlv). The status of Ajax as a Sophoclean hero is founded on more than his valour as a great warrior; it depends most essentially on the fact that he should be a worthy recipient of due funeral rites and public homage. The respect Odysseus pays to

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his former foe's nobility, and his determination to honour his body confirm Ajax's posthumous veneration as a hero:

I am ready to help you bury your dead
And share in every office that we mortals
Owe to the noblest of our kind.

ll. 1378–1380

Teucer answers Odysseus with equivalent courtesy and generosity:

Good friend,
I thank you for those words. You have proved me wrong
You were my brother's bitterest enemy,
Yet here you have stood alone in his defence

ll. 1381–1384

Both Teucer and Odysseus show up the meanness of Agamemnon and Menelaus. In their self-righteous, implacable hostility towards Ajax, the kings reveal their ignoble and envious natures and, more significantly, their moral incompetence to pass judgement on Ajax.

Charles Segal considers that 'Ajax . . . fulfills the characteristically Sophoclean pattern: by apparently losing everything that defines “himself”, the hero becomes “himself” in a profounder and truer way . . . . Thus Ajax, accused of treason, shamed before the whole army . . . can be proclaimed at the end as “noble in all respects, inferior to no one while he lived” (1415-1417). C.H. Whitman affirms this view, and acknowledges the dramatic validation of nobility by a former foe: ‘when a man's honor and value are defended by his worst enemy . . . the matter is closed, in drama at least. Ajax has won his case . . . . He has given his life reality again, by the self-conscious discipline of his departure from it'. Whitman notes, too, Goethe's observation that the last part of the *Ajax* serves as a 'natural commentary' on the *Antigone* as a whole:

The painstaking care with which Sophocles shows that Ajax deserved sepulchre makes it impossible to believe that Creon had any moral right to issue his decree against the burial of Polyneices . . . Odysseus showed no hesitation in taking Teucer's side against the Atreidae, the side of the individual against the vested authority of the king.

*Sophocles, pp. 86–87*

Chapter VII
In addition, Whitman observes that the 'sheer excellence' of the Sophoclean hero, confirmed after death, is the over-riding factor which 'compels his fall, for it makes him no longer appropriate to this life'. He cites as an example the Antigone, in which 'no crime can possibly be alleged as moral justification for her fall' (p. 96). With the acknowledgement of the hero's transcendent nobility, the drama simultaneously emphasizes the fallibility of the community-at-large which strives to limit the heroic capacity.

In the Antigone, Creon's censure by Haemon, who accuses him of injustice, pride and insensitivity, by Teiresias of self-will, and ultimately by the chorus of stubborn pride, identify in him the very faults of which Antigone has been accused throughout the drama. Haemon tells Creon that popular opinion is with Antigone, that she does not deserve death for an 'honourable action... Has she not rather earned a crown of gold?' (694–702). Jebb's translation is more explicit:

I can hear these murmurs in the dark,
these moanings of the city for this maiden; 'no woman',
they say, 'ever merited her doom less, - none ever was
to die so shamefully for deeds so glorious as hers;'
Jebb, ll. 691–695

Haemon criticizes Creon's harshness, his self-will, his inflexibility, and his lack of understanding:

Your frown is a sufficient silencer
... Surely, to think your own the only wisdom,
And yours the only word, the only will,
Betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart.
Watling, ll. 693, 709–711

Teiresias is equally outspoken in condemnation of Creon: 'the blight upon us is your doing... Only a fool is governed by self-will' (1016, 1029). Creon, however, is obdurate: nothing Teiresias can say will 'frighten [him] from [his] determination/Not to allow this burial' (1043–1044). His authoritarian intransigence causes him to adhere blindly to an inhuman decree and is ultimately responsible for the deaths of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice.

After their suicides, Creon is despairing and uncharacteristically conscience-stricken:

Chapter VII
O the curse of my stubborn will!
. . . There is no man can bear this guilt but I.
It is true, I killed him.
Lead me away, away. I live no longer.

ll. 1269, 1319–1321

The chorus offer no comfort and are now, finally, stern and decisive in their censure: 'The guilt, no other man's/But his alone . . . Alas, too late you have seen the truth' (1260, 1268). There is a striking dramatic and moral effect to this categorical reproof, after their ambivalence throughout and their usual deference to Creon's will. Their new resolve and stern condemnation of Creon's conduct admit no doubt as to his culpability; as Theban elders, - and given their former moral irresolution, and submission to Creon - it would have been more natural and expected for them to support their king.

There is no explicit affirmation in the drama of Antigone's worth, her enduring noble memory, as there is of Ajax's; the chorus however assure her, albeit before her death, of a 'name undying' (843). Her blamelessness and merit is implicitly confirmed by Creon's admission of guilt, his own acknowledgement of those faults which were previously ascribed to Antigone. Her only transgression is an act of piety: her moral integrity and her courage are exemplary. Haemon's love for Antigone, like Tecmessa's for Ajax, and Virgilia's for Coriolanus, and his integrity, like theirs, provide an impressive comment on the protagonist's essential worth. The quiet, indomitable loyalty of a worthy beloved is ultimately of greater significance in the understanding of the heroic identity, than is the smug declam by an inadequate community.

Coriolanus is afforded the conclusive posthumous vindication of his enduring noble reputation by former enemies:

1 Lord. Bear from hence his body, And mourn you for him. Let him be regarded As the most noble corse that ever herald Did follow to his urn.

. . .

Auf. Yet he shall have a noble memory V.6.142–145, 154

This is the definitive rebuttal of any censure which might have been levelled

Chapter VII
against Coriolanus, the verification of the folly and injustice of the two communities which spurned him. The unmerited nature of his murder is confirmed by the Volscian lords' attempts to stem Aufidius's ferocity, by their acknowledgement of Coriolanus's nobility, and by the rapid dissipation of Aufidius's savage rage. The lords are alarmed at the turn of events:

1 Lord. Peace, both, and hear me speak.

... 

2 Lord. Peace, ho! No outrage – peace!
The man is noble, and his fame folds in
This orb o' th' earth. His last offences to us
Shall have judicious hearing. Stand, Aufidius,
And trouble not the peace.  

111, 124–128

Aufidius, not Coriolanus, is rebuked by them, but he continues to bait Coriolanus, 'Insolent villain!' (130), until the conspirators bay for blood: 'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!' (131). Even after the murder, the lords call for a discontinuation of the shocking brutality: 'Hold, hold, hold, hold!' (132). The appeal for self-control in the same staccato vein as the frenzied call for bloodshed emphasizes the inexpressible horror of the act.

Aufidius attempts to make excuses for his words and actions, but the lords interrupt him, clearly revealing their regret, and their aversion to the savage atrocity:

Auf. My noble masters, hear me speak.
1 Lord. O Tullus!
2 Lord. Thou has done a deed whereat valour will weep.
3 Lord. Tread not upon him. Masters all, be quiet;
Put up up your swords.

132–135

Aufidius once again tries to defend and justify his conduct, but is virtually disregarded as the First Lord affirms Coriolanus's nobility, his prerogative to appropriate funeral rites. Ultimately, Aufidius admits his 'rage is gone', and he, too, is forced to grant Coriolanus's distinction, in a somewhat chastened offer to help bear the body, to grant Coriolanus the solemn, correct and honourable obsequies, the undying memory which his nobility warrants. Odysseus shows similar readiness to praise his former enemy and help bury

Chapter VII
him. His conduct, however, is more magnanimous than is Aufidius's: from the outset Odysseus openly opposes Menelaus and Agamemnon's intended outrage to Ajax's body, and acknowledges Ajax's nobility more spontaneously than Aufidius does Coriolanus's.

Aufidius's sudden change of emotion and opinion may appear to be expedient, given the lords' almost blanket condemnation of Coriolanus's murder. After his savage, uncontrolled verbal and physical assault on Coriolanus, and his continued unrepentant justification of such conduct, his volte-face is more unexpected than is Odysseus's. Aufidius schemes and aims for Coriolanus's downfall throughout the drama, and when he achieves his objective he asks the lords to rejoice with him. A comparison of his last two speeches, however, strikingly captures his change of heart. Not only the mood and tone, but the emotional spirit and cadence of the latter speech communicate Aufidius's genuine desire to honour his former enemy. The poetic quality of lines 147–154 is noticeably more simple and sincere than lines 136–142, as Aufidius's mood changes from rejoicing to sorrow, from bluster to generosity. Long, fragmented, tortuous sentences and declamatory style give way to shorter phraseology, succinct and unaffected sentences, and simple expressions of sorrow and respect:

My lords, when you shall know – as in this rage,
Provok'd by him, you cannot – the great danger
Which this man's life did owe you, you'll rejoice
That he is thus cut off. Please it your honours
To call me to your Senate, I'll deliver
Myself your loyal servant, or endure
Your heaviest censure.

... My rage is gone,
And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up.
Help, three o' th' chiefest soldiers; I'll be one.
Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully;
Trail your steel pikes ...
Yet he shall have a noble memory.
Assist.

136–142, 147–154

The rhythm of the latter speech and the monosyllabic words echo the slow, solemn, funereal drumbeats that Aufidius requests to mourn and honour his
former foe.

Coriolanus's downfall cannot be attributed to his pride or inflexibility, for the full scope of the tragedy derives from an understanding that in order to affirm his aretē, 'to sustain the moral and spiritual value of life itself', he forfeits his life rather than those principles which are his most essential part. The vindication of his nobility after death is the ultimate triumph of his heroic and tragic integrity. C.H. Whitman states: 'Tragic suffering is always, in Sophocles, a sacrifice by the hero to the being he conceives himself to be. Thereby he transcends his mere existence, and merges, as it were, with that larger, mythic self with which Greek heroic tradition provided him'.

Typically, in Sophoclean tragedy, the cardinal concern of the drama is the acknowledgement and appreciation of heroic merit. The vindication of the protagonist's enduring nobility by his friends, but most especially, and more decisively by his enemies after his death, is of fundamental significance. Coriolanus, at the end, shows characteristic concern that he should be commemorated truthfully, with due honour. He proudly reminds Aufidius and the Volscian lords that if they have written their annals truly, they should record, more than any other action of his, the fact that he, alone, overwhelmed their compatriots in Corioli, 'like an eagle in a dove-cote' (114–116). Although he has always held the opinions of others in contempt, and still does, at the moment of his inevitable death his overwhelming anxiety is that the lies of the unworthy should not be allowed to pollute his reputation after his death, when he will not be able to defend it.

The words of the Volscian lords, and more particularly those of Aufidius, his implacable adversary, in final acknowledgment of Coriolanus's nobility, constitute the ultimate justification of his unique confidence in his own integrity, and of the necessity of such integrity in society. Aufidius's command: 'Take him up' (148), relates literally and figuratively – physically and morally – to the exalting of Coriolanus. The Volscian leader's ultimate, conclusive words and act express an affirmation of Coriolanus's enduring prestige. Aufidius commands the Volscians to assist, to join him in the mourning and the honouring of a great and worthy hero, and together they co-operate in bearing aloft, in elevating Coriolanus.

Chapter VII
Coriolanus has not, finally, found his world elsewhere. The tragedy elicits a perception that for the heroic individual there can be no world elsewhere, that ordinary human nature is inevitably incompatible with the heroic – the absolute and the excellent – and is universally less than perfect. There is nowhere in the world of the drama in which Coriolanus can be himself without opposition. Tragically, nothing changes or improves; Volscian nature in Antium mirrors the fundamental inadequacies and errors of the Roman community.

The conclusion of the tragedy is desolate; there is no sense of hope, no acknowledgement of the possibility of a new, improved order to come, as there appears to be in all other major Shakespearean tragedies. In Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello, the new order promises to re-establish honest reliability through Fortinbras, Malcolm, Edgar and Cassio respectively. Only in Coriolanus is there no promise of a new, or better, order. Only in Coriolanus is the protagonist's the only death, unmerited and tragically pointless; nothing is achieved by his death.

In Sophoclean tragedy, and in Coriolanus, 'society no longer saves, as it did in Aeschylus. The individual must save himself, ... as the embodiment of those values that, oddly enough, preserve society'. Thus, while there is, in Coriolanus, no real sense in which a better society may be anticipated, yet in the acknowledgement of the hero's worth by his former detractors, there is an implicit recognition that he embodies those values which are desirable, and which could improve society. The lack of confidence, however, in any future improvement, the sense of human inadequacy and unreliability at the conclusion, is characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy. The Ajax ends with a sense of misgiving about man's ability to know or understand either present or future:

Many are the things that man
Seeing must understand.
Not seeing, how shall he know
What lies in the hand
Of time to come?  

ll. 1416–1420

The Antigone concludes with the somewhat resigned statement: 'We learn
when we are old' (1353).

Coriolanus's savage murder provokes a sense of profound sorrow and deprivation, a sense which is somewhat qualified by an intense admiration for the unconquerable heroic spirit he embodies. The tragedy presents the inadequacy of human nature, but recognizes man's potential for nobility. It is the nobility, and not the inadequacy, which is the distinguishing characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy: 'Excellence, not failure, is the source of tragedy'.\textsuperscript{51} The only moral certainty at the close of \textit{Coriolanus} is the heroic singularity of the protagonist. 'A hero is the thing he is best at being'.\textsuperscript{52}

'Greatness wins hate: Unenvied is unenviable'

'Such deeds our kings repay
With unforgiving spite'

'For mortals greatly to live is greatly to suffer'

'Who deserves greatness
Deserves your hate'

\textit{Clytemnestra.}

\textit{Chorus in the \textit{Ajax}.}

\textit{Chorus in the \textit{Antigone}.}

\textit{Coriolanus.}\textsuperscript{53}

Chapter VII
APPENDIX I
PRESENTATION AND EXAMINATION OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOPHOCLEAN TRAGEDY, 1502–1608

a Editions and translations of Sophoclean tragedy, the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, published during the sixteenth century
Note: Particulars written in Greek in these entries have been omitted.

i. Lists, transcripts, and bibliographies

[ARBER]
A TRANSCRIPT of the REGISTERS of the COMPANY OF STATIONERS of LONDON;

[1581] ULTIMO DIE JULIJ

JOHN WOLFE Licence unto him under the handes of the Bishop of LONDON and master Dewce, APHOCUS [or rather SOPHOCUS]
ANTIGONE, THOMA WATSONO interprete . . . . . vii°.

[BUNKER]

Tiletanum 1540.


[COCKX-INDESTEGE]


Appendix I
Tragoediae... carmine latino reddito...
Antverpiae... 1584...

[COLLINS]
Through the medium of the Latin language the Greek classics were available to [Shakespeare], and... through this medium he was more or less familiar with those Greek classics who would be likely to attract him – namely, the dramatists. Aeschylus had been literally translated into Latin by Joannes Sanrevius in 1555, in an edition printed at Bale (Aeschylus, Poetae vetustissimi, Graeco in Latinum sermonem utriusque lingua tironibus ad verbum conversae MDLV). Of Sophocles there were several translations. In 1543 appeared at Venice the first Latin translation, with brief marginal notes. In 1549 a literal version of the seven tragedies, containing brief introductions to each play, 'ad utilitatem juventutis quae studiosa est Graecae', and dedicated to our Edward VI, was published at Frankfort. This was succeeded by another translation of the seven tragedies, published at Paris in 1557. Next year the seven tragedies were translated into Latin verse... with marginal comments and elaborate stage directions... In 1597 another complete translation, this time a literal version by Vitus Winsemius, appeared at Paris... In addition... three charming little volumes, published in 1567, by Henry Stephens, *Select Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides*, namely... the *Ajax, Antigone*... as many of them give succinct sketches of the plots of the plays as well as elucidatory notes... it is... improbable, almost to the point of being incredible, that Shakespeare should not have had the curiosity to turn to them'.

[GANOCZY]
*Sophocles, graece, cum commentariis. vetustis et valde utilibus...*, Florence, 1522, Haeredes.

[GESNER]
There is a reference to seven tragedies of Sophocles, and to a Greek version of 1528.

[GRUYS]
The first Latin translations of Aeschylus (1555), 'appeared late compared with those of Sophocles... The first translation of a separate play of Sophocles appeared in 1530 (Ajax translated by J. Lonicer), and of the seven tragedies in 1543 (by J.B. Gabia).'

Appendix I
Selma Guttman, *The Foreign Sources of Shakespeare's Plays, Annotated Bibliography on this subject 1904–1940 and a list of translations available to Shakespeare* (New York, 1947), pp. 56, 82-83.

p. 56.

**LATIN:**


pp. 82-83: *Influence of Greek Literature on Shakespeare.*

**Sophocles –**

**LATIN AND GREEK-AND-LATIN:**

*Tragoediae omnes*, tr. J.B. Gabio, Venice, 1543.


*Tragoediae VII*, tr. Th. Naogeorgus, Basel [1558].

*Tragoediae ... quotquot extant*, tr. G. Ratallerus, Antwerp, 1570.


*Tragoediae selectae Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripidis* [tr. Erasmus, Buchanan, et al., no pl.], 1567.

*Ajax flagellifer*, tr. I. Lonicerus, Basel, 1533.


*Antigone*, tr. G. Hervetus in *Gentiani Herwet ... quaedam opuscula*, Lyons, 1541.


*Philoctetes in Lemno*, tr. Q.S.F. Christianus, Paris, 1586.

**FRENCH:**

*Antigone*, tr. J. Ant. de Baif, 1573.

*Electra*, tr. Lazare de Baif, Paris, 1537.

**ITALIAN:**

*Ajax flagellifero*, tr. Girolamo Giustiniano, Venice, 1603.

*L’Antigone*, tr. Luigi Alamanni [no pl.], 1533.

*Edipo il Re*, tr. G. Giustiniano, Venice, 1589.


*Edipo tiranno*, tr. M.P. Angelio Bargeo [Florence], 1589.

*Eletra*, tr. Erasmo di Valvasone, Venice, 1588.

**SPANISH:**

*La venganza de Agamenon* [Electra], tr. Fernan Perez de Oliva, Burgos, 1531.

**GERMAN:**


Appendix I

1564 *Ajax Flagellifer*, translated from Sophocles, a Latin tragedy performed at Cambridge.

1572 *Ajax and Ulysses*, a classical legend, performed by the Windsor Boys at Court.

1581 Thomas Watson's translation of the *Antigone* by Sophocles, a Latin tragedy performed at Cambridge, c. 1583 (?).

1605 *King Lear* by William Shakespeare performed 1605-1606 by the Magdalen men at Christchurch, Oxford, and the *Ajax Flagellifer* of Sophocles was performed by the same company at the same venue, 28 August, 1605.


**GREEK CLASSICS**

**Sophocles, B.C. 406**

*Gr. without the Scholia*, EDITIO PRINCEPS, Venet. apud Ald. 8vo. 1502.

Lord Lisburne purchased a beautiful copy of this Edition at Dr. Askew’s sale for 1 l. 11 s. 6 d.

**Sophocles, Gr. printed by Colinaeus, 12mo. Paris, 1528, 10s. 6d.**

_________ *Gr. 8vo. Haganoae, 1534, 7s. Basil, 8vo. 1556.***

_________ *Francof. 8vo. 1550,1567.***

_________ *Plantin, 12mo. beautiful and correct, Antw. 1579, 1593.***

**Sophocles, Gr. with the Scholia, 8vo. Florent. 1518.***

_________ *Gr. with the Scholia, 4to. Florent. apud Juntas, 1522. A fine copy of this Edition sold at Dr. Askew's sale for 2 l.***

_________ *Gr. with the Scholia, 4to. Francof. 1544, 10s. 6d. Another Edition was purchased at Francof. 4to. 1555, 10s. 6d.***

**Sophocles, Gr. with the Scholia, 4to. apud Turnebum, 1552. Dr. Hunter purchased a fine copy of this Edition of Sophocles at Dr. Askew's sale for 1 l. 14 s. Another Edition of Sophocles was printed by Turnebus, 4to. Paris, 1553, 10s. 6d.***

**Sophocles, Gr. with the Scholia, apud Hen. Stephanum, 4to. Paris, 1568, 1 l. 11s. 6d. A very accurate and magnificent Edition.***

**Sophocles, Gr. & Lat. without the Scholia, Heidelberg, 8vo, 1597.***

_________ *Ingolstad, 8vo. 1608.***

**Sophocles, Gr. & Lat. with the Scholia, Paul Stephan. 4to. Geneva, 1603, 10s. 6d. a good Edition.***

_________ *Ajax Lorarius, Gr. by Scalinger, 4to. Paris, apud Benenat, 1573, 5s.***

Scholia in Sophoclem, Gr. 4to. Romae, 1518, sold at Dr. Askew’s sale for 12s.

Appendix I
[MOEKLI]
p.68: 1567 Tragoediae selectae Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripidis . . .

[REYNOLDS]
p.140: 'The most remarkable years for the publication of major classical texts were 1502-4, which saw the 1st editions of Sophocles . . .'
p.156: contains a reference to Tumebus; 'His edition of Sophocles (1553) is also the edito princeps of the Scholia of Triclinius'.

[SANDYS]
Contains a reference to the 1502 version of Sophocles printed in Venice by Aldus Manutis, and to Thomas Watson, possibly of Oxford, who produced a Latin version of the Antigone (1581).

[YOUNG]
'Sophocles gr. cum commentario.'

Appendix I
ii. Library Catalogues
The catalogues have been listed alphabetically according to the library or other repository
[BODLEIAN]

*The FIRST PRINTED CATALOGUE of the*  
*BODLEIAN LIBRARY*  
1605  
a facsimile

Catalogus librorum Bibliothecae  
publicae quam vir ornatissimus Thomas  
Bodleius Eques Auratus in Academia  
Oxoniensi nuper instituit.  

OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS  
1986

p.388:


[BODLEIANÆ]

*Catalogus Bibliothecae Bodleianæ in Academia Oxoniensi, 4 Volumes*  

SOPHOCLES, Atheniensis, tragicus.  

Tragœdias septem, Gr.  

- exemplar aliud cum notis MSS.  
- et  
- exemplar aliud cum appendice rarissima.  
- exemplar aliud cum notis MSS.  
- et 4°. Par. 1552.  

- cum interpretationibus uetustis et ualde utilibus.  

- ed. alt.  
- ed. alt. [cum notis MSS.]  
- [cum paucis et brevibus, sed acutis Gul. Canteri notis criticis; acc. etiam sententiae aliquid insigniores Sophoclis breuiter collectæ, et Lat. versibus redditæ a Cantero.]  
- ed. alt.  
- recensuit et explanavit Ed. Wunderus; in Bibliotheca Græca curante Jacobs et Rost, q.v.

Appendix I

exempl. aliud cum notis MSS.


et [eadem edit. ac præcedens.] 8°. Par. 1558.


Ajax, Gr. Lat. carmine translatus per Jos. Scaligerum. 4°. Par. 1573.

Commentarii in septem tragedias Sophoclis; opus exactissimum rarissimumque in gymnasio Mediceo Caballini Montis a Leone X. constituo recognitum repurgatumque, &c. 4°. Rom. 1518.

[BRITISH LIBRARY]

Catalogue of Seventeenth Century Italian books in the British Library, 3 Volumes


[BRITISH MUSEUM]


Sophocles ... 1528. 8°.

__ __ [Ajax only.] Apud I. Bogardum: Parisii, 1545. 8°.


__ __ Apud M. Vascosanum: Lutetia, 1558. 8°.

__ __ Apud collegium Sorbonæ [G. Morrhy]: Parisii, 1530. 4°.


Appendix I
Sophocles... Ed. A. Manutius... 1502. 8°.
___ Apud Iunctam: Florentiae, 1547. 4°.


1439 ___ ___ Tragoediae septem. ff. 193... (Florentiae, per haered, Philippi Iuntiae, 6 Kal. Nou. 1522.) Red printing on a1... Tr. Cai.(bdg).


1443 ___ ___ Tragoediae septem. ff. 193... 4°. (Francofurti, ex off. Petri Brubachii, 1544)....

1444 ___ ___ ff. 192... 4°. Florentiae (apud Iunctam) 1547....

1445 ___ ___... Ed. A. Turnebus. pp. 400, 147... Each leaf of the first series to S is signed, except 0s,6... 4°. Parisiiis (Lutetiae Parisiorum) apud (excud.) Adrianum Turnebum... Ian. 1552....

1446 ___ ___... ff.193... 4°. Francofurti [P. Brubach?] 1555....

1447 ___ ___ Tragoediae septem. pp. 427... 8°. Francoforti, per (apud) Petrum Brubach., 1567....


1449 ___ ___ Tragoediae VII. Ed. G. Canter. pp.431... 16°. Antuerpiae, ex off. (excud.) Christophori Plantini, 1579 (1580)....


1451 ___ ___ Gk & Lat. Tragoediae VII. Ex aduerso respondet Latina interpretatio. Tr. V. VVinsemin. Notes by G. Canter. pp. 16, 701... 8°. Heidelbergae, apud Hieronymum Commelinum, 1597....

Appendix I
Sophocles. Sophocles Tragoediae septem, cum commentariis. [Edidit Aldus Ro. – Editio princeps.] 8°. [Venetiis, in Aldi Romani Academia, 1502].

Sophocles Tragoediae septem. Cum interpretationibus uetustis. [Edidit Antonio Francivs]. 4° [Florentiæ, per Hæredes Philippi Iuntæ, 1522].

Sophocles Tragoediae septem. [Graece.] 8° [1528]. [2 copies.]


Sophocles Tragoediae VII. In quibus praeter multa menda sublata, carminum omnium ratio hactenus obscurior, nunc apertior proditur: opera Gylielmi Canteri. [Graece.] 12° Antverpiae, ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1579.

Sophocles Tragoediae VII. In quibus praeter multa menda sublata, carminum omnium ratio hactenus obscurior, nunc apertior proditur: operâ Gylielmi Canteri. [Graece.] 12° Lvgduni Batavorvm, ex officina Plantiniana, 1593.


Appendix I
Commentarii in septem Tragedias Sophoclis . . . Opus exactissimum . . . in Gymnasio Mediceo Caballini Montis . . . recognitum . . . [Graece. – Editio princeps.] 4° [Romæ, 1518].

[JOHN RYLANDS]

Catalogue of the Printed Books and Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library Manchester,

3 Volumes (Manchester, 1899), 3, pp. 1707–1709.

SOPHOCLES


" Portus, F. In omnes Sophoclis tragoedias. Morges, 1584.

Tragoediae vii. cum commentariis. [Greek. Edited by A.P. MANUTIUS.]

8vo. Aldus. Venice, 1502

Printed on vellum.

Another edition. Cum interpretationibus vetustis et valde utilibus. [Edited by A. FRANCINO.]

4to. Junta. Florence, 1522

Another edition.

8vo. S. des Colines. Paris, 1528

SOPHOCLES. Tragoediae vii. cum commentariis interpretationum argumenti Thebaidos Fabularum Sophoclis, authore J. CAMERARIO Qu. jam recens natis atque aeditis.

8vo. Hagenau, 1534.

Another edition. Cum interpretationibus vetustis.

4to. Peter Brubach. Frankfort, 1544

Red morocco, with the arms of Michael Wodhull.

Another edition.

4to. Junta. Florence, 1547

Another edition. Demetrii Triclinii de metrica et schematibus, cum scholiis. [Edited by A. TURNEBUS.]

2 vols, in 1. 4to. A. Turnèbe. Paris, 1552-53

Another edition.

8vo. P. Brubach. Frankfort, 1567


4to. H. Stephanus. [Paris] 1568

Another edition. Opera GUIL. CANTERI.

16mo. C. Plantin. Antwerp, 1579

Another edition. Opera G. CANTERI. 16mo. F. Raphelengius. Leyden, 1593


4to. P. Stephanus. [Genæa] 1603

Interpretatio tragoediarum, edita a VITO WINSHEMIO. [Latin only.]

8vo. P. Brubachius. Frankfort, 1549


Appendix I
iii. The Folger Shakespeare Library

THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY, Washington

Detailed description of the only edition of Sophocles from the relevant time period, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Acquired in 1943, from the Philadelphia dealer Rosenbach, from his catalogue 'English plays to 1700', item no. 505. There are no other marks of ownership. [With thanks to Dr. Nadia H. Krivatsky].

L1 Antigone

31 July 1581


(A) SOPHOCLIS I ANTIGONE. I Interprete Thoma V Watsono J.V. I \textit{fudiofo}. I

1581 Huic adduntur pompæ quædam, ex singulis Tragoediaë actis deriuatae; & post eas, totidem themata \textit{jen}-\textit{tentijs refertisima}; eodem THOMA I WATSONO Authore. I \[device 216, with \textquotedblleft VBIQUE printed up on the left and FLORESCIT. down on the right\] LONDINI I Excudebat Johannes Woljius, I 1581.

HT] SOPHOCLIS ANTIGONE THO- I MA WATSONO INTERPRETE.

RT] SOPHOCLIS I ANTIGONE. \[SOPHOCLIS. 3 CF, 2 DG, 4 E; SOPHOCUS. on C4\'; SOPHOCLIS: 1 DF; ANTIGONE \textit{no point} 3 D, 2 F]

Explicit] FINIS ANTIGONES.

Collation: 4°, A-H^ I^ \[A I fully signed: leaving B2-3 unsigned and misprinting A3 as A5\], 34 leaves, paged (A3) 5-68 \[leaving 8-16 unnumbered\].

Title, A2 \[A1 and A2 blank\]. 'Epistola Dedicatoria' in verse headed 'Nobilissimo proceri, claroque multis nominibus, Philippo Howardo Comiti Arundeliae, Thomas Watsonus solidam felicitatem precatur' \[96 ll.\] and signed 'Thomas Watsonus Londinensis', A3 \[misprinted A5\]. Commendatory verses, A4 \[Ex epistola quadam ad Tho: Watsonum data, dum esset Lutetiae, vt varia sua poemata in lucem exponeret' 28 ll. signed 'Stephanus Broelmannus Agrippinensis, Poeta'; 13 II. Greek ... 10 II. signed 'Philippus Harrisonus, Iuris Vtriusque Licentiatus', 10 II. 'Franciscus Yomans', 6 II. 'Christoforus Atkinsonus Medicus', 16 II. 'C. Downhalus', 18 II. 'Guil. Camden']. 'Vita Sophoclis ex Suida', B2\textsuperscript{v}.

'Argumentum Antigones, per Tho. Watsonum' in prose, B3. Another 'Argumentum Fabulae' in verse 'Thoma Watsono Authore', B3\textsuperscript{v}. Note on the scene and 'Personæ' on B4\textsuperscript{v}. Text with HT,

C1. 'Pompa Antigonæ', G3\textsuperscript{v}. 'Hic sequuntur [sic] quædam themata, ex ipsis huius Tragediæ'

Appendix I

Five acts in verse, with arguments in prose and verse. 'Scena huius fabulae constituitur Thebis Boeoticis.'

Notes – 1. Speakers' names are in the left margin without indentation of the text, and there are marginal notes.
2. The 'Pompa Antigonæa' consists of a procession of allegorical characters each with an appropriate speech, the whole introduced and concluded by speeches of 'Poeta'.

Catalogue card from The Folger Shakespeare Library:

STC Sophocles
A-H^4, I^2. (A1, blank except for signature, and A4 lacking. An extra leaf, blank, is bound after B4.) 4to.
Huntington Library duplicate copy.

9/29/43

Appendix I
b Editions and translations of Sophoclean tragedy, the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, published between 1502 and 1608, as listed in the catalogues of the British Library

*Sophocles*, pp. 42–73. Relevant collections, single or multiple plays, selections, scholia, dictionaries, and indexes have been noted with the language of translation.

**SOPHOCLES**

**SEVEN TRAGEDIES**

**Greek**

___ Sophoclis Tragædiæ septem cum commentariis. [Edited by A.P. Manutius.] ED. PR.

In Aldi Romani Academia, Venetiis, mense Augusto, 1502. 8°.

*Without pagination. No commentaries were printed with this edition.*

___ Sophoclis Tragoediae Septem. Cum interpretationibus vetustis, etc. [Edited by A. Francinus.] MS. NOTES.

Per Hæredes Philippi Juntæ: Florentiæ, 1522. 4°.

___ Sophoclis tragoediae septem. [Paris,] 1528. 8°.

*Without pagination.*

___ Sophoclis Tragoediae septem cum commentariis interpretationum argumenti Thebaidos Fabularum Sophoclis, authore Ioachimo Camerario Qu. jam recens natis atqz aeditis. 2 pt.

COPIOUS MS. NOTES.

Ex Officina Seceriana: Haganoæ, 1534. 8°.

___ Sophoclis Tragoediae septem cum interpretationibus vetustis, etc. FEW MS. NOTES. ff.193

Ex officina. P. Brubachii, Francoforti, 1544. 4°.

*A reprint of the Giunta edition of 1522.*

___ Apud J. Bogardum: Parisiis, 1545 8°.

*Imperfect; containing only the first play, the Ajax on 32 leaves.*

___ Sophoclis Tragoediae septem cum interpretationibus vetustis, etc. [With a preface by B. di Giunta.] ff. 192. Apud Junctam, Florentiæ, 1547. 4°.

___ Petrus Brubachius: Francoforti, 1550. 8°

*The date on the titlepage is 1549.*


*The colophon to pt. 1 bears the date 1552.*

___ Sophoclis Tragoediae septem cum interpretationibus vetustis, etc. [With the preface of B. di Giunta.] ff. 193

Francoforti, 1555. 4°.

*Another edition of that printed at Florence in 1547. Titlepage slightly mutilated.*


Appendix I

... Sophoclis Tragœdiae vii. In quibus praeter multa menda sublata, carminum omnium ratio hactenus obscuorior, nunc apertior proditur: opera G. Canteri. (Sophoclis sententiae aliquot insigniores.)

Ex officina C. Plantini: Antverpiae, 1579. 16°

The colophon is dated 1580.

... Sophoclis Tragœdiae vii. In quibus praeter multa menda sublata, carminum omnium ratio hactenus obscuorior, nunc apertior proditur: opera G. Canteri. (Sophoclis sententiae aliquot ...

. latinis versibus redditæ a G. Cantero.)

Apud F. Raphelengium: Lugduni Batavorum, 1593. 16°.

Greek and Latin


... Sophoclis Tragœdiae septem. Una cum omnibus Graecis scholiis et Latina Viti Winsemij ad verbum interpretatione. Quibus accessorunt J. Camerarii, necnon H. Stephani annotationes. 3 pt. FEW MS. NOTES.

P. Stephanus: [Geneva,] 1603. 4°.

Tragœdiae Sophoclis quotquot extant, Graeco-latine. Ex Typographeo A. Sartorii

Ingolstadii, 1608. 8°.

Latin

... Sophoclis Tragœdiae omnes, nunc primum Latinæ ad verbum factæ, ac scholiis quibusdam illustratae; J. B. Gabia Veronensi interprete. Apud Io. Baptistam a Burgofrancho:

Venetis, 1543. 8°.

Interpretatio tragoediarum Sophoclis ad utilitatem juventutis, quae studiosa est Graecae linguæ, edita a V. Winshemio. P. Brubachius: Francoforti, 1549. 8°.

Sophoclis tragicorum veterum facile principis tragœdiae quotquot extant septem ... Nunc primum Latinæ factæ, et in luce emissæ per I. Lalamantium, etc.

Apud M. Vascosanum: Lutetiae, 1557. 8°.

Sophoclis tragœdiae septem, Latino carmine redditæ et annotationibus illustratae per T. Naogeorgum ... Collectæ sunt etiam ... dictaque proverbialia ex hisce tragœdiis, per eundem, adque finem operis adjectæ græce et latine.


Tragœdiae Sophoclis quotquot extant carmine Latino redditæ G. Ratallero ... interprete. Ex officina G. Silvii: Antverpiae, 1570. 8°.

Imperfect; wanting pp. 160–176.

[Another edition. With an epistle to the reader by A. Mylius.] Apud J. Bellerum:

Antverpiae, 1584. 8°.

Appendix I
TWO OR MORE WORKS

Greek and Latin

Ajax flagellifer. - Antigone. - Electra. 1567/16° [no place]

Latin

Sopochlis Aiax Flagellifer, Thoma Naogeorgo . . . interpreter. Sopochlis Philoctetes, etc.
[Translated into verse by T. Kirchmeyer.] . . [1552?] 8°.


SINGLE WORKS

Ajax

Greek


Without pagination.

Greek and Latin


Ex officina Hervagiana: Basileæ, 1533. 4°.

[Another copy]

. . . Sopochlis Aiax Lorarius, carmine translatus per J. Scaligerum, Julii filium.

Apud J. Benenatum: Parisiis, 1573. 4°

Latin

Ajax Lorarius, stylo tragico . . . a J. Scaligero . . . translatus . . . 1574. 8°.

Sopochlis Aiax lorarius, stylo tragico à Josepho Scaligero . . . translatus: & in Theatro Argentinensi publice exhibitus anno M. D. LXXXVII . . . Cum aliis quibusdam omatus causa interpositis, ad calcem tragœdiae adiectis. Excedebat Antonius Bertrainus:

Argentorati, 1587. 8°.

. . . pt. 3. 1591 8°.

. . . pt. 3. 1600 8°.

German


Italian


Appendix I
ANTIGONE

Latin

___ Sophoclis Antigone: tragoedia a G. Herveto . . . traducta e Graeco in Latinum. G. Hervetii
 . . . quaedam Opuscula, etc, pt.2 1541. 8°. [Leyden]

___ Sophoclis Antigone. [Translated into Latin verse.] Interprete T. Watsono . . . Huic adduntur
pompæ quaedam, ex singulis tragediæ actis deriutæ; et post eas, totidem themata
sententiis refertissima; eodem T Watson authora. J. Wolfius: Londini, 1581. 4°.

French

___ Antigone, tragédie di Sophocle [translated into French verse] par J. A. de Baif. Euvres, etc.
vol. 3 [Paris] 1573. 8°.

SELECTIONS

Greek and Latin

___ Hoc libello haec continentur. Sophoclis . . . vita non prius in lucem edita . . . Ejusdem Poetæ
sententiae pulcherrinæ interprete B. Marliano. Per A. Bladum Asulanum: Romæ, 1545.
8°. Without pagination; 24 printed leaves, including that containing the colophon only.

SCHOLIA

___ Commentarii in septem tragedias Sophoclis quæ ex aliis eius compluribus injuria tempo
amissis, soleæ superfuerunt. Opus exactissimù . . . in Gymnasio Mediceo Casallini mótis a
Leone Decimo Pont. Max. constituto, recognitu, etc. Gr. ED. PR. . . . 1518. 4°.

Without pagination.

DICTIONARIES AND INDEXES

___ H. Stephani annotationes in Sophoclem, etc. 1568. 8°.
c Amalgamated chronological table of editions and translations

Amalgamated chronological table of all editions and translations included in Appendix I, a and b of the seven extant Sophoclean tragedies, of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* individually, or with one or two other Sophoclean plays.

Unless confirmed in the references used, the city of publication (column three), and/or the language of translation (column four), have been omitted. In some cases a supposition has been made – indicated by [?] – based on concurring data of editor, publisher and/or language of translation.

If more than one source of reference has been used to confirm a particular edition, the British Library Catalogue (BLC) has been cited.

**Source of reference** (column five), is to the authority cited in Appendix I, a or b.

**Abbreviations**:  
- **BLC**: British Library Catalogue  
- **BM STC(F)**: British Museum Short-title Catalogue of *Books printed in France . . . 1470–1600*

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Appendix I
1543 All Sophoclean tragedies Venice Latin BLC
1544 Seven tragedies Frankfurt Greek BLC
1545 Seven tragedies [?Paris] Latin Bunker
1545 Ajax Paris Bunker
1545 Selections Rome Greek-and-Latin BLC
1545 Seven tragedies Paris Greek BLC
1547 ______ Frankfurt BLC
1547 ______ Florence Greek BLC
1549 Sophoclean tragedies Frankfurt Latin BLC
1550 Seven tragedies Frankfurt Greek BLC
1552 ______ Paris Greek Bodleian
[1552?] Ajax Flagellifer, Philoctetes [no place] Latin BLC
1552–53 Seven tragedies Paris Greek BLC
1555 ______ Frankfurt Greek BLC
1555 Six tragedies Basel Latin Guttman
1555 Seven tragedies Frankfurt Greek BLC
1556 Sophocles Basileæ Greek Harwood
1556 Ajax, Electra [no place] Latin BLC
1557 Seven tragedies Lutetiæ [Paris] Latin BLC
1558 ______ Geneva Greek-and-Latin Moekli
1558 ______ Paris Latin Bodleian
1558 ______ Lutetiiæ [Paris] British Museum
1558 ______ Basileæ Latin BLC
1567 Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Selections Geneva Moekli
1567 Ajax Flagellifer, Antigone, Electra [no place] Greek-and-Latin BLC
1567 Seven tragedies Frankfurt Greek Bodleian
1568 Seven tragedies: annotations Geneva Greek-and-Latin BLC
1568 Sophocles: [no place: annotations ?Geneva] BLC
1568 Seven tragedies Paris Greek-and-Latin BLC
1568 Sophocles: tragedies Paris Greek Bodleian

Appendix I
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Appendix I
d Relevant evaluations derived from data presented

i Analysis of the numbers and frequency of editions of designated works of Sophocles in each decade, 1502–1608.
Editions of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* published separately from the complete extant works have been noted.
The edition of 1579–1580 from Antwerp has been included in the decade 1580–1589, as 1580 is a probable publication date.

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ii Chronological list of the editions of individual Sophoclean tragedies other than the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* which were published in the period under review.

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Appendix I
## Analysis of the numbers and frequency of different translations published

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<td>1540–1547</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1550–1556</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1567–1568</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1579–1580</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1593</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greek-and-Latin</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1533</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1541–1545</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1558</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1567–1568</td>
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<td><strong>Latin</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>1530</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1541–1549</td>
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<td>1552[?]–1558</td>
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<td>1570–1576</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1581–1587</td>
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<td>1600</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Appendix I
Analysis of the numbers and frequency of plays published in different cities and countries.

Countries are listed chronologically, according to the date of the first edition published.

Publications noted as [no place] in the references have here been attributed to a particular city on the evidence of concurring data from two sources, and have been marked [?].

<table>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>1502, 1543, 1603</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florence</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>1518, 1518, 1545</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>1522, 1544, 1547, 1549, 1550, 1555, 1555, 1567</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td>1574, 1597</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hagen</td>
<td>1534</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingolstadt</td>
<td>1608</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>1528, 1530, 1530, 1540, 1545, 1545, 1545[?], 1552, 1552–3, 1557, 1558, 1558, 1568, 1568, 1573, 1573, 1574[?], 1585, 1597, 1603</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lyons</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strasbourg</td>
<td>1587, 1591, 1600, 1608</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basel</td>
<td>1533, 1555, 1556, 1558</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Leyden</td>
<td>1541, 1593</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Antwerp</td>
<td>1570, 1576, 1579–1580, 1584, 1593</td>
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<td>England</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1518, 1528, 1530, 1533, 1552?, 1556, 1557</td>
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Appendix I
Analysis of the language of the translations published in various cities and countries.

Countries are noted in the chronological order used in Div. Variations in the total numbers of editions noted in Div, and the totals below are due to the fact that some editions appeared in the authorities quoted without the language of translation specified.

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<th>Vernacular</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>Antwerp</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appendix I
APPENDIX II
AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF 'ROME' AND 'ROMAN/S' AND OF RELEVANT SYNONYMS AND PRONOUNS IN CORIOLANUS

a An analysis of the use of 'Rome' and 'Roman/s' in the dialogue and stage directions
All counts are original, unless otherwise specified. The Arden Shakespeare, Coriolanus, edited by P. Brockbank, (1980), was used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Total lines</th>
<th>Rome</th>
<th>Roman/s</th>
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<td>I.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Rome</td>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>I.4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>I.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>I.6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Coriolis gates</td>
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<td>Rome</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>II.3</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>III.1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>III.2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>III.3</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>IV.1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>IV.2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between Rome and Antium</td>
<td>IV.3</td>
<td>48</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Antium</td>
<td>IV.4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antium</td>
<td>IV.7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>V.1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volscian camp</td>
<td>V.2</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volscian camp</td>
<td>V.3</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>V.4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>V.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

118   91   22   1   4

Appendix II
Of the total 118 times that Rome and Roman/s are used in the text, 113 are actually in the dialogue. The count does not include the designation of the Roman characters in I.5.1-3, and in IV.3. John Bartlett, *Concordance to Shakespeare* (London, 1937), lists a total of 109, of which 87 are Rome and 21 are Roman/s. Marvin Spevack, *Complete and Systematic Concordance* (Hildesheim, 1968-1980), lists a total of 115, of which 113 are in Volume 3, and 2 (excluding the Roman characters in I.5 and IV.3), are in Volume 7.

b An approximate count of the use of 'Rome' and 'Roman/s', of the relative possessive pronouns, and of the characters or groups of citizens using the terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section of society</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Impersonal</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricians</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5 (our)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see IV.2.17-14 and V.3.133-170</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plebeians</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including messengers and spies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volscians</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coriolanus</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


C An approximate count and analysis of the use of synonyms for Rome, and of the relative possessive pronouns used.

Plebelans: *country* – 7, *city* – 2, *territories* – 1
Use with possessive pronouns relative to Coriolanus – 7, to themselves, *our* – 1.

Patricians: *state* – 5, *city* – 8, *country* – 14, *home, streets* – 9, *gates* – 1
Relative to Coriolanus – 9, *our* – 8

Relative to Coriolanus – 4, *our* – 1

*streets, gates, temples* – 3
Relative to himself – *my* – 6; *our* – 3, *your* – 1

Aufidius: *country* – 3, all relative to Coriolanus

Approximate total of synonyms used is 85: 43 possessive pronouns are used, of which 29, about 70%, are relative to Coriolanus.
d An approximate comparison of the use of 'Rome' or synonyms by different characters or groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Rome</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricians</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plebeians</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volscians</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coriolanus</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX III

The use of 'home' and 'house' in five of Shakespeare's tragedies, compared with the use of the same words in *Coriolanus*. All counts are from Bartlett and Spevack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tragedy</th>
<th>'Home' Spevack</th>
<th>'Home' Bartlett</th>
<th>'House' Spevack</th>
<th>'House' Bartlett</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Lear</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macbeth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antony and Cleopatra</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coriolanus</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix III
NOTES TO CHAPTER I

NOTE: As far as possible, full names of authors have been specified when first referred to in the notes, and in the bibliography. Thereafter, in subsequent references in the notes, initials have been used, and the title of the book only when more than one book by that author has been quoted. In both the notes and the bibliography, if initials only have been recorded, the full names have not been available either in the work quoted, or in the British Museum catalogues.


4. Maurice Charney presents a representative review of modern critical speculation and controversy about the play and the hero. This varies from the familiar interpretations of Coriolanus's imagined defects or faults, to the more psycho-analytical or political observations. The wide range of criticism is indicative of the puzzling nature of both play and protagonist, even though it is now widely acknowledged that *Coriolanus* is 'one of Shakespeare's most original accomplishments . . . [and that] commentary has been intent on discovering what makes it unique as a tragedy'.


Notes to Chapter 1


11. Margot Heinemann, pp. 204, 229, note 35, 221. The issues raised by Palmer, Brecht, Gray, Heinemann *et al.*, are significant for an inclusive apprehension of *Coriolanus*, but are not particularly relevant to the central line of the thesis.


13. The fundamental nature of Coriolanus’s singularity and its peculiar relevance to the Sophoclean hero will be examined in Chapters III and IV.


17. See note 4, above.


20. A detailed examination of the manner in which *Coriolanus* deviates in this respect from other tragedies in the Shakespearean canon, an analysis of the exceptional concentration on the hero in the play, and the way in which this reflects Sophoclean drama, is presented in Chapter III, pp.76-82.

21. Chapter II and Appendix I present documentation of the translation and publication of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* of Sophocles in Western Europe in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

22. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes, compared together by that grave learned Philosopher and Historiographer, Plutarke of Chæronea: Translated out of Greeke into French by James Amyot . . . and*

Notes to Chapter 1
out of French into English, by Thomas North (London, 1579). The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus, Sig. V[v]-Yiiijf (pp.237-259);
________________________, (London, 1595), Sig. Viiijf-Yiiijf (pp.235-257).


See also: David C. Green, 'Plutarch Revisited. 'A Study of Shakespeare's last Roman tragedies and their source', Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Jacobean Drama Studies, 78 (1979).

See also: Herman Heuer, 'From Plutarch to Shakespeare: A Study of Coriolanus,' Shakespeare Survey, 10 (1957), pp. 50-59.

See also: Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, 8 volumes, V (1964), The Roman Plays.


25. The discord, the lack of communication and comprehension between the tragic hero and his community are presented in Chapter V.


NOTE: All quotation line references to the tragedies of Sophocles are necessarily inexact as they are from translated texts in which line numbers do not match those of the original. Unless otherwise specified, quotations are from the Watling translations. The texts used correspond most closely to Jebb's parallel Greek-English texts, with which they have been compared in order to establish the most precise line references and translations.


Coriolanus, III.2.1-6.

NOTE: All quotations from Shakespeare's plays, unless otherwise specified, are from: William Shakespeare, The Complete Works, edited by Peter Alexander (Ninth Printing [no date]).
27. *Antony and Cleopatra*, III.13.92-93
*Hamlet*, II.2.565-578

*Othello*, III.3.201
*King Lear*, I.1.293, II.3.37-38.

29. Coriolanus's distinctness within the Shakespearean tragic canon and his similarity to the Sophoclean hero with respect to integrity and self-knowledge, are presented in Chapter IV, pp.95-104.


31. The inability of the non-heroic to comprehend the heroic in this context, is presented in Chapter VI, pp.215-220.

32. The irrelevance of the concept of *hamartia* with respect to the Sophoclean hero is developed in Chapter IV, pp. 106-110.

33. *Ajax*, II. 422-424
*Antigone*, II. 100, 449-469.


38. Excesses of the heroic temperament are investigated in Chapter IV. The lack of moral principle in the community at large is examined in Chapter VI.

39. Chapter V indicates the significance of non-verbal communication in the play; of stage directions, stage pictures, gestures and silence in the communication of Coriolanus's isolation.

40. The lack of agreement between the heroic and the ordinary, and the consequent isolation of the protagonist within the community, are topics which are fully developed in Chapters V, VI and VII.


a count of 88 for Coriolanus: 
96 is an original count.

43. Chapter VI and Appendices II and III present a detailed examination and analysis of the concept of Rome, the ambiguous relationship the citizens have with their city, and of the emotive intentions of the various synonyms, adjectives, and possessive pronouns which are used relative to Rome throughout the drama.

44. The Sophoclean attribute of heroic and tragic preservation of integrity in the face of inevitable death, and its relevance to Coriolanus, is examined in Chapter VII, pp. 270-279.

45. Chapter VI, pp. 213-230 examines the unreliability of public opinion and report in Sophoclean tragedy, and the manner in which this is relevant to Coriolanus.

46. The posthumous confirmation of the enduring nobility of the Sophoclean tragic hero with reference to Coriolanus's 'noble memory' is presented in Chapter VII, pp. 279-288.
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2. Dean Putnam Lockwood and Roland Herbert Bainton, 'Classical and Biblical Scholarship in the age of the Renaissance and Reformation', *Church History*, 10 (1941), 125-143 (p.126).
   __________, *Antigone*, adapted by Thierry Maulnier (Paris, 1944).

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   See also: Finley Melville Kendall Foster, *English translations from the Greek, a biographical survey* (New York, 1918), p.108.
   See also: John Tresidder Sheppard, 'Aeschylus and Sophocles, their works and influence', in *Our Debt to Greece and Rome*, 27, edited by George Depue Hadzsits and David Moore Robinson (Massachusetts, 1922), pp.114-115, 128.
   See also: *The Macmillan Dictionary of Italian Literature*, edited by Peter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (London, 1979), which dates Alamanni's *Antigone* as 1556.
26. In this respect, it is worthy of note that for the purposes of this study accredited English translations of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* have been used, various versions have been compared, most especially with the definitive translations by Jebb, and significant variations have been noted. See Chapter V, p. 154 and Note 25.
   ________, *William Shakspere’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*.
Contrariety (Berkeley, 1979), p.17.


30. T.J.B. Spencer, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans, p.37.

31. Muriel Saint Clare Byrne, 'Classical Coriolanus', The National Review, xcvi (London, January to June, 1931), 426-430 (pp.430, 428, 427).


40. Glynne Wickham, p.71.

41. Tragoediae vii cum commentariis, edited by A.P. Manutius (Venice, 1502). See Appendix I.

42. Orsatto Giustiniani, Edippo Tiranno, a cura di Flavia Fiorese (Vicenza, 1984), pp.119-124.

See also: B. Weinberg, 2, pp.942, 944.

43. R. L. Colie, p.3.

44. Sears Jayne, p.3.


48. Sears Jayne, p.53.

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51. Ioachimus Camerarius, *Commentatio Explicationum Tragoediarum Sophoclis* (Basileae, 1556).

52. Willichus (Iodoco Vuillichio), *Commentaria in Artem Poeticam Horatii*, ([no place], 1539), Sig. F8r (p.95).


54. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury Being the Second part of Wits Commonwealth* (London, 1598), Sig. Nn8r-Oo3r, Oo5r (pp.280a-283a, 285a).


   See also: Lewis William Brüggermann, *A view of the English editions, translations and illustrations of the ancient Greek and Latin authors*, 2 volumes, original publication Stettin, 1797,(New York, 197?) [sic], p.101.


   See also: John Edwin Sandys, 2, p.241.


57. J.T. Sheppard, p.129.


58. Anthony Nixon, *Oxofs Triumph: In the Royall Entertainment of his most Excellent Maiestie, the Queen, and the Prince: the 27. of August last, 1605*, Sig.Cv.


   See also: 'James I at Oxford in 1605', edited by F.S. Boas and W.W.

Notes to Chapter II
63. T.J.B. Spencer, p. 36.
64. First Folio, 1623: 'To the memory of my beloved, The Author Mr. William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Us . . .'

Notes to Chapter II
NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. R. Colie, p.128.
12. C.H. Whitman, Sophocles, p.64.
15. In line with general usage in classical commentary, Antigone is included in the category of tragic hero without specific distinction on the basis of gender.
22. See Chapter I, note 23.

Notes to Chapter III
   ______, 'The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus', reprinted in
24. Michael Goldman, 'Characterizing Coriolanus', *Shakespeare Survey*, 34
   (1981), pp.73-84 (pp.83-84).
27. R.S. Ide, p.10.
   pp.135-144.
32. Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization – an interpretation of Sophocles*
33. Jacob Burckhardt, 'Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen', quoted in
34. Norman Rabkin, 'Meaning in Shakespeare', *ACTA of the World
   Shakespeare Congress*, edited by Clifford Leech, 1972; quoted in
   *Macbeth*: III.2.52-54, III.4.59.
   *Hamlet*: I.5.172.
   *Othello*: I.3.136-145.
   *Antony and Cleopatra*: I.1.33-34, III.11.56-60.
37. George Edward Bateman Saintsbury, *Shakespeare* (Cambridge University
38. M. Goldman, p.77.
41. Cedric Hubbel Whitman, *The Heroic Paradox*, edited by Charles Segal
42. See pp.65-68.
43. See pp.68-69, 74.
44. Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, Thirteenth

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46. The distinctive nature of areté, the heroic integrity, as embodied in the Sophoclean tragic hero, and its peculiar relevance to the personality of Coriolanus, will be presented in Chapter IV, pp.95-105.


49. R.S. Ide, pp.xi, xii, xvi.


51. Chapter IV presents an examination of the excesses of the heroic personality, and the inapplicability of the concept of the tragic flaw or *hamartia* as the responsible factor in the downfall of the hero.


Notes to Chapter III
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

4. ______, I.1.293, IV.7.60.
7. R.S. Ide, 169.
   See Chapter 1, pp.23-24.
11. R.D. Dawe, pp. 89-90: 'Errore, proveniente da inconsapevolezza, da ignoranza di qualche fatto o di qualche circonstanza: colpa involontaria . . .'.

Notes to Chapter IV
23. C. Segal, Tragedy and Civilization, p. 201.
25. __________, pp. 31.
26. __________, pp. 98.
27. __________, pp. 40.
32. R.S. Ide, Possessed with Greatness, p. 173.
37. The general fallibility of public opinion with regard to the heroic personality is examined in Chapter VI.
40. C.H. Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition, p.198
41. Salutati, quoted in Waith, The Herculean Hero, p. 41, 121.
43. There is a precedent for the alternative significance of 'sway' as irresolution, persuasion, or change of mind: Much Ado About Nothing:

Notes to Chapter IV
IV.1.200-201. Friar. 'Pause awhile,/ And let my counsel sway you in this case.'

'Sway, v. 1500 . . . To move or swing first to one side and then to the other . . . 1b fig. To vacillate (rare) 1563 . . . 5. To turn aside, divert (thoughts, feelings, etc.); to cause to swerve from a course of action 1596 . . . 11. to have weight or influence with (a person) in his decisions, etc. 1593.'

44. Quoted in Brower, _Hero and Saint_, pp. 61-62.
See also: Allardyce Nicoll, _Chapman's Homer_ (1957), 2 volumes, 2, p.4: 61.


47. C. Whitman, _The Heroic Paradox_, p. 47.


51. _Coriolanus_, The Arden Shakespeare, Appendix, p. 332.

52. ______, III.1.6, 278, 280.


54. B.M.W. Knox, _The Heroic Temper_, p. 29.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

19. A further investigation of Act III scene 2 with regard to the inconsistency between words and actions, and the perversion of gestures, is presented on pp. 168–177.

20. An examination of the substance and significance of 'he holds her by the hand, silent' (V.3.182 SD), is presented in Chapter VII, pp. 252–260.


25. In an attempt to arrive at reliable, inclusive interpretations, various competent translations have been consulted and compared. Richard Jebb's definitive commentaries and translations have served as a basis for all textual comprehension, and have been complemented with reference to later translations. The principal versions used, however, by E. F. Watling, are recognized among the more recent translations as being closest to the original.

Thanks to Professor P.E. Easterling of the Department of Greek and Latin at University College London for his advice on which translations of and commentaries on the Ajax and the Antigone of Sophocles are acknowledged to be most precise and accurate.


34. C. Segal, Tragedy and Civilization, p.133.


Notes to Chapter V
38. *Hamlet*, I.5.172;
   *Othello*, IV.1.90-91, IV.2.90-93;
   *Macbeth*, III.1.64-65, 140-141;
   *King Lear*, I.1.50-52, 112-115.
40. See Chapter VI, pp.200-230 for an examination of the unreliability of opinion in the drama.
41. Carol M. Sicherman, 'CARIOLANUS: The failure of words' *English Literary History*, 39.2 (1972), 189-207 (p.190).
42. Donald James Gordon, 'Name and Fame: Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', *Papers Mainly Shakespearean*, collected by G.I. Duthie (University of Aberdeen, 1964), 40-57 (p.55).
51. L.F. Dean, p. 177.
   D.J. Gordon, p. 49.
53. See pp. 177-183.

Notes to Chapter V
63. J.L. Simmons, pp. 31, 36 (II.3.68ff), 29.

Notes to Chapter V
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

5. See Appendix II: An analysis of the use of 'Rome' and 'Roman/s' and synonyms in *Coriolanus* in the dialogue and stage directions.
6. See Appendix III: The use of 'home' and 'house' in five of Shakespeare's tragedies, compared with the use of the same words in *Coriolanus*.
7. the state: II.3.175, 179
   his country: II.3.233
   the city: III.1.199, 264
   his country: III.1.301
   our city: III.3.102
   his country: III.3.119
   the city: III.3.143
   his country: IV.2.30
   the commonwealth: IV.6.14
   your country: V.1.36
   the city: V.4.59
   the state: x 2
   the city: x 4
   his country: x 4
   our city: x 1
   the commonwealth: x 1
   your country: x 1
8. his country: I.1.27,37
   the city: I.1.45
   his country: II.2.23
   your country: II.3.86, 104
   his country: II.3.160
   the city: III.1.200
   his country: IV.3.34
   our territories: IV.6.78

Notes to Chapter VI
his country: x 5
the city: x 2
your country: x 2
our territories: x 1

10. my country: I.9.17, II.3.51, III.1.76.
    our large temples: III.3.36
    our streets: III.3.37
    home: II.1.167, III.1.20.
12. G. Schmidgall, pp.34, 29.
22. ________________, pp.89.
23. ________________, pp. 91, 92.
26. Barnabie Rich, Sig. L4 v –M1r (pp.40b-41a).
28. Laurentius Grimaldus Goslicius, *A Commonwealth of Good Counsaile* (London, 1607), Sig. G4 v: '. . . the multitude, which is no reasonable or indifferent judge of mens worthines'.

honour to vulgar reputation, he might as well compare a course pack threed to the fine twist of the silkeworme', Sig. IV-12r (folio 29b-30a); 'they that are not vertuous, can not judge of them that be vertuous, & if they can not judge of them, how can they with conscience praise them:' Sig. 13v (folio 31).

See also: William Corne-Waleys (the yonger), Essays (London, 1600), A Second Part, 1601, Essay 30, 'Of Popularitie': '... the many headed multitude, ... in respect of their ... nature uncertaine, and consequently dangerous'. Sig. R4r; '... their natures ... is left ignorant, which impotencie leaves a wavering disposition easily seduced, ... apt to beleeve a faire tale, and as apt to beleeve weake reasons, strong: spent in contradiction, this makes them inconstant' Sig. R4v.

30. B. Evans, p.309.
31. See Chapter III, pp.77-80.
33. M. Goldman, p. 75.
Coriolanus, IV.7.35-48.

34. Examples of diverse opinions about Coriolanus:
a planet: II.2.112
a dragon: IV.7.23
too absolute: III.2.39
too noble: III.1.255
too proud: I.1.32, 250-252, II.1.17, II.2.6, IV.6.29-31, IV.7.37-39
too modest: I.9.53
insolent: I.1.261
boastful: II.1.18
prone to flatter: V.6.23-24
courageous: II.2.80-87, 98-99, 102-103
traitorous: III.1.162, III.3.66, V.6.85
tyrrannical: III.1.194-195
intemperate: III.1.241, III.3.27-28
ambitious: IV.6.29-31
inhuman: III.1.80-82, IV.6,91-92, V.4.11-22

35. B. Evans, pp.312, 313.
36. L.G. Goslicius, Sig. H4v-H5r (pp. 80-81).

Notes to Chapter VI
38. ______, p. 53.
40. Coriolanus, 1.10.12-13, 16, 26-27.
41. W. Fulbecke, Sig. I2v (folio 30b).
NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

   B. Rich, Sig. M3f (p. 43a).
   J. Dillon, p. xi.
21. ______, I.4.30-42 (only possibly), II.3.109-121, 134, IV.4.1-6, 12-26, IV.5.5-6.
23. ______, IV.1.29.
   *Coriolanus*, The Arden Shakespeare, Appendix, p. 343.
27. *Antigone*, ll. 856-860, 942-943, 882.

Notes to Chapter VII
38. *Coriolanus*, The Arden Shakespeare, p.363
   ______, V.3.182-199.
40. See pp.261-263.
42. P. Vellacott, p. 4.
44. C. Segal, p.110-111.
46. C. Segal, p.110-111.
49. ______, *The Heroic Paradox*, p.63.
50. ______________________, p.37.
51. ________,*Sophocles*, p.140.
52. D.J. Enright, 'Coriolanus' Tragedy or Debate?, p.3.
   Sophocles, the *Ajax*, ll. 618-619.
   Sophocles, the *Antigone*, l. 618.
   Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, I.1.174-175.

Notes to Chapter VII
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The following Bibliography is limited in scope to works which are specifically referred to in the text. There are four main categories. The first contains a list of those Shakespearean and Attic Tragedy texts which have been used. The second category includes the catalogues, bibliographies, and transcripts referred to for data used in Chapter II and Appendix I. Category three lists primary sources, and category four comprises secondary sources, which are divided into three sub-sections: those relative to Attic tragedy, those to Shakespeare, within the sphere of the thesis, and selected commentary on classical Greek, Renaissance, and modern literature, drama and thought.

Where the initials instead of full names of authors have been given, the names were not recorded in the British Museum library catalogues and/or in the specific volumes cited.

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