Imagery in Coriolanus

Lois Margaret Jarka

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IMAGERY IN CORIOLANUS

By

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[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

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Date
"The fundamental word in art is not impression, but design; and analysis simply means discovery of the design."

Msgr. F.C. Kolbe in *Shakespeare's Way*
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Introduction

As Theodore Spencer says, Coriolanus has "never been popular."

Critics are strangely divided in their reactions to the play. Spencer, like many who praise its craftsmanship, asserts that "though we admire Coriolanus, we admire it in cold blood." He dispenses with the play in three pages as being merely a "study in human behavior," and finds that it does not have "enough universality to rank it with the great tragedies." Few critics seem to have been able to penetrate the hard, often brittle surface of Coriolanus to feel, beneath what Harold C. Goddard calls its "clarity of full daylight," the warm human darkness of misplaced tenderness and love that distorts the world for Coriolanus as thoroughly as it does for King Lear.

M. W. MacCallum long ago sensed the greatness of Coriolanus, and his study, published in 1910, with its acute insight into the human as well as the political situation involved, remains one of the most valuable interpretations of the play. Since then other provocative and helpful short studies have appeared; the best of them are by John Middleton Murry (first written in 1921), G. Wilson Knight (1930),

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1 Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1949), pp. 177 and 183.
5 G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme (London, 1930).
H. C. Goddard (published posthumously in 1951), and by Harry Levin in his brief but penetrating introduction to his edition of Coriolanus (1956). But it is only in very recent years that Coriolanus has been awarded the kind of serious attention it merits. Derek Traversi, in his excellent study, Shakespeare: The Roman Plays (1963), presents, at last, a comprehensive modern critical exposition of the play, and assigns Coriolanus its proper place among Shakespeare's great tragedies.

In the past thirty years scholars and students have begun to read Shakespeare with new eyes and to discover aspects of his craftsmanship which have never before been fully appreciated because they have never been so thoroughly explored. This new way of seeing Shakespeare's work began with a curiosity about him as a man. Caroline Spurgeon, attempting to come nearer to Shakespeare's "person," undertook in the 1930's an extensive classification of images which recur in many of his plays as a means of revealing Shakespeare's main kinds of interests and the quality of his imagination. In 1936, one year after her pioneer study, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us, appeared, Wolfgang Clemen, a German scholar, working quite independently, published his Shakespeare's Bilder, the original German version of The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery. Clemen was less interested in the "content" of the imagery than in Shakespeare's development of the increasingly organic function of the image in the dramatic structure. He traced the development from the early plays where much of the imagery is either decorative simile or only loosely connected with the overall design, to the late plays in

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6 loc. cit.
which recurrent images, serving "several ends at one time," form an organic part of the total structure.

Since the publication of these two studies, imagery has been a major concern in Shakespearean scholarship. The possibilities inherent in this concern for exhaustive studies of individual plays were first explored by Robert B. Heilman. In 1948 he published *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear."* Heilman discovered that iterative images in *King Lear*, while interweaving and qualifying one another, group themselves around certain concepts or "root ideas" central to the play, and form what he calls "patterns of meaning." Like individual metaphors, the patterns themselves reinforce, qualify and illuminate each other. Heilman also discovered that "basic" words (e.g., the simple verbs, *see* and *know*), not ordinarily thought of as metaphorical, take on the nature of images through repetition and accumulation of many diverse associations. This extension of the usual function of imagery is most apparent in the later plays where Clemen had found Shakespeare's method "more subtle and indirect."  

In *Coriolanus* much "basic" language is used metaphorically, and perhaps for this reason the play has been thought of as one of the least poetic of Shakespeare's works. Goddard echoes the opinions of many critics when he states that *Coriolanus* "lacks poetry," but he adds the qualification, "in a narrower sense."  

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8 Clemen, p. 90.
9 Goddard, p. 209.
and we can only speculate that Goddard must have discerned a poetic quality in the play that could not be accounted for in terms of direct overt metaphor of the kind that enriches Antony and Cleopatra. Traversi comes closest perhaps to suggesting the quality of the poetry in Coriolanus when he says of the Roman tragedies:

The style of these plays, far from reflecting a pedestrian process of versification, shows a unique combination of narrative lucidity, achieved through the easy, almost conversational use of spoken rhythms and vernacular phrases, with poetic intensities that flow effortlessly from this foundation whenever the state of the action so requires. This marriage of colloquial ease with the heights of emotional expression is achieved with a consistency hardly paralleled elsewhere in Shakespeare's work.10

The more familiar we become with Coriolanus, the more we begin to realize that its poetry is the language, not something we can speak of separately. The most colloquial phrase takes on the nature of an image for, through the process of repetition, it not only accumulates other meanings, but begins to function metaphorically in terms of them. The result is a work so organically conceived that hardly a word means only itself.

It seems to me that Coriolanus is an example of what Hermann Broch describes as Altersstil, the "style of old age" which is "not always a product of the years; it is a gift implanted along with his other gifts in the artist, ripening, it may be, with time, often blossoming before its season, or unfolding of itself even before the approach of age or

death: it is a reaching of a new level of expression..." In this
Altersstil Broch places the mature work of Rembrandt and Goya, Bach's
Art of the Fugue, the last quartets of Beethoven, and the final scenes
of Geohe's Faust. He asks:

What is common to these various examples? All of
them reveal a radical change in style, not merely
a development in the original direction; and this
sharp stylistic break can be described as a kind
of abstractism in which the expression relies less
and less on the vocabulary, which finally becomes
reduced to a few prime symbols, and instead relies
more and more on the syntax: for in essence this
is what abstractism is--the impoverishment of
vocabulary and the enrichment of the syntactical
relations of expression; in mathematics the
vocabulary is reduced to nothing, and the system
of expression relies exclusively on the syntax. 12

Broch feels that it is only the artist of old age who can "capture" the
universe "by showing its basic and essential principles, its basic, and
one might even say, its mathematical structure."13

In Coriolanus, the last of his tragedies, Shakespeare, too seems
to be "reaching a new level of expression." He relies less on richness
of vocabulary than on exploiting to the full the possibilities inherent
in the very nature of language as metaphor.

Using Robert B. Heilman's analytical method, I have attempted to
study the imagery of Coriolanus in terms of four main patterns of meaning.
I have tried to show how these patterns emerge naturally out of a close
reading of the text, how they continue throughout the play, and are

11 Hermann Broch, "The Style of the Mythical Age," an introduction to
p. 10.
12 Broch, p. 11.
13 Broch, p. 13.
finally so intricately interwoven with the structure that they cannot be talked about as separate entities. They no longer carry the meaning - they are the meaning.
Chapter I

The Four Dominant Patterns of Meaning in "Coriolanus"

One of the chief difficulties in dealing with the language patterns in Coriolanus is that dominant ideas in the play (e.g., the importance of speech and of nobility) do not always remain in the background to be represented or implied by images. The ideas themselves, through constant word repetition, take on symbolic meaning and something of the transformed and suggestive character of images. Wolfgang Clemen warns rightly against over-interpretation:

The singling out of imagery for a too specialized study seems to have led to an undue emphasis on Shakespeare's "philosophic patterns," and to a curious temptation to read a symbolic meaning into every other image occurring in the text.¹

I realize this danger. At the same time I cannot help feeling that Shakespeare has achieved the effect, at least, of making every word seem extremely significant. But is it merely an "effect?" I think we find ourselves giving to the play the same heightened attention which we usually reserve for compact lyrical poetry. We begin to look even at the literal with new eyes and a sense of expectancy. Discussing the "sight pattern" in King Lear, R. B. Heilman says:

The symbolic significance of the blindness of Gloucester will be readily apparent to a reader of Lear; yet the reader may less readily perceive, throughout the play, a consistent use of the imagery of seeing and blindness which suggests that the literal meanings of seeing and not-seeing have passed over into the symbolic.²

¹Clemen, p. 231.
²Robert B. Heilman, This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear" (Seattle, 1963), p. 10.
The most pervasive pattern in Coriolanus, what I call the *speech pattern*, functions in a very similar manner. The inability of Coriolanus to speak in a politic manner is a constant source of conflict between himself and peace-time Rome, and is the immediate cause of his banishment. By the iteration, not only of the words *speak* and *say*, but also of *mouth*, *tongue*, *voice* and *words*, we gradually become aware of a relationship among them and a common relatedness to the idea of speech itself. We sense that Shakespeare is concerned with defining the nature of speech.

One of the salient characteristics of such a pattern is that it qualifies or illumines every aspect of the play. For example, speech is a fundamental issue in the political situation, and one of the basic questions posed by the play is that of who should have the right to speak. Speech is everywhere exploited and misused, and their relationship to words qualifies all the characters. The action takes place at a crucial time for the new Roman republic; tribunes, that is, *speakers* have just been granted to the populace. The tribunes become the "tongues o' the common mouth" (III,1,22), demagogues to the unthinking mob. Menenius, representing the whole patrician class, holds off violence by calculated, dishonest rhetoric. Volumnia's speech is, like her anger, "Juno-like" (IV,1,53), and her praise of Coriolanus, what she has said of him when he was too young to put it in the proper perspective, has tragic consequences. Virgilia, whom Coriolanus calls "my gracious silence" (II,1,194), has fewer lines than even Cordelia in *King Lear*. She typifies

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true motherhood and mercy. Mercy and a higher truth come to be associated with silence; honesty, violence and death with noise and impassioned speech. Coriolanus' "heart's his mouth" (III,i,255), as Menenius says. He speaks with a "trumpeter" tongue (I,i,123). In Coriolanus' relation to speech we encounter paradox everywhere. His speech is both mercilessly brutal and scrupulously honest, at least to the degree that Coriolanus himself discerns the truth. The trumpet imagery reflects the paradox. Over and over again in the stage directions we learn that trumpets accompany Coriolanus. Volumnia calls them the "ushers of Martius" (II,i,176). Like Coriolanus' speech, the trumpet is the "honest" voice of war, and like his rage, a call to death. In contrast, Aufidius' speech is "opinion," but we do well to listen to him for we learn much from him. He has the insight of the intelligent and semi-honest realist who can calculate and exploit the weaknesses of his enemies.

Although the speech pattern qualifies all the characters, it centers on Coriolanus. It is closely allied with the clothes imagery, a minor but important pattern. It involves the "gown of humility" in Act III, Coriolanus' disguise in Act IV, and the mimetic action of caps thrown into the air as accompaniment to the shouts of the mob. A change of clothes is associated with Coriolanus' saying something which goes against his nature, with playing a role. Cap-throwing is associated with the fickle humility of the mob who shout for you today, against you tomorrow.

Apart from these more overt aspects of the pattern, we are constantly made aware of very basic concerns with speech by the unobtrusive iteration of the words speak and say. For example, how one says something is set against what one says; what is merely said about someone (motif of praise,
fame), against what that person really is; what one says about something (opinion), against the truth of the matter; what one can say, or make others say, regardless of scruples, to obtain a calculated result (demagoguery), against what is spoken, without calculation, from the heart. Ultimately we are dealing with appearance vs. reality, falsehood vs. truth. The definition of the significance of speech involves us in basic moral questions.

Closely allied to the speech pattern is a pattern I have termed the name pattern. Wolfgang Clemen has pointed out Shakespeare's "technique of characterizing the hero by means of images." Of Coriolanus he says:

...in no other play did Shakespeare honour his hero with such a wealth of imagery. The omnipresence of Coriolanus produces one of the most powerful dramatic effects of this play.4

The name pattern, like all major patterns in the play, centers on Coriolanus himself. Name comes to symbolize many things. It is basically the third name of Caius Martius "Coriolanus" bestowed on him for his bravery at Corioli. It is the identity (a minor motif) Coriolanus gains by doing the outstanding military thing. It is the mark of distinction which makes him truly unique among his fellow Romans, and it becomes associated with the theme of aloneness throughout the play. Going to greet Coriolanus on his return from battle, Volumnia says of Cominius, "He gives my son the whole name of the war" (II,1,149). The scene in which Coriolanus receives his surname is the high point of the praise motif which concerns his sensitivity to what is said about him by those whose opinion he most respects. The whole speech pattern is involved

^Clemen, p. 158.
here. When Coriolanus goes to Aufidius in disguise and is asked again and again for his "name" (IV,v), he says of his surname, "only that name remains" (IV,v,79 - my italics). In the last scene of the play Aufidius refuses to honour his name, saying, "Dost thou think I'll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol'n name, Coriolanus in Corioli?" (V,v,88-90). Coriolanus becomes enraged and his impassioned speech touches off the violence of the mob against him.

The significance attached to name involves the whole area of meaning surrounding the concept of fame which is constantly in the background. In a sense the name pattern forms an extended image which little by little defines the nature of fame. Fame, then, is like a name, something foreign to the essence of a man, symbolizing outward honour bestowed upon him by the world which at any moment may take it back again. It is completely dependent upon time and fortune. Fame is the "gilded butterfly" (I,iii,66) of mutability.

As in the speech pattern we are dealing here with very basic human problems. The name pattern points up the discrepancy between the name you give something and what it actually is, the difference between knowing a person by his name and really knowing him, the difference between the identity one gains by "making a name" for oneself and the inner identity which remains nameless, the difference between a man's name as a public entity and his name as the symbol of intimate family bonds. The paradox involved here is that name is the superficial outward sign of a man, yet symbolically represents the essential bonds between himself and his family and country. When he betrays his own identity he commits the sin of impiety against all those whom his name represents.
Again, these questions and distinctions cut very deep and ultimately become moral concerns.

As most of the leading philosophical ideas in the play evoke their opposites (e.g. appearance vs. reality, the many vs. the one), these contrasts are reflected in the major patterns of meaning. Directly opposed to the name pattern is what I call the nobility pattern. The adjective "noble" is used perhaps more often than any other descriptive word in the play. Most often it is used falsely or ironically so that we are forced to define the true nature of nobility by discovering what it is not or should not be. Basically, of course, we are concerned with the nobility as a class in contrast to the plebeians. But apart from the question of a man's place in society, a matter of his birth-right, traditionally the nobleman should embody in some sense a superiority which is recognized as "noble." The play constantly asks the question of wherein this superiority resides.

Ideals of nobility change with the changing ideals of a culture. The most frequent concept of nobility throughout the play is one which reflects the military character of the Roman state. It is chiefly an ideal of physical superiority. Coriolanus epitomizes this ideal. He is a noble specimen, a man of noble blood, of perfect physical form and strength. His superiority is assessed in terms of blood, in the form of the number of wounds he brings back from the war. As Menenius says, "The wounds become him" (II,i,137). The nobility pattern and the pervasive blood imagery qualify each other.

The falseness of this exaggerated physical concept of the "noble" is implied by the perverse interest of Volumnia and Menenius in blood and
violence. A mother, hoping that her son has wounds to show, reverses everything that a mother naturally should be. The intensification of a popular ideal in Volumnia points up the unnatural quality of a society attuned to war. Here the nobility pattern and the nature pattern coalesce and define each other.

There is a theme of emulation running throughout the play which involves both of these patterns. Sometimes we find it in terms of idealization, sometimes in terms of rivalry and jealousy. It is always somehow connected with the unnatural, with some kind of lack of balance in the character who idealizes. This idealization often goes hand in hand with an excessive self-pride. Shakespeare seems to be showing that idealization is double-edged. It can bring out qualities in a man which transcend the ordinary, and which transcend himself. For example, in emulation of his mother's character and the ideals of the Roman state, Coriolanus becomes "possessed" in battle. He becomes something other than human, something like an inescapable natural force. Cominius says that "he waxed like a sea" (II,ii,104), and "struck Corioli like a planet" (II,ii,119). But the Roman conception of the heroic in war, we begin to sense, is basically inhuman. Though man has transcended somehow the usual limits of man in his fascination with the heroic ideal, he has become something unnatural.

In the second act, when Coriolanus is expected to show his wounds to the people, the constant repetitions of "noble" and forms of the word, "worth," throw the whole popular concept of nobility into question. (Forms of the words, "worth" and "service," are iterated throughout the play and develop minor patterns of meaning which qualify the ideas of
fame, speech and nobility.) For Coriolanus, a man's worth lies in his service, his deeds. The honourable deed is not done for any purpose beyond itself. Coriolanus believes in intrinsic worth. The deed speaks for itself. The man of pure heart is his own pledge. The truly noble man does not have to show the outward signs, his wounds, to prove himself. Here we pass over into the world of the spirit, of intrinsic quality rather than quantity of gashes. What is of the spirit cannot be exhibited. Coriolanus says of his wounds, "I will not seal your knowledge with showing them" (I,iii,115-116). The nobility pattern illumines some of the basic oppositions in Coriolanus, e.g. appearance vs. reality, the physical vs. the spiritual, quantity vs. quality. One of the basic sources of conflict within Coriolanus is his attempt to serve both of these opposed concepts of nobility at the same time.

The fourth major pattern is one which is fundamental to Shakespearean drama, the nature pattern. In defining human nature in Coriolanus, Shakespeare uses images in a more conventional manner than in the patterns we have already examined. In the preceding patterns, we have discussed many non-figurative or literal words which have taken on symbolic value, gradually becoming a kind of image by accumulation of associative meanings. Shakespeare's immediate concern is the definition of certain abstract concepts and often, one senses, with the nature of language itself. No matter how often a word is repeated it never means quite the same thing in any two contexts. The meaning of a word is pushed almost to the limits of meaninglessness.

Although the concept "nature" is a broad one including the natural universe, the Renaissance idea of order, and, as R. B. Heilman calls it,
the "nature" of human nature, the nature pattern in Coriolanus centers on the human being. This pattern is the one most rich in imagery. As in the nobility pattern, we sense a basic lack of balance in the human being. His physical nature is exaggerated, often glorified. The pervasive blood imagery draws together all the various and opposing aspects of the concern with the physical so that a constant paradox involving the natural and the unnatural is contained within the word "blood."

In a positive sense blood represents family bonds, here chiefly between mother and son. It is a man of noble blood, carrying on his family's and his country's traditions, who possesses a superior nature. But in a state constantly at war it is a man's highest duty to shed his blood for his country. It is a mother's highest honour to give her "blood," her son, to the state. In Volumnia's excessive dedication to duty and sacrifice there is more than a taint of the "unnatural." She says, "I had rather have eleven [children] die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" (I,iii,26). As elsewhere in the play an exaggeration of quantity draws attention to a quality which is lacking. Here it is some quality of human warmth, for Volumnia is completely cold-blooded. We sense that the whole ideal of heroic militarism is being called into question. The blood imagery centers in Coriolanus. He boasts to Aufidius, "...'tis not my blood wherein thou see'st me masked" (I,viii,10). He is nourished by blood as he was nourished in his boyhood by Volumnia's love of violence. He tells Aufidius that he has "drawn tuns of blood out of [his] country's breast" (IV,v,105). Cominius says of him, "He was a thing of blood" (II,ii,114),
like an elemental force of death. For Coriolanus blood is a symbol for a kind of valour in war which approaches the superhuman. But it is also the contemptible, merely physical "painting" (I,vi,68) which smears the warrior and disguises, that is, outwardly clothes, the spirit, the warrior's inner will. Here the blood imagery begins to merge with the opposing imagery of the heart which comes to symbolize Coriolanus' spiritual nature.

The heart represents his inner integrity. Throughout the play it is the "counsellor heart" (I,i,122) which guides his thinking and his action. After the battle for Corioli he says;

   ...I thank you, general;
   But cannot make my heart consent to take
   A bribe to pay my sword.
   (I,ix,36-39)

When he is praised on his return from Corioli, he objects, "No more of this; it does offend my heart" (II,i,187). He scorns the citizens who would rather have his "hat" than his "heart" (II,iii,104). When he betrays his country it is with a denial of the heart, what Coriolanus calls a "heart of wreak" (IV,v,91). When he sends Menenius back to Rome from the Volscian camp it is with a "crack'd heart" (V,iii,9). And it is his heart which finally triumphs and makes him whole again and able to feel compassion. By listening to his heart he regains his humanity and reaffirms the natural bonds which exist between him and his country. He again finds his place which he had denied by going to Aufidius (place is a minor pattern), and he reestablishes himself in the natural order of things. He follows his heart with the tragic realization that the heart itself is merely the spokesman of a higher order, of "great nature" (V,iii,33) itself.
Also closely related to the nature pattern is the animal imagery in Coriolanus. It is constant throughout the play. Of this imagery Clemen says:

The contrast between the commanding figure of Coriolanus and the baseness of the "rabble" is vividly brought out by a series of images which, at the same time, reveal Shakespeare's intense dislike of the masses, of the never-to-be-trusted rabble.5

Maurice Charney, too, feels that "the main function of the animal imagery in Coriolanus is to express the base nature of the plebeians."6 I feel, however, that it serves other functions which are equally important. The character who uses the animal image may perceive only a simple application of it. The audience is at liberty to perceive a more complex range of associations. Animal images are, in fact, constantly double-edged. By defining the plebeians, they are defining the patricians at the same time. As we have seen, Shakespeare is defining human nature in Coriolanus by showing us that an exaggerated sense for the importance of the physical in all the characters results in a lack of balance which dehumanizes them or renders their actions unnatural. This inhumanity is not only limited to individuals but is a reflection of Roman society as a whole. The animal imagery, used for both plebeians and patricians, further develops the theme of the "unnatural" and is extremely effective in building up the atmosphere of intense physicality in the play.

Certainly the introduction of individual citizens, some of whom speak reasonably, and some of whom do not, indicates a more complex attitude

5Clemen, p. 154.
toward the common man than that already suggested. We are dealing again with a situation which reflects basic philosophical notions of quantity and quality, and of the one and the many. The "many-headed multitude" (II,iii,17) are sheer quantity, a body which can only express itself forcefully through the one mind of its leader. There would be no point in judging the mob, a quantitative thing. Men in a crowd become dehumanized by the very fact that they are deprived of what made them human, their individuality and, therefore, their ability to reason. The individual, ideally, acts out of a certain oneness of mind and heart which makes it possible for him to distinguish the higher truth or the greater good whether or not he then acts in accordance with his knowledge. He assumes the responsibility for his moral choices. He moves in a qualitative world.

In a crowd, everyone and therefore no one is responsible. The many cannot act reasonably or morally because they are caught in the disunity and chaos of their numbers. They are truly "fragments" (I,i,228). As an entity the crowd is only aware of the physical power latent in its very quantity. Ideally, the leaders should assume the responsibility for directing this blind power. They should be the shepherds. They should represent the world of quality. In Coriolanus all the leaders fail. Harry Levin very aptly says, "Shakespeare's portrayal of the multitude, whose sedition he arms with a grievance, is anti-demagogic rather than anti-democratic."7

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If the plebeians are dogs, hares, mules, crows, and the like, the patricians are the "cormorant belly" (I,1,127) who are more subtly animal-like but are nevertheless slowly devouring their fellow "animals" by starving them and sending them off to the wars. As Harry Levin says so well, "the prevailing code is dog eat dog." We sense that Shakespeare is pointing up a violation of natural order. Certainly any Elizabethan would sense a violation of the chain of being. The patricians relegate the plebeians to the animal level, yet they themselves follow a philosophy of living which stresses only man's animal nature. There is no feeling on either side for intrinsic human worth. Instead, the values of both sides are materialistic while the ideals of both are a glorification of physical force. Menenius, in an uncalculated moment of "confusion," cries out, in spite of himself, "On both sides more respect" (III,1,180).

Although Maurice Charney stresses the use of the "pairing of noble and ignoble animals to show the contrast between patrician and plebeian," I cannot believe that Shakespeare did not use these images ironically. The eagle is traditionally a "noble" bird but it is also rapacious, a bird of prey. When Coriolanus says,

If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,  
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I  
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli:  
(V,1,114-116)

the suggestion is not only, as Charney notes, that the doves "in battle are cowardly and contemptible," but that the gentle and helpless don't stand a chance.

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8 Levin, p. 21.  
9 Charney, p. 167.  
10 Charney, p. 167.
Closely allied with the animal imagery is the food imagery. It too is constant and centers upon the basic issue of the scarcity of corn. But this fundamental food image is greatly expanded into imagery of nourishment, digestion, appetite and a devouring of one part of society by another. Its ultimate expression is the war itself.

As in the animal world, the main concern in this animal-like society is with eating. For the plebeians, who are on the verge of starvation, it is a problem of sheer existence. If deprived of corn, they will devour Coriolanus, upon whom they place the whole blame for their situation. The patricians, with their "noble" appetites, unsatisfied by merely eating, resort to war to devour the very blood of their neighbors. We are reminded of Ulysses' speech on "degree" in Troilus and Cressida:

Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking;

(I,iii,119-126)

When "degree is shak'd," when men no longer have their proper places in the natural order of things which is directly reflected in the body politic, when men descend to the animal level and treat one another as animals, appetite runs riot. Menenius represents the patrician class, which sees to it that its own belly is filled and that the poor have enough, just enough, to prevent their rebelling. Menenius' fable about the "war of the members" in the first scene is an attempt to convince the people that the present political set-up is as natural and inevitable as
a biological organism. But the basic disorder within the state is building in intensity. The resulting "unnatural" appetites take on distinct form in Volumnia, for example. Her appetite for blood and honour and power over her son ends in self-devouring anger. After Coriolanus' banishment, she rages defiantly when Menenius invites her to "sup" with him:

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

    (IV,i,50-53)

Last of all, the disease imagery, though not as pervasive as the food imagery, points up the sickness and corruption of Roman society. Coriolanus' attitude toward the common people is most often represented in terms of animal, smell and disease images. He calls the "fliers" (I,iv,45) from battle

    You shames of Rome! you herd of —Boils and plagues
    Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorr'd
    Further than seen, and one infect another
    Against the wind a mile!

    (I,iv,31-34)

In the first scene he says of the mob, "your affections are a sick man's appetite" (I,i,183-184).

    Ironically the tribunes speak of Coriolanus as the "disease that must be cut away." Menenius replies: "O! he's a limb that hath but a disease;/ Mortal to cut it off; to cure it easy" (III,i,293-295). This sick society thinks it can cure itself by amputation of a part of itself. Coriolanus makes the same mistake. He thinks that he can cure his hurt pride by destroying Rome which is a vital, sick part of himself. Both, the plebeians and Coriolanus, over-simplify issues. They want solutions as clear-cut and easy as the amputation of a diseased limb. Coriolanus
decides to be merciful to Rome in the fifth act because he finally realizes that the disease and imperfection around him are inextricably bound up with all that he cherishes and with all that is good. His strength and his sword are powerless to separate them.

Perhaps, then, the chief function of the imagery in Coriolanus is to give us a sense of this kind of complication. R. B. Heilman created the term "patterns of meaning" to designate the structures of iterative imagery he found in King Lear. When we trace the similar patterns in Coriolanus, we begin to realize how apt Heilman's term is. We find that Shakespeare is constantly concerned with definition. His images are no longer merely descriptive or decorative as Clemen observes that they are in his early plays. They are Shakespeare's most effective tools for qualifying meaning. His concern with definition is not a desire to narrow down meaning by a process of exclusion. The nature of a man or of a concept is defined by revealing its many-sidedness, its inherent contradictions and ambiguities. Images provide the perfect means for this kind of definition. An image accumulates diverse meanings and imposes a kind of unity upon them. New unities are constantly formed, for, with each new accretion of meaning, the image changes in structure and quality. The pattern produced by the image is a dramatic process of revelation by continual qualification. Ultimately, the definition of the nature of nobility or fame or speech, or of a man's character, lies in the dynamic pattern of both the events and the images.
Chapter II

Act I

The Speech Pattern

"No, tis his kind of speech; he did not mock us."
(II,iii,169)

Now that we have in mind a brief overall picture of the dominant patterns of meaning in the play as a whole, we can examine the way in which these patterns are worked out. All the main theme and image patterns are firmly established by the end of Act I. But in the first act there is more emphasis on the function of images as foreshadowing coming events than on the interconnection of images. Therefore it is easier in Act I to make an artificial separation of the images than it will be in the succeeding acts. Later on it will be profitable to concern ourselves with key speeches and scenes.

We will begin with the speech pattern. The idea of speech is so basic to dramatic art that it takes some time to realize that Shakespeare is dealing with it as a theme in itself. The fact that it almost escapes observation corresponds with Clemen's comment on the quality of the imagery in Shakespeare's late works:

It was pointed out that the more veiled, unobtrusive, and indirect manner of expression offered by imagery corresponded to the characteristic art which Shakespeare used on many levels in the tragedies, whereas, in the early plays, it had been his aim to make everything as clear as possible.1

1 Clemen, p. 223.
The first two lines of the play introduce the speech pattern as the key-note of the plebeian cause:

1.Cit. Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.
All. Speak, speak.

(I,i,1-3)

Shakespeare immediately shows what the consequences of plebeian speaking are. The citizens do not use speech to reason things out. The mob mind is demanding action and trying to justify an unjustifiable action:

1.Cit. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?
All. No more talking on't; let it be done. Away, away.

(I,i,10-13)

Here, in the first thirteen lines of the play Shakespeare presents in vivid dramatic terms the basic problem of the young Roman republic. The people demand to speak and be heard; but even in them speech is misused, and the result is a stiffening of speech everywhere in Roman life until violence and rash action reach a climax with Coriolanus' banishment at the end of Act III.

After the lines quoted above, the second citizen enters the dialogue like the voice of reason, or at least of common sense. With his "one word, good citizens" (I,i,14), he is obviously trying to bring the crowd back to a discussion. The sub-patterns of the use of speech to ward off violence and the misuse of speech to arouse violence are already becoming established in their simplest, most obvious forms.

With an ironic foreshadowing of the uses to which speech will be put later in the play, the first citizen distinguishes between public speech which grows out of concrete need and speech in which personal interest is disguised beneath false concepts of honour. In other words these are
basic issues:

1. Cit. ...for the Gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge.
   
   (I,i,24-26)

The second citizen tries to temper the mood of the mob by making them aware of how they are speaking:

2. Cit. Nay, but speak not maliciously.
   
   (I,i,36)

Here we have the beginning of a concern which will become more and more meaningful as the play progresses. How one speaks will be the major problem in Act III, scene ii, where we hear the admonitions of Volumnia and Menenius to Coriolanus to speak "mildly" (III,i,139,142,145,146). And since the consequences of how one says something can be disastrous, Shakespeare will eventually set how one speaks against what one says. What one says takes on a life of its own. It reveals and it conceals the man. But a man's speech betrays what he is only if it can be interpreted correctly.

Once we become sensitive to this theme, we discover its pervasive essence everywhere. For example, in I,i, the citizens argue about Coriolanus' character in terms of what is said about him by others:

1. Cit. I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end: though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother...
   
   (I,i,37-40)

And the second citizen replies:

...You must in no way say he is covetous.

(I,i,44-45)
Coriolanus' reputation for heroism and selflessness is overshadowed by proud qualities in his nature which the people can see only as incongruous. They are unable to unify their many opinions into one acceptable view of the man, and since they cannot understand him, they condemn him. We sense a concern already with the nature of "reputation" which will be examined from different angles throughout the play. The problem is the relationship between what is said about a man and the actual truth. Coriolanus' final reputation will be the form of the play itself unifying, qualifying, and putting in perspective everything that has been said of him.

Almost at once the citizens attempt to substitute action for speech. The first citizen shouts, "Why stand we prating here? To the Capitol!" (I,i,50). Menenius enters, and again speech is opposed to violence. His first words are:

> What work's, my countrymen, in hand? Where go you
> With bats and clubs? The matter? Speak, I pray you.

(I,i,57-58)

Menenius, in contrast to Coriolanus who enters later, chooses the right, that is to say, the expedient words, to soothe the crowd: "my countrymen."

It is a commonplace that a character in a drama is delineated and defined by his speech. Here, however, another dimension is added to this most fundamental of the dramatist's technical means. The "way of speaking" enters into the structure of the drama, becomes a part of the very plot. Speech is not merely a means of characterizing. At various points in the play speech becomes a force almost independent of the characters who utter it. It becomes, as it were, another actor.

Speech takes on a variety of tones even at this early stage in the play. The considered speeches of individual citizens are opposed to
the emotional shouts of the mob. The individual citizens and Menenius share a consciousness of speech, an inkling of its power. They can use and misuse speech with a curious detachment from what they say. Coriolanus, on the other hand, is as unconscious of what he says as the mob itself. He is his speech. Speech is never an objective thing which he can manipulate. For this reason, especially when he is angry, he is apt to forget the power of speech, and its danger. He places his faith in the force of Truth, no matter how rude and rough-sounding. Coriolanus cannot pervert language to use it as a shield for he has no faith in the protection of words. He feels that his inner purity speaks for itself and is its own best defense.

For Menenius speech is a weapon to use against the bats and clubs of the mob. The speech theme takes ironic and satirical twists in the Fable on the war of the members he tells to soothe the crowd. The pathos involved in this scene of desperate, hungry people forgetting themselves in their childish curiosity to hear a story (the magic of speech), is counterbalanced by the bitterly humorous ineptitude of Menenius. Apart from the illogical quality of the analogy itself, the comparison of the belly to the patricians is hardly flattering and is not apt to arouse sympathy. However the story becomes really satirical when Menenius says that the belly smiles and speaks. From that moment on, Menenius is the speaking belly. Everyone knows that Menenius keeps a good table. In the second act he says of himself:

I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't.

(II,1,52-54)
He is aware that he can use speech, but in the end he uses it against himself. He does not know himself well enough to avoid using the kind of comparisons which can become humorously double-edged to his own detriment. Ironically, he is as much his speech as is Coriolanus.

In reply to Menenius' description of what he calls the "discontented members, the mutinous parts" (I, i, 117), the second citizen evokes an ideal of man which fits Coriolanus himself with some precision:

The kingly crowned head, the vigilant eye,
The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter...
(I, i, 121-123)

This abstract ideal man has Coriolanus' noble appearance, his strength, his integrity, and his ability to inspire men in battle. In many ways Coriolanus embodies a public ideal that is heroic and military. However there is a discrepancy between the people's imagined ideal and what they really want. Although they are ready to worship Coriolanus, as Brutus tells us in the second act when the tribunes have to admit that

All tongues speak of him,...
(II, i, 224)

nevertheless, when the people's ideal actually appears in the form of the plain-spoken Coriolanus, they fail to see his heroism and feel only his arrogance. In peacetime the "trumpeter" tongue is much too harsh.

The trumpet imagery (constant throughout the play) prepares us in the first scene for the trumpet blast of Coriolanus' scathing speech not to but at the citizens. He cannot adjust his warrior trumpet to peacetime for it commands men to follow but never to discuss.

Coriolanus immediately emphasizes the double-mindedness of the people:
...Trust ye?
With every minute you do change a mind,
And call him noble that was now your hate,
Him vile that was your garland.

(I,i,187-190)

Coriolanus' hatred for saying one thing at one time and something else at another is immediately apparent. His contempt for the mob takes the form of an attack on opinion. He has no interest in the voice of the mob, for what the many say today is only opinion which will change tomorrow. Coriolanus is interested only in the truth which never changes.

From almost the first word of his encounter with the citizens in I,i, the emphasis is on what men "say" with the implication that speech is the instrument of ignorance and falsehood. When Coriolanus demands a second time, "What's their [the mob's] seeking?", Menenius replies:

Men. For corn at their own rates; whereof they say
The city is well-stor'd.

Mar. Hang 'em! They say!
They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know
What's done i' the Capitol;...

(I,i,194-198, my italics)

And later:

Mar. ...They say there's grain enough!

(I,i,202, my italics)

When Menenius asks, "What says the other troop?", Coriolanus replies:

...They are dissolv'd: hang 'em!
They said they were an-hungry;...

(I,i,210-211, my italics)

Opinion, idle talk, speech: rather than action enrage Coriolanus.

Whether or not the demands of the mob are justified is to him beside the point. What the mob says is wrong. The mob is the fickle many who are unstable and traitorous for they can be swayed and changed by mere words. Coriolanus' contempt for the rabble is thus a contempt for
rhetoric, for the arts of speech, for the falsehood he senses in the words all about him.

Essentially he feels that true speech bursts forth from the heart. Traversi calls our attention to the verb "vented,"[^2] which Coriolanus uses when mocking the people:

They vented their complainings.  
(I,i,215)

And Menenius uses it of Coriolanus:

What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent...  
(III,i,257)

Coriolanus instinctively hates the emotional bursts of speech coming from the mob. The many have no right to them. And they prove fatal to Coriolanus in the end.

When Coriolanus is angry and gives full rein to his tongue, he becomes a castigating principle of Truth. For the moment (I,i,173-194), he is nothing but himself. But here again his surrender to emotion is fatal. Ironically, both the mob and Coriolanus are impelled by emotion. Though Coriolanus is speaking the truth of his heart, it is truth in too raw a form to be effective in human terms for he does not allow his mind to mediate between his heart and his tongue. The heart is truly his "counsellor." He thinks with his heart.

There are no mediators in the play. The tribunes who should be the instruments of reason for the people fail them just as Menenius fails for the patricians. On all sides, a surrender to emotion, good or bad, leads to violence, first in speech, then in action. Coriolanus' contempt for

what the mob says is dramatically emphasized in I,i, by the fact that, apart from the brief remark of the second citizen, Coriolanus does not let the people say a word. He ends his tirade against them with a presentiment of the danger to come. The people

...will in time
Win upon power, and throw forth greater themes
For insurrection's arguing.

(I,i,225-228)

There is a constant sense in the play of speech becoming a tougher and tougher force to reckon with, as if raw speech symbolized the rising power of the commonalty. In announcing to Menenius the appointment of the five tribunes, Coriolanus says:

And a petition granted to them, a strange one,
To break the heart of generosity
And make bold power look pale.

(I,i,216-218)

Instinctively Coriolanus feels that giving the people speakers will set free a force more insidious, less obvious and yet far stronger than "bold power," the right of speech itself. The petition is "strange" because a speaking people is an idea foreign to Coriolanus' thinking. Menenius speaks for his whole class when he echoes Coriolanus with only one comment, "This is strange" (I,i,227).

Coriolanus' sense of order is based on the simple aristocratic notion that speech is the prerogative of the patrician leader, the true nobleman. Ideally then the many would be absorbed into the will of a single leader, and order and unity would prevail. With the threat of the many-voiced mob, Coriolanus fears a fracturing of this unity. His absolute nature feels an abhorrence for the many, the "many-headed multitude"(II,111,16), the imperfect, the half-hearted (vide his rage at
the "fliers" in I,i,iv). Coriolanus damns the mob with the curt dismissal:

Go; get you home, you fragments! (I,i,228)

What Coriolanus is, he is one hundred per cent. It is ironic that this rage for integrity, wholeness, oneness is exactly what prevents him from being a "complete" human being. He sacrifices wholeness in a human sense by attempting not only to live but to become one with the aristocratic ideals of the Roman patrician class. Coriolanus, too, is a fragment.

The tribunes feel Coriolanus' opposition most intensely in terms of what he says:

Sic. When we were chosen tribunes for the people, -
Bru. Marked you his lips and eyes?
Sic. Nay but his taunts.
Bru. Being mov'd, he will not spare to gird the gods.
Sic. Demock the modest moon.
Bru. The present wares devour him! He is grown
Too proud to be so valiant. (I,i,261-265)

It is Coriolanus' tongue, his overbearing manner of speaking verging on hybris, which makes enemies for him. More and more, what Coriolanus says and how he says it, the unpleasantness of his speech, become identified with the man himself to the exclusion of what would otherwise make him admirable in the eyes of the Romans.

The situation is not simple. If Coriolanus' rude speech is a sign of his overweening pride, it is also a proof of his inability to falsify what he thinks by means of what he says. He speaks the truth as he feels it in his heart. His impatience with opinion is contempt for the half-truths by which most men live. He tries to live according to an either-or philosophy and, as a military man, he cannot afford to get caught making distinctions. A given course is right or wrong; his life depends upon it.
There is a certain lack of imagination involved here but there is also an elemental awareness in Coriolanus that absolute distinctions are necessary to his existence. He is somehow in touch with the absolute, with Truth.

By the end of the first scene the speech pattern is well-established. It becomes critically important again in the ninth scene of Act I where it merges with the motifs of reputation and praise, and finally with the name pattern. But before we go on to the name pattern, let us examine briefly these minor motifs for they reveal some of the deeper "psychological" reasons for Coriolanus' distrust of words.

Goddard describes Coriolanus as "in the same situation as Hamlet, forced into a role intolerable to his soul." I do not agree that the role itself, the military profession, is intolerable to Coriolanus. Plutarch says:

> Now in those days valiantness was honoured in Rome above all other virtues...But Martius, being more to the wars than any other gentleman of his time, began from childhood to give himself to handle weapons...  

Certainly Coriolanus' innate idealism was channeled in this direction by his mother who, in turn, was reflecting and exaggerating by her ambition the ideals of the Roman state. But more than one factor has accounted for Coriolanus' almost superhuman military career. His own basically noble and idealistic temperament would, when he was an adolescent, have drawn him toward the military as offering the quickest, most tangible

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3 Goddard, p. 216.
and easily available means of testing himself against ideals of honour and glory which he had absorbed quite naturally as he grew up. It was usual for a young Roman patrician to begin his political career with a term of military service. Undoubtedly Coriolanus remained in the Roman army because it provided the career most in accord with his temperament. He could never have been a really reflective man. One cannot imagine that a political career would ever have appealed to him. His mother is shrewd enough to see this, to judge her son's nature and to calculate the opportunities for attaining glory through him, opportunities for endless self-aggrandizement as a "sacrificing" mother. She has not created the conditions but she has certainly exploited them.

We should not be tempted to sentimentalize Coriolanus. I find no justification in the play for Goddard's speculation: "Congenitally he must have been closer to a young poet than a young warrior." There is no evidence that Volumnia perverted his character in this way or that she actually "changed" him. However, if a military career had not received the exaggerated emphasis and approval it did in his mother's eyes, it might have formed merely a youthful phase in Coriolanus' life. Undoubtedly, as Goddard says, "he was made for better things." What probably harmed Coriolanus most was that his over-ambitious mother pushed him too fast along the road his natural bent would have taken. She sent him off to what she admits was a "cruel war" (I,iii,15) at the age of sixteen. Unfortunately for him, he was too successful. He justified his mother's heartlessness. For "he returned, his brows bound with oak"

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5 Goddard, p. 213.
6 Goddard, p. 216.
To a young man of Coriolanus' nature, such success was merely a starting point, a record he had to better in successive battles. He was innately too proud to fall below what was expected of him in accordance with his "reputation" once earned. Plutarch says:

...the first honour that valiant minds do come into doth quicken up their appetite, hastening them forward as with force of wind, to enterprise things of high deserving praise. For they esteem not to receive reward for service done, but rather take it for a remembrance and encouragement to make them do better in time to come; and be ashamed also to cast their honour at their heels, not seeking to increase it still by like desert of worthy valiant deeds. This desire being bred in Martius, he strained still to pass himself in manliness.7

Here, perhaps, we have the key to Coriolanus' sensitivity to praise.

Undoubtedly, his reaction against being praised was originally the result of a noble fineness of feeling, true modesty. As his need to excell gradually took a stronger hold on him, Coriolanus needed praise at the same time that he despised it. It confirmed his success when it was the hard-won praise of Cominius or of his mother. When Cominius and Lartius praise him after the siege of Corioli, he says:

...Pray now, no more: my mother
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me grieves me.
(I,ix,13-15)

What Coriolanus seems to be saying here is that his sense of modesty is too great to allow him to accept praise even from his mother -- from whom it should be quite natural and hardly embarrassing. But knowing what we do already of Volumnia, we sense that it is the mother's praise which is really painful, and that Cominius' words are an unpleasant

7Plutarch, p. 299.
reminder of it. What Volumnia desires, Coriolanus, from long habit, has felt he must live up to. In the past praise put the strain of obligation upon him when he was already struggling to surpass himself. Now praise from others has the taint of flattery for he is praised by men inferior to himself in courage.

In his distrust of language, Coriolanus often must have regarded praise as mere words pitifully inadequate to his deeds, to what he gave of himself in battle. As Leonard F. Dean has pointed out, one of the chief oppositions in the play is "between voice and deed." For Coriolanus words are ambiguous and therefore ultimately meaningless. The deed alone is somehow absolute, unchanging. It is its own reward. A deed concretizes "honour," and makes tangible for a moment Coriolanus' highest abstract ideals. He is obsessed with the possibility of supreme excellence. Levin says of Coriolanus:

His aggressive temperament could never be happy until it had lurched all other swords of the garland. His fight against the world is not for booty nor praise nor office, but for acknowledged superiority; he does not want to dominate but to excel...9

Although Coriolanus' sensitivity to praise involves a concern for his "reputation," he does not want to be known by what people say about him, that is by opinion. What he really wants is a kind of instinctive recognition of his excellence. For Coriolanus, excellence is a god-like quality which need not be talked about but which brilliantly exists, which is. Although he is not aware of it, ultimately this recognition would

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8 See Leonard F. Dean, "Voice and Deed in Coriolanus," The University of Kansas City Review, XXI (1955), 177-184.
9 Levin, p. 22.
take the form of a kind of voiceless worship. Coriolanus is reaching for something divine, unsullied by the words and opinions of the many. He is too proud to be praised just like any other "good boy."

It has been suggested that Coriolanus' mother held out the promise of praise to her son as a "bait."\(^{10}\) As we shall see, in Act III she tries to force him to betray his own nature:

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

\((\text{III,ii,107-110})\)

There is a spirit of bargaining here incongruous with a mother's genuine and selfless affection. Volumnia uses Coriolanus' love for her own ends. She offers him praise as a reward for obedience to her. She expects the natural emotional reaction of a son toward his mother even though her mother's love is so bound up with self-love and ambition that she herself cannot react naturally. What she expects of Coriolanus she cannot give in return. She does not, or does not want to, realize that natural ties bind not only son to mother but also mother to son, that the obligations of pietas, the great Roman virtue, are reciprocal. Simple love should tell her this. But Volumnia's mind is calculating and her ambition poisons her heart. She treats Coriolanus as a child to avoid the responsibility and loss of personal power involved in recognizing his individuality as a man.

His mother's praise, his own desire for excellence, and finally his newly-won name are all pressures bearing down upon Coriolanus that find

\(^{10}\) This idea was suggested by a student participating in the Summer Session, 1965, at the University of Montana.
their outlet in the plainness, directness, crudeness, and often violence of his speech. Plain speaking is a means by which he can maintain his own identity against everything his mother and other people say of him. After Cominius' praise, Coriolanus answers him with exaggerated plainness:

...I have done
As you have done; that's what I can: induc'd
As you have been; that's for my country:
He that has but effected his good will
Hath overtaken mine act.

(I,i,15-18)

People often attempt to protect themselves by means of involved, elaborate speech, but Coriolanus protects himself by the very plainness of his words. This speech is more deliberate than Coriolanus is accustomed to make. There is a sharp formality in the syntactical parallelism. For once, one of his speeches is well thought out and measured. And it betrays his defensiveness.
The Name Pattern

"The gods begin to mock me."
(I,ix,79)

The name pattern emerges out of the opposition between "voice and deed," one of the leading ideas of the ninth scene of Act I. Cominius says:

If I should tell thee o'er this thy day's work,
Thou't not believe thy deeds: but I'll report it
Where senators shall mingle tears with smiles...
(I,ix,1-3)

Cominius feels only the inadequacy of speech to express the reality of the deed. Coriolanus associates speech with insincerity, flattery, and corrupt peace-time luxury. He is enraged by the use of the trumpet to acclaim him:

May these same instruments which you profane,
Never sound more! When drums and trumpets shall
I' the field prove flatterers, let courts and cities be
Made all of false-fac'd soothing!
(I,ix,41-44)

To Coriolanus the trumpet is the forthright and unambiguous voice of battle where only honest deeds count. As we have seen, it is the ambiguous quality of words which Coriolanus cannot deal with. He feels the distance between what is said and what is meant, the discrepancy between word and deed. Language does not fit action. Why then does he accept the name "Coriolanus," a word which may be spoken by every mouth? The trumpets sound again and all the soldiers shout, "Caius Martius Coriolanus!" (I,ix,67). Coriolanus feels instinctively that this time the name fits. This name which he earned in utter loneliness against extravagant odds combines within itself both word and deed. It is a true
symbol. It represents the power of the will. It is his own word, a foreign word for a self-won identity which has nothing to do with family or country. And it is with only this name left to him that Coriolanus will become a foreigner to his country and to himself.

With his love for the greatest possible contrast at the most crucial moment, Shakespeare ends the scene with a foreshadowing of catastrophe. Almost immediately after being so highly honoured, Coriolanus says:

The gods begin to mock me. I, that now Refus'd most princely gifts, am bound to beg Of my lord general.
(I,ix,79-81)

Coriolanus has touched the stars with his head. In a moment of heroic selflessness he has approached the "divine." And immediately afterwards a sense for his own humanity descends upon him with a sudden intensity. He is tired and human again. Out of these contrasting states, following so swiftly one upon the other, there arises in Coriolanus a heightened awareness of his relationship to his fellow beings. Although a few hours before he butchered the enemy in an abstract rage, he remembers now the simple kindness he once received from an old man who has been taken prisoner. The man had taken him in and given him rest. He had observed the traditional sanctity of the relationship between host and guest, the obligations of pietas. In Coriolanus' feeling of responsibility for him he experiences a sense for the essentially human in the other man and in himself, for their connectedness, their common bond of nature.

He tells Cominius:

I sometime lay here in Corioli At a poor man's house; he us'd me kindly: He cried to me; I saw him prisoner; And wrath o'erwhelmed my pity: I request you To give my poor host freedom. (I,ix,83-87)
The phrase, "he us'd me kindly," will be echoed in the next act when the first citizen tells Coriolanus that the "price" of the consulship is "to ask it kindly" (II,iii,80). We cannot help hearing overtones of a second meaning of "kindly," that is, according to nature, rightly. The poor man "us'd" Coriolanus according to his nature as a human being. Within the natural order of things, it was the proper way for one man to treat another. The citizen is expressing a deep-rooted sense of propriety when he demands that Coriolanus speak "kindly." The citizens want to be treated as men who share with him at least an essential humanity. They want some assurance that he is "a man of their infirmity" (III,i,81).

Coriolanus' arrogance cuts him off from those around him. His sense of the bond of nature is as fleeting as this glimpse of the poor man. Aufidius, a symbol for his own pride, cuts off his view. Coriolanus has surrounded the idea of Aufidius with everything that he himself dreams of becoming, with a superhuman ideal. As Coriolanus is interested only in his own inner potentialities, he sees others also in terms of their inner qualities. He cannot remember names because he attaches no essential importance to them. A name is merely the outward, superficial sign of a man. In the fourth act we shall see that Aufidius attaches a great deal of importance to a man's name. The distinction in attitude is a telling indication of the difference between the two men.

This ninth scene of the first act also foreshadows the last scene of the play in which Coriolanus himself, like the poor man whose name he had once forgotten, is helpless, robbed of his name, and alone in the same city. Coriolanus' name symbolizes the nature of fame. The moment
of greatest triumph brings with it the inevitable feeling of being helplessly exposed to and alone against the whim of fortune.

Here we begin to realize the importance of a theme of mutability which has been prepared for earlier by the butterfly image in I,iii. Valeria relates the following incident about young Martius, Coriolanus' son:

I saw him run after a gilded butterfly; and when he caught it, he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes, and up again; caught it again: or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it; O! I warrant, how he mammocked it!

(I,iii,65-71)

Here Coriolanus' son represents the inner duality of his father. We sense that we are not only seeing Coriolanus himself as a boy repeated in his son. The scene is also an image for Coriolanus' whole career. He is constantly chasing the "gilded butterfly," some fragile glory that he catches and lets go again, that he may begin the chase anew. When he is banished he "falls," he "sets his teeth" in revenge and mammocks his own cherished ideal. Surely the butterfly represents fame more than, as H.C. Goddard suggests, "the soul." It is the "gilded" (deceptive), not genuinely golden fame always fluttering before Coriolanus, something which must be won, "caught," over and over again.

The imagery here has an unmistakable similarity with imagery expressing the same theme in Troilus and Cressida when Achilles says:

'Tis certain, greatness, once falne out with fortune,
Must fall out with men too. What the declin'd is
He shall as soon read in the eyes of others
As feel in his own fall; for men, like butterflies,
Shew not their mealy wings but to the summer.

(III,iii,75-79)

11 Goddard, p. 214.
Here the butterfly wings symbolize the tribute of fame men give to the "great" who happen to be in the "summer" of fortune's favor at the moment. The definition of fame is pursued further by Ulysses in his speech on Time:

Those scraps are good deeds past,
Which are devoured as fast as they are made,
Forgot as soon as done. Perseverence, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright.

(III,iii,148-151)

Though Achilles is content to rest on his laurels, Coriolanus instinctively senses the transitory quality of fame, and pits himself constantly against devouring time. By chasing the butterfly of fame, he is "serving" time. Yet, paradoxically, by giving himself up to time so completely and unreservedly, by becoming one with it, he attempts to escape its tyranny. Cominius says of him:

...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,i,131-134)

Here a concept of quality or absolute worth is set against the relativity of time.

Cominius has penetrating insight here. He is observing a paradox which he himself perhaps does not fully understand. Coriolanus "rewards his deeds with doing them" because what he does he does for its own sake. The deed has intrinsic worth and is its own reward. Coriolanus is content to "spend the time to end it" for he gives himself up wholly to the moment without calculating the consequences of his action. He does not "spend," that is use, time for some extrinsic purpose, some distant goal. He is not bargaining with life. Praise irritates him because it has the
taint of the utilitarian, of vulgar profit. Cominius thinks of time as a quantitative progression which a man manipulates to his own advantage. Time ends, is lost, if its use does not further a man's career in the eyes of the world. Cominius' first reaction to Coriolanus' heroism is to calculate the fame it will bring him in Rome. He is interested in what he can report to others:

...I'll report it [Coriolanus' deeds]
Where senators will mingle tears with smiles,
Where great patricians shall attend and shrug,
T'he 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,
'Ve thank the gods our Rome hath such a soldier!'

(I,ix,2-9)

The repetition of "where" here is more than a mere rhetorical device. In this scene Shakespeare is examining the question of where and how a man should be rewarded. Cominius thinks of honour in terms of its ability to impress. It is something to show off. There is a vivid theatrical quality about this description of the imagined reaction at Rome to Coriolanus' deeds.

Coriolanus is not concerned in this way with what is "reported" of him. To be sure, he has urged on his soldiers with:

...If any such soldiers be here --
As it were sin to doubt-that love this painting
Wherein you see me smear'd; if any fear
Lesser his person than an ill report;
If any think brave death outweighs bad life,
And that his country's dearer than himself;
Let him, alone, or so many so minded,
Wave thus, to express his disposition,
And follow Martius.

(I,vi,67-75)

The "report" is not important in itself. Ciriloanus is constantly emphasizing the inner man. When the soldiers applaud him, he says:
He is convinced of a tremendous inner potentiality in himself and in the "willing" (I,vi,67) soldier. Through the selfless heroic act, Coriolanus strives to penetrate to the realm of the absolute or timeless contained within any one moment. He is concerned with a qualitative "dimension" of life. He tries to absolutize the moment, to force by sheer strength of will the quantitative to give way to the qualitative. There is a constant tension in the play between the necessity for Coriolanus to fulfill the demands of time in the sense that Cominius is using it, and the attempt to get beyond time to the timeless absolute.

The refusal of reward is indicative of how Coriolanus is cutting himself off from life. Cominius tells him:

You shall not be
The grave of your deserving...
(I.ix,19-20)

This comes like a reminder that Coriolanus' intense concern with his inner self, with intrinsic worth, and with the timeless, is disproportionate. His fascination with the absolute, the qualitative, the truly noble and the spiritual is dangerously close to a fascination with death itself. And a sense of death overshadows Coriolanus' triumphant return to Rome in the next act.

I have begun to overlap. It is almost impossible to deal with the name pattern without reference to the nobility pattern. The two are aspects of each other and set each other off. In general it might be said that the name pattern concerns the outer man and his relation to others and their opinions; the nobility patterns concerns the inner
man and his relation to himself and to a spiritual world beyond him. The interweaving of the patterns themselves gives us a sense of the enormous complexity of these relationships. It must constantly be kept in mind what one pattern implies for the other.
The Nobility Pattern

"His nature is too noble for the world."

(III,1,254)

Like the speech pattern, the nobility pattern begins to establish itself very early in the first scene. The citizens, talking among themselves, pose basic questions about the nature of Coriolanus. He is a controversial figure. The one thing about Coriolanus which the mob as a whole agrees upon is that he is "a very dog to the commonalty" (I,1,29-30). The voice of the "common body" sees him in the only terms the mob can understand. The second citizen replies:

Consider you what services he has done for his country?

(I,1,31)

(Service and gratitude, key terms in the definition of nobility, are major issues in Act II.) On the surface, this is the best argument in favor of Coriolanus, but the first citizen is less content with a sentimental approach.

He replies:

Very well; and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud.

(I,1,33-35)

Coriolanus' worth is not being questioned. It is his own consciousness of it, his alleged pride, which the people resent. Gratitude is for those who humbly wait for it; it is not only a matter of worth. The next reply of the first citizen cuts a little deeper. He examines the motives for the deeds of Coriolanus for which the commonalty should be grateful:
I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end: though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud; which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue.

(I,i,37-42)

The citizens make a distinction between what is done merely for fame and what is done as selfless service. Coriolanus' pride and arrogance make it impossible for them to believe that he has any true idealism. The first citizen's judgment of Coriolanus is partly true. But the people see moral issues as they themselves are directly affected by them. What they leave out, what they would not perhaps understand, is that part of Coriolanus, his truly noble self, values the deed as a thing of intrinsic worth which has nothing to do with motives or rewards. It will require the whole play to make this kind of complexity in Coriolanus manifest.

Although the word "noble" becomes extremely frequent afterwards, Shakespeare uses it first to introduce Coriolanus. Menenius cries, "Hail, noble Martius!" (I,i,169). Yet our first taste of his nobility seems anything but noble. When we listen closely to his scathing censure of the rabble we begin to sense that we are indirectly learning a great deal about what Coriolanus considers "noble." That is, the noble is the opposite of what he condemns in the mob. As Derek Traversi has observed, in Coriolanus' first encounter with the citizens (I,i,173-194), "the most striking effect is one of intense contradiction."\(^{12}\) The constant working with oppositions reflects the absolute either-or nature of

\(^{12}\)Traversi, p. 213.
Coriolanus. To him a man is noble or he is base, a lion or a hare, a fox or a goose. The people are cowardly, fickle, traitorous and rapacious, whereas the noble man is courageous, dependable, absolute, unchanging and loyal. He is whole in contrast to the mob, the "fragments."

Coriolanus values men like a soldier. These are the qualities a military man would value in his comrade-in-arms, qualities upon which his own life might well depend. In war, a man is either a friend or an enemy; there is no in-between state.

In contrast to this emphasis on character, Coriolanus also thinks of the noble in terms of physical prowess. Of Tullus Aufidius he says:

I sin in envying his nobility,
And were I anything but what I am,
I would wish me only he.

(I,1,236-238)

These lines betray the immature, adolescent, ultimately dangerous aspect of Coriolanus' idealism. He does not see Aufidius clearly because he makes him into an ideal dream vision of himself. A very young idealist is always too ready to take his own identity from another whom he himself has endowed with all the virtues he most desires to emulate. Coriolanus is already dimly conscious that his desire to merge with an ideal enemy in glorified combat is somehow excessive and that it involves an evasion of responsibility, for he terms his envy "sin." There is a vivid foreshadowing of Coriolanus' betrayal of himself and, inevitably involved in his self-denial, his betrayal of family, friends and country.

With each new use of the word, "noble," its meaning becomes more ambiguous. After the butterfly image in the third scene, Valeria ends her story by saying, "Indeed, la, 'tis a noble child" (I,iii,73).
As we have seen, the butterfly image has more than one function. Seen in perspective, that is, within the framework of the whole play, it is a foreshadowing of future events and a symbol for the nature of fame. Within the scene itself, the image characterizes Valeria and, at the same time, gives us another way of looking at one of the dominant notions of nobility which Shakespeare is examining. For Valeria, a butterfly is a butterfly. It is quite natural that this "very pretty boy" should chase a pretty thing. But she also tells us that he has a "confirmed countenance," and gives a lively description of how he "mammonked" the butterfly (I,iii,62-71). We sense an admiration for ruthless strength and for the innate right of those of noble birth to crush the beautiful and helpless.

We begin to feel an association of the noble with death. For Volumnia the noblest thing a man can do is to die for his country. She says:

...I had rather had eleven [children] die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.

(I,iii,26-28)

Indeed, she gains her greatest honour in the end by Coriolanus' "noble" death.

Titus Lartius' eulogy of Coriolanus carries this concept of nobility to its extreme expression as the ideal of a warrior. He says of Coriolanus:

...O noble fellow!
Who, sensibly, outdares his senseless sword,
And, when it bows, stands up. Thou art left, Martius:
A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
Were not so rich a jewel. Thou wast a soldier
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
Only in strokes; but, with thy grim looks and
The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds,
Thou mad'st thine enemies shake, as if the world
Were feverous and did tremble.

(I,iv,52-61)

What the soldiers have termed "foolhardiness" (I,iv,46) Titus Lartius sees as evidence of Coriolanus' truly noble nature. By out-daring his sword he has gone beyond the ordinary role of the solider and has entered the realm of the ideal. He has done the ultimate, selfless deed which has an intrinsic worth that cannot be described in terms of anything else. Lartius can think only of the most valuable thing he knows, a jewel, and call it less valuable than Coriolanus. In the form of an epitaph of praise, Titus Lartius is giving us a sense for the superhuman quality of Coriolanus' action. The epitaph is particularly fitting here because Coriolanus' merging with the "ideal" is a kind of death. When he enters the gates of Corioli he symbolically enters another world, one which is foreign to the merely human. There, in scorn for his weak fellow soldiers, he becomes for the moment the god, Mars, himself. He becomes a natural force like the thunder. He is somehow in touch with the absolute.

Coriolanus' whole military career and his long-cherished ideals of courage and honour have been preparing him for this moment. For Coriolanus the fact that he entered the city alone is enormously important. He boasts to Aufidius in the eighth scene of the first act:

Within these three hours, Tullus,
Alone I fought in your Corioli walls,
And made what work I pleas'd...

(I,viii,8-10)
Coriolanus' whole being is attuned to doing the extraordinary, the uncommon, that which goes beyond ordinary human limits, and is largely a matter of skill and will. When Cominius asks him which soldiers he wants to take to fight Aufidius, he replies:

...Those are they
That are most willing.

(I,vi,66-67)

Coriolanus' fascination with the heroic deed is a fascination with loneliness, with man alone against overwhelming odds. It is the same basic pull that leads certain types of men to polar exploration or space flight. It involves an intensely heightened sense of individuality. Coriolanus' need for gaining this kind of identity was perhaps originally a self-assertive defense against the domination of his mother.

This fascination is the basis of age-old stories of heroism. Over and over again it is the one against the many. The hero is the whole army in one man who embodies in perfect form every concept of physical and spiritual strength. At the end of the sixth scene, when Coriolanus gives a "pep" talk to the soldiers, it is the word "alone" which catches their imagination. Suddenly the individual has a new importance, for each soldier sees himself as the one hero of the battle. Shakespeare emphasizes this idea by having the soldiers repeat the word "alone:"

O me alone! Make you a sword of me.

(I,vi,75)

Ultimately the ideal is inhuman. The soldiers are asking, in effect, to become the absolute soldier, the very symbol of death.

So the threads come together. The truly noble is associated with selfless heroism, with loneliness and with death.
Coriolanus is constantly alone in the play. It is never Coriolanus and someone else against opposition. It is 'Coriolanus vs. the people, Coriolanus vs. the patricians, Coriolanus fighting alone within the walls of Corioli, Coriolanus alone among the Volsces, Coriolanus alone against his family and his class, and Coriolanus at last fatally alone in Corioli. The name, "Coriolanus," won by taking the city almost single-handed, forever puts the stamp of aloneness upon Caius Martius.

Exploiting possibilities for the greatest possible contrast, Shakespeare places the combat between Coriolanus and Aufidius almost immediately after the "pep" talk. Nothing could be more ignoble and more opposed to Coriolanus' fighting ethic than the fact that Aufidius does not encounter him alone but accepts the help of fellow Volsces. The truly noble man stands alone.

The dramatic development of the concept of nobility as an ideal of strength and courage reaches a high point in the ninth scene when Martius is rewarded with Cominius' "noble steed" (I,ix,61). This noble animal is a true symbol for the physical prowess of the warrior. We are reminded of Menenius' commendation of Titus Lartius' courage in the first scene when he exclaims, "O! true-bred" (I,1,29). We sense a criticism here of the concept of "noble breeding." To be of good family does not necessarily insure that one has noble moral qualities. Constantly the characters in Coriolanus are placing emphasis on the wrong things, on the body rather than the soul.

The name "Coriolanus," however, which Cominius bestows upon Caius Martius with the exhortation to "bear the addition nobly" (I,ix,66), is a symbol for inner nobility. It represents a height of achievement
possible to a human being. But it also carries the suggestion of superhuman qualities in Coriolanus and of a nobility dangerously verging on the absolute.

The act ends with the ignoble speech of Aufidius. As has often been observed, Aufidius has reached the point Laertes comes to before the fencing match with Hamlet. Like Laertes, he consciously turns his back upon all that is noble and sacred that he might satisfy his hurt pride. Coriolanus never acts this consciously. When he turns against Rome, it is his emotions which seem to justify his action. He follows his heart even to its own denial. Aufidius looks at the situation coldly and analytically, and decides on the advantageous course regardless of the heart. He is able to carry through his most treacherous plans. Coriolanus cannot. In the practical world the shrewd rationalist has the better of the idealist.
The Nature Pattern

"His bloody brow! O Jupiter, no blood!"

(I,iii,42)

The definition of what is "natural" is a fundamental concern of Shakespearean drama, for the nature of man and the nature of the universe are being constantly probed and explored. The concept of "nature" is a broad one, and though the emphasis on one or the other of its aspects shifts from play to play, it always involves the natural universe, the Renaissance idea of order, and human nature in relationship to "great nature" (V,iii,33), the universal "frame of things." In talking about nature I find that I am constantly using the term in two ways. As in Heilman's phrase, "the nature of" nature," a distinction must be made between nature and the "nature" of human nature. Shakespeare is not only concerned with Coriolanus' place in the scheme of things, but also with his nature as a man who fills this place. Coriolanus' place in nature is defined by his natural relationships to other men, to his country and to the universe. The exploration of these relationships is by no means limited to any one pattern of meaning, but rather involves all of them. But Coriolanus' nature as a man is revealed in image patterns which tend to fall into a separate nature pattern because they emphasize the paradoxical fusion of physical and spiritual qualities which make up a human being. All but one of these sub-patterns of blood,
disease, food and animal imagery are concerned with pointing up the disproportionate emphasis on the physical in Coriolanus and in the Roman world. The glorification of the physical distorts the natural feelings of almost everyone in the play. Against these images of the "unnatural," Shakespeare sets the imagery of the heart, of "natural" emotion. These conflicting patterns indirectly define the kind of balance of physical and spiritual qualities necessary to the ideally human nature.

Blood imagery

Even apart from the battle scenes, the first act is permeated with an atmosphere of blood and violence. The mob in the first scene is out for Coriolanus' blood. Coriolanus tells Menenius in front of the people:

Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
As I could pick my lance.

(I,i,203-206)

Menenius tries to convince the people that the "belly" (the patricians) is sending nourishment "through the rivers of [their] blood" (I,i,141). Their lives are being cared for. When Menenius feels that he has the upper hand, he says of the first citizen:

Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,
Lead'st first to win some vantage.

(I,i,165-166)

Tucker Brooke tells us that in Elizabethan English a "rascal" was a "lean, inferior deer, whereas stags were said to be 'in blood' when in good condition." The blood imagery here reflects upon the whole mob. If the mob are the rascals, Menenius implies that the patricians are the

15 See the notes of Tucker Brooke to the Yale edition of Coriolanus used here, p. 143.
stags in good blood. We have the superiority of the nobility in terms of sheer physical condition.

The superiority of blood in this sense is carried to its extreme by Volumnia in the third scene. It is one of the most striking examples in the play of false ideals being revealed in all their basic perversity. The logical consequence of the idealization of the body is the glorification of violent bloodshed:

Vol. ...His bloody brow
With his mailed hand wiping, forth he goes,
Like to a harvestman that's tasked to mow
Or all or lose his hire.
Vir. His bloody brow! 0 Jupiter, no blood!
Vol. Away, you fool! it more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy: the breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovlier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood,
At Grecian sword contemning.

(I,iii,38-47)

Volumnia turns values upside down. The harvest of death is valued above the harvest of life-giving grain. The whole unbalanced economic situation of Rome at that time is reflected here. War and the ravagement of the countryside were keeping men from the fields, and the lack of grain was leading to more and more wars. War-mindedness was feeding upon itself. For Volumnia tradition is not a passing on of values or precepts for life, but of examples of heroic death. She already sees herself as Hecuba honoured for Hector's bloody death.

Virgilia, on the contrary, has somehow maintained a true sense of values in spite of the sensational temper of the times. She is gentle-souled but morally firm. She does not allow herself to be talked into leaving the house by the two older women. Symbolically this staying at
home gives us a sense for her womanliness, her sense of loyalty and unchanging love, and her acceptance of her place in life.16

We are constantly reminded of blood in this act. Coriolanus scorns his wounds saying,

The blood I drop is rather physical
Than dangerous to me: to Aufidius thus
I will appear, and fight.

(I,v,18-20)

For Coriolanus, here, blood is the symbol of victory. The effectiveness of the blood imagery arises from its multiple opposed meanings. We have to regard the image not only from the point of view of the character who employs it, but also from the possible perspectives of all those who are somehow affected by it. Coriolanus' "mantle" of blood implies his own victory, but also others' defeat; his strength and courage, but also his animal savagery; his vitality, but others' death. The shedding of blood implies the blood that was shed. Shakespeare emphasizes the ambiguity in the symbol by having both Cominius and Coriolanus make a distinction between the blood stains of others upon Coriolanus and those of his own. Cominius replies to Coriolanus when he asks if he has come "too late":

Com: Ay, if you come not in the blood of others,
But mantled in your own.

(I,vi,28-29)

And Coriolanus tells Aufidius proudly:

Cor: ...'tis not my blood
Wherein thou seest me masked.

(I,viii,10-11)

Ultimately all the various meanings of the blood image, both those which

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16After writing this, I found a very similar discussion of Virgilia by John Middleton Murry in an essay, "A Neglected Heroine of Shakespeare," from J. Middleton Murry, Countries of the Mind (London, 1924), p. 29.
suggest life as well as those which suggest death, center in Coriolanus himself. In the blood imagery, perhaps more than in any other pattern of imagery in the play, we are aware of enormous oppositions within Coriolanus.

Images of blood often merge with clothes images. Blood becomes the clothing of the soldier. Coriolanus is "mantled" or "masked" in blood. It is commonplace in Shakespeare's work that a change in clothing represents an inner change. We sense that the blood "clothing" of a soldier marks an essential change in him. He has become something other than human. The life blood of the enemy is the costume for his inhuman, unnatural role. In the next act Cominius will say of Coriolanus, "He was a thing of blood" (II,i,i,114). The end of the ninth scene reminds us again of how Coriolanus earned the highest honours. Cominius says to him, "Go we to our tent:/ The blood upon thy visage dries" (I,ix,92-93). Coriolanus may have achieved something like the superhuman but it was also the inhuman for it involved the deaths of many other men. The blood on Coriolanus' face is like an actor's mask which is washed off after the play. In effect, Cominius is saying, "The show is over." Coriolanus has been playing a role as every soldier must in order to be able to kill. A soldier's actions are supposed to be separate from his life. In his military role he is savage and brutal. He becomes human again, or rather humane, by washing off the blood. A man's purity of soul is supposed to remain unstained by his action in war. Shakespeare seems to be exploring the incongruity of this double role which a society attuned to war expects a man to play. In Act III this issue of action versus integrity will become more acute when Coriolanus declares:
...I will not do it  
Lest I surcease to honour my own truth  
And by my body's action teach my mind  
A most inherent baseness.  

(III,ii,121-124)

Here it is the peace-time role which Coriolanus considers a threat to his sense of inner purity. Fundamentally, then, Shakespeare is concerned with the relation between what a man does and what he is.

Amidst this kind of complexity, we feel more intensely the simplicity and directness of Coriolanus' reliance upon the knowledge of the heart.

**Heart Imagery**

The concept of the "heart" is built up gradually in Act I. Each mention of the heart is important. The second citizen establishes its conventional function by his epithet, the "counsellor heart" (I,i,122). Menenius calls the heart the "court" of the body (I,i,142). The heart, then, advises and judges; it is the court of appeal. When Coriolanus says that the granting of the tribunes to the people is a petition to "break the heart of generosity" (I,i,217), he is thinking both of the gentry and of their political function. Coriolanus fears a fracturing of the patricians' innermost core, their political unity. He also fears, as a consequence, a division in the judgment, the counseling power, which should come directly from the nation's heart, that is, the gentry itself. In other words he sees the political situation in terms of the extreme significance he attaches to the heart. As the seat of his...

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17 John Dover Wilson in his edition of Coriolanus, The New Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1960), p. 146, tells us that the term cor or pectus Senatus was usual "in the medieval writings on law or politics."
deepest and best feelings, he feels that it is the source of his strength. He tells his soldiers:

Now put your shields before your hearts, and fight
With hearts more proof than shields.

(I,iv,24-25)

Coriolanus' heart is that part of him which he feels is unassailable because it partakes somehow of the spiritual. It is ultimately the spirit which conquers, not the sword. Coriolanus' concentration on the inner man centers in his allegiance to the heart. For Coriolanus, his heart is his innermost being, the perfect, unsullied core of his self in which he places complete unquestioning trust. Ultimately he relies upon the strength of good instinct. It is partly this reliance upon unthinking instinct which allows him to fall prey to a passion for revenge later in the play. For he undervalues the mind.

In contrast to Coriolanus' emphasis on the heart, it might be interesting here to look at Ben Jonson's description of the traditional classical ideal relationship between the mind and the heart in lines from his "Epode:"

...we must plant a guard
Of thoughts, to watch and ward,
At th'eye and ear, the ports unto the mind,
That no strange or unkind
Object arrive there, but the Heart, our spy,
Give knowledge instantly
To wakeful Reason, our affections' king,
Who, in th'examining,
Will quickly taste the treason, and commit
Close, the close cause of it. 18

The mind and the heart work together. Here the heart judges by instinctive feeling and hands on her knowledge to be examined by the mind. Each requires the other.

18 Ben Johnson, "Epode," 11.7-17.
For Coriolanus, the heart alone is capable of deciding a man's action and of representing his integrity. When Cominius offers Coriolanus a tenth part of the spoils after the battle for Corioli, he replies, "I thank you general; but cannot make my heart consent to take a bribe to pay my sword" (I.ix,36-38). What Coriolanus has done, he has done for its own sake at the dictates of his heart. We sense already what will become more explicit in the next act, that Coriolanus defines the heart as the counsellor which directs his action toward the selfless deed of intrinsic worth. In contrast, the mind gets caught in the web of words and their ambiguities, in the imperfect and the calculated. In Act II we shall see how the concepts of true nobility, intrinsic worth, selfless service and the counsellor heart are interconnected and qualify one another. They run counter, however, to the concepts implied in the animal imagery, which is also a part of the nature pattern.

Animal Imagery

The first scene bristles with animal imagery. Not only do Coriolanus and the plebeians accuse one another of being dogs, but the idea is suggested in other ways. The second citizen says that the patricians "provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor" (I,i,88 - my italics). Coriolanus, whom the people have called "a very dog to the commonalty" (I,i,29), comes on the stage like a snarling dog. We feel that in both political factions the animal in man is pulling at his chain ready to tear his fellow animal apart.
Coriolanus' relegation of the mob to the animal level is a measure of his excessive pride. In Elizabethan terms he is attempting, without knowing it, to break the chain of being. He violates order in two ways. He strives to surpass the merely human, to do and to be that which is god-like. But he also breaks the chain in the other direction by "restraining" the common people below the human level of being. If Coriolanus could reorder the world, he would be divine, the patricians human, the people animals.

The animal imagery constantly emphasizes disorder in the body politic and in the whole scheme of things. It also emphasizes the fact that men are thinking of each other in terms of strength and prowess in war. The real source of Coriolanus' contempt for the people is their lack of physical daring in war. He says to them:

He that trusts to you
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
Where foxes, geese...

(I,i,176-178 - my italics)

An Elizabethan audience would immediately associate the "lion" and the "fox" with ideals of kingship implicit in "nature," and realize that Coriolanus is measuring the common soldier against the highest standards of conduct. To Coriolanus a man in action is either kingly or animal-like. Neither in war nor in peace-time does Coriolanus have any patience with the human being (who is always a compromise) between these extremes. E.M.W. Tillyard tells us that the lion, the fox, and the pelican were commonplace metaphors in the Renaissance for the three most important qualities of an ideal king, namely, strength (courage), shrewdness (diplomacy), and compassion. 19 It is interesting that at this

point Coriolanus takes only the first two of these qualities into account. That Coriolanus is almost completely lacking in the third quality, the compassion of the pelican, will be crucial later in the play.

Imagery of disease goes hand in hand with animal imagery. In the battle scene Coriolanus says to his men:

All the contagion of the south light on you,
You shames of Rome! you herd of -- Boils and plagues
Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorr'd
Further than seen, and one infect another
Against the wind a mile! You souls of geese,
That bear the shapes of men, how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat!

(I, iv, 30-36)

To Coriolanus the cowardly man is something less than human. Here the disease images imply the common man's imperfection, that is, his incomplete humanity, while the animal images represent his lack of will or spirit which would raise him above the merely physical.

But Coriolanus also glorifies the physical. He says of Aufidius, "He is a lion that I am proud to hunt" (I, i, 241-242). The common man's animal nature seldom measures up to the so-called nobler animals like the lion, especially if the common man is hungry. To Coriolanus a man is either a lion or a contemptible animal like a rat. When war with the Volscæ is imminent, instead of sending the people home, Coriolanus declares:

May, let them follow:
The Volscæ have much corn; take these rats thither
To gnaw their garners.

(I, i, 254-256)

In any case, noble or ignoble, man is thought of in terms which take into account only one half of human nature, and certainly the lesser half.
Shakespeare is concerned here with what is human and what is not. The abundance of animal imagery in Coriolanus makes us intensely aware of the lack of much humanizing quality in almost all the characters except Virgilia, and, ironically, Coriolanus himself -- that is, some spiritualization of their natures.

On the whole, there is much more animal imagery in the first act than in the later acts. One of its most important functions is to point up the suppressed violence in the city. It establishes the tense, strained, unnatural jungle atmosphere of animals waiting to spring on each other. It emphasizes the extremely physical, material nature of man's thinking. And it bears almost directly upon the use of food imagery which begins almost immediately in I,i.

Food Imagery

The first scene begins with the fundamental issue of the distribution of corn among the common people, who, because they are suffering hunger, argue as the poor have always argued. Their want would be relieved if they merely could obtain what the patricians have left over. The first citizen says:

What authority surfeits on would relieve us.
If they would yield us but the superfluity,
while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely; but they think we are too dear: the leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery,
is an inventory to particularise their abundance;
our sufferance is a gain to them.

(I,i,16-23 -- my italics)

There is truth here, but of course the plebeians' view of the situation is highly simplified. The patricians undoubtedly have enough to eat, and to spare. The superfluity, however, would hardly relieve the wants
of the whole population. There is actually a greater problem than that of the greed of the patricians. The patricians sneer at the people for not being able to take a larger view of the situation, but they hardly can be expected to when they are hungry.

The above speech, in addition to telling us that there is dearth in the community, sets a certain atmosphere for the play as a whole. The terms "abundance," "superfluity," and "surfeit" contribute to the pervasive feeling of excess or excessiveness which runs throughout the first act. The patricians have too much, the people too little; Coriolanus is too proud, the plebeians too simple, their numbers too great. Volumnia is excessively ambitious to the point of ruthlessness, Coriolanus "too absolute" (III,ii,39), Aufidius too cold, too rational, Menenius too fond of luxury, of good eating. There is lack of proportion everywhere.

Coriolanus cannot think politically for his thinking is largely qualitative. To him the people are by nature inferior and he will not compromise with the "many-headed multitude" (II,iii,17). His answer to the political situation is simply to get rid of the rabble. When the messenger announces that the "Volsces are in arms," he replies:

I am glad on't; then we shall ha' means to vent
Our musty superfluity.

(I,i,230-231)

Rome's surplus will make good cannon fodder. The city needs more grain and less "musty" citizens. Here imagery of smell merges with the food imagery to suggest unwholesomeness. I shall take this opportunity to say a few words about this minor image pattern because it illustrates so aptly the way in which images of the "physical" reflect moral attitudes
and point toward the larger dimension of the nature pattern, the concept of a natural universe in which balance and order express and are the Good. Images of smell (often connected with breath images, especially in Act II) are scattered throughout the play and are usually employed pejoratively by Coriolanus to characterize the people. Smell imagery reinforces the animal imagery to represent the base, disgusting physicality of the mob. As in this use of "musty," smell images also point up qualities of decay in a moral sense. A concern with the definition of "wholesomeness," a state of physical and moral health in the whole man, is reflected in passages like the following from Act II. Menenius cautions Coriolanus about how he should speak to the plebeians:

*Men:* You'll mar all:
   I'll leave you. Pray you, speak to 'em, I pray you,
   In wholesome manner.
*Cor:* Bid them wash their faces,
      And keep their teeth clean.
      (II,iii,63-65)

As the play unfolds we become increasingly aware, as we are here, of the ambiguous quality of many images arising from their double function of suggesting, at the same time, moral and material (or physical) associations.

The real center of the food imagery in the first act is, of course, Menenius' fable of the belly. Menenius is trying to make an analogy between the human body, a natural biological organism, and the body politic. The patricians are compared to the belly, and the plebeians to the body's other members. The members rebel and accuse the belly of idleness, of storing the food without sharing it, and of not working with the other members for the common good of the whole body. The belly defends himself by pointing out that he merely receives the food "at
first" (l,1,137), that he is the "storehouse and the shop" (l,1,139) of
the body, and that he distributes the food to the members according to
their needs. He knows of course that no one member can have an overall
view of these activities but he asserts that he could account ("make
his audit up"-I,1,150) for everything he receives and delivers. He
reminds the members that they can receive nothing which does not
"proceed" (I,1,159) from him. They are helpless without the belly.

The argument sounds good but it does not stand up under examination;
essentially, the metaphor is inadequate to the situation. The patricians
and senators are not merely the "belly" of the body politic with no
other duties but the distribution of corn. Menenius' fable actually
reinforces the plebeians' over-simplified view of government.
It brings them no closer than before to understanding that the constant
wars, the precariousness of the grain supply, and the influx into Rome
of farmers ruined by war, make the problems of government extremely
complex. The fact that greed enters in only complicates the situation;
it does not, as the plebeians think, make the issues black and white.
Greed is another factor to contend with, but corruption is not the main
issue. The complexity of the situation is, of course, exploited by the
patricians for their personal ends, and Menenius' fable is a good example
of the way in which the patricians can turn circumstances to their own
advantage. Menenius over-simplifies to give the illusion that the
patricians' task of distribution of food has a simple, almost mechanical
directness in its functioning. At the same time he uses the scope of
the task as an excuse for the complexity which makes it impossible for
a single plebeian to grasp it in its entirety. He has the belly say to
the members:
Menenius tries to picture simple honesty on a large scale. The trouble is that the people are not enjoying the fruits of this honesty; they are not getting enough to eat. Somewhere, in the complexity of the process, there is room for swindle. The fact that the distribution cannot be viewed "all at once" is exactly what makes the system subject to corruption and attack. It is easy for the patricians to say that they could account for all the corn; but the plebeians have no way of checking on them. They cannot examine the books. Hence, the assertions by the belly are typical of the empty bragging of politicians. The electioneering politician, for example, always refers the voter to the pure "record" of his life; he pretends to have "nothing to hide."

Actually, the analogy works against Menenius more often than it works for him. For instance, if the patricians are only the "belly" of the body politic, then the plebeians are, as the second citizen says:

- The kingly crowned head, the vigilant eye,
- The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
- Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter.

(I,i,121-123)

Menenius has not thought out the logical consequences of his argument. In attempting to prove to the people that the patricians serve them, he reduces them to mere servants. The noble functions fall to the plebeians.

Menenius is trying to preserve the status quo by making it equivalent to natural order. And so he has the belly say:
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he, 'That I receive the general food at first, Which you do live upon; and fit it is, Because I am the store-house and the shop Of the whole body: but, if you do remember, I send it through the rivers of the blood, Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o' the brain; And, through the cranks and offices of man, The strongest nerves and small inferior veins From me receive that natural competency Whereby they live.

(I,i,136-145 -- my italics)

This all sounds good on the surface, but a phrase like "natural competency" disguises a slippery concept. The patrician would interpret it quite differently from the plebeian. What Menenius is really saying is that the little the plebeians get is their "natural" portion. He is attempting to assume a higher, neutral authority for the maintenance of the political set-up. If it is "natural," there is nothing that anyone can do about it. Menenius' method throughout the scene is to evade responsibility. First he attempts to intimidate the mob with the greatness of eternal Rome. Rome's "course" (implying its present course, the status quo) is natural and inevitable. He tells the people:

...you may as well
Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
Against the Roman state, whose course will on
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
Of more strong link asunder than can ever
Appear in your impediment.

(I,i,71-76)

Next he blames the gods for the dearth. Then he blames the citizens for ingratitude to the "helms o' the state, who care for them like fathers" (I,i,81). The citizens are naughty children, are unnatural.

The argument is highly sophistical for the analogy is illogical. The belly is not the body's storehouse, and a storehouse is not what the
people need. The patricians are devouring and hoarding the food, not storing and distributing it. The analogy would make sense only if the body politic were a working organism as Menenius pretends that it is. The parts should be interdependent. Furthermore, the belly is not in fact able to exist without the other members. There must be some kind of mutual respect and cooperation between the parts because in such an organism all the parts are equally important. No one part can do all the distributing. Menenius falsifies both the biological organism and the political scheme of things. The body is a true organism; Rome is not. Rome is a disunity in which one part is helplessly dependent upon another part which is not supplying its needs. The argument is full of contradictions. On the one hand, Menenius asserts that the patricians are truly paternalistic. He tells the citizens:

No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
And no way from yourselves.

(I,i,158-160)

On the other hand, he pretends that there is really something like an organic "body politic" in which the parts complement each other. The fact is that neither conception of the nature of the community is true and that the people are starving. The patricians' belly is really a "gulf" (I,i,103).

The fable, which seems so smooth on the surface, really points up conflict and disunity. The "belly" image is turned back upon the patricians. They are the devourers who do nothing for the people but, like Menenius, only speak and smile, and pretend to be what they are not. Their only answer to the situation is to start another war hoping that so much grain will be brought back to Rome that they will become rich and
Chapter III

Introduction

Acts II and III form a unity which is in many ways distinct from the rest of the play. Both acts have a peculiarly forensic quality, for they are one long debate in the streets of Rome. The fact that almost all the scenes are set either on the market-place, in the forum, or at the Capitol, is more than a matter of convenience or accident; it has multiple significance. Shakespeare's concern here is with the individual in a completely "public" world, amid public values. Coriolanus, who cherishes only his inner worth, is being forced to live on the outside, for Volumnia and the patricians are trying to push him into the consulship against his own nature. The one scene set in Coriolanus' home (III,ii) is a scene with Volumnia. And she is doing her best to thrust him out into the world as she has always done, to thrust him away from her and from himself. She wants external glory, not the inner warmth of love; the public world of fame rather than the private world of the hearth. She would exchange "his good report" (I,iii,22) for her son himself. She would exchange life for words.

Coriolanus has often been criticized as being a "cold" play. D.J. Enright finds the figure of Coriolanus "shadowy." Traversi makes much of the "peculiar sensation of hardness, of utter incompatibility, with which the play's conflicting attitudes are presented." Shakespeare

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2 Traversi, p. 212.
was certainly not seeing Rome with the idealization of most Renaissance humanists. But the conflict and the hardness here are vividly "human." In the intensity of Volumnia and Coriolanus we sense a great warmth which has turned toward the abstract. The love which should bind human beings together Volumnia gives to fame, Coriolanus to honour. Shakespeare's comment on Rome seems to be that here the ideals of a people begin to work against them. War has become a constant state. A prolongation of the ideals of valour, sacrifice and strength, to the exclusion of other ideals, and beyond a point in history when they are necessary for Rome's survival, dehumanizes the citizens by absorbing and institutionalizing their deepest emotions. Love has become misdirected. Coriolanus is a product both of his mother and of the state but, given his essentially noble nature, we would expect him to turn away from public emotion. Another man might have turned to the private world of the family and the home, Coriolanus goes in the opposite direction for he wants to be all that Rome expects of him, and more. He wants to become what Rome stands for, or should stand for. Instead of turning against the impersonal, ideal demands upon him, he tries to absolutize them in action. His love he gives to Truth. But in spite of his efforts to make it absolute, it is ultimately the truth of the heart and, therefore, a human truth.

H.C. Goddard makes an interesting observation when he says:

More and more, from Hamlet on, Shakespeare delighted in creating incorrigible truth-tellers who discomfort and undo the hypocrites and knaves: Emilia (at the end), Kent, Cordelia herself, Timon, Paulina, even Thersites and Apemantus, for whom - who can doubt it? - Shakespeare had more respect than for Osric or Parolles. Coriolanus is a pre-eminent member of this group... As truth-teller, at
least, the poet undoubtedly admired his hero more than some of his more timid readers do.

Coriolanus does tell the truth but we must not forget that it is the truth as he sees it and feels it. His truth is limited and distorted by his subjectivity and his lack of self-knowledge.

In Acts II and III Truth is at the center of various other concerns, for example, self-knowledge, the nature of speech, the philosophic problem of the one and the many. The atmosphere of the market-place, the emphasis on debate at the expense of action, and the kind of issues involved, give a marked Platonic quality to this part of the play. There is a very similar combination of concerns in Plato's Phaedrus. Although we can only conjecture that Shakespeare might have known this dialogue, it is nevertheless interesting to see the similarity between Coriolanus and the Phaedrus in dealing with concepts of Truth, opinion, rhetoric and probability. The value of such conjecture is not in attempting to establish Shakespeare's knowledge of Plato (too little is known about Shakespeare for this), but in suggesting something about the possible climate of ideas in the Renaissance within which Shakespeare was working.

Early in the dialogue Socrates tells Phaedrus that there is a...law of Destiny, that the soul which attains any vision of truth in company with a god is preserved from harm until the next period, and if attaining always is always unharmed. But when she is unable to follow, and fails to behold the truth, and through some ill-hap sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice, and her wings fall from her and she drops to the ground, then the law ordains that this soul shall at her first birth pass, not into any other animal, but only into man; and the soul which has seen most of truth shall come to the birth as a philosopher, or artist, or some musical or

loving nature; that which has seen truth in the second degree shall be some righteous king or warrior chief...4

In the first category we might place Virgilia, in the second, Coriolanus. Plato places demagogues very low in the eighth category.

One of the main concerns of the Phaedrus is with defining the nature of the art of rhetoric. It is interesting that Plato uses a proverb involving a wolf to describe the rhetorician who is aiming at conviction rather than at truth:

Soc: May not "the wolf," as the proverb says, "claim a hearing?"
Phaedr: Do you say what can be said for him.
Soc: He will argue that there is no use in putting a solemn face on these matters, or in going round and round, until you arrive at first principles; for, as I said at first, when the question is of justice and good, either by nature or habit, he who would be a skilful rhetorician has no need of truth—for that in courts of law men literally care nothing about truth, but only about conviction: and this is based on probability, to which he who would be a skilful orator should therefore give his whole attention.5

Coriolanus calls the gown of humility the "wolfish toge" (II,iii,122 -- if "wolfish" is the correct adjective in this much disputed phrase).

For him it symbolizes saying what he does not believe. In the role of the "skilful rhetorician," Coriolanus, horrified at his own dishonesty, feels that his true nature has been disguised beneath wolf's clothing.

Plato describes the rhetorician as one who uses probability or the "likeness of the truth"6 in order to persuade. Socrates defines probability as "that which the many think."7 Earlier in the dialogue

5 Plato, p. 320.
6 Plato, p. 321.
7 Plato, p. 320.
Socrates has said that "mere knowledge of the truth will not give you the art of persuasion." Throughout the *Phaedrus* Plato pits truth against the art of public speaking. The oppositions in the dialogue between truth and opinion, truth and the art of speech, the improbable and the probable, the one and the many, are similar to the same oppositions at the center of this part of *Coriolanus*. The tribunes are skilled in all the arts of persuasion. In telling the citizens what to say they exploit the resemblances of the truth and consciously reinforce opinion and probability. *Coriolanus*, as truth-teller, does not believe in convincing anybody. He wants the truth to speak for itself. But, as *Phaedrus* says, "from opinion comes persuasion, not from truth."

It is interesting that Plato in the *Phaedrus* makes a distinction between augury and prophecy. Socrates says:

...prophecy is more perfect and august than augury, both in name and fact, in the same proportion, as the ancients testify is madness superior to a sane mind, for the one is only of human, the other of divine origin.10

Later in the dialogue Plato associates prophecy with truth. Socrates says:

There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that oaks first gave prophetic utterances. The men of old, unlike in their simplicity to young philosophy, deemed that if they heard the truth even from "oak or rock," it was enough for them; whereas you [Phaedrus] seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true, but who the speaker is and what country the tale comes from.11

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8 Plato, p. 304.
9 Plato, p. 303.
10 Plato, p. 284.
11 Plato, p. 323, (my italics).
Coriolanus is associated with the "oak" throughout the play. In Volumnia's first speech she says of him, "To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak" (I,iii,15-16). After the battle for Corioli, when Coriolanus has just been refusing "praises sauc'd with lies" (I,ix,53), Cominius bestows upon him "this war's garland" (I,ix,60). When Coriolanus returns from Corioli, Volumnis says, "he comes the third time home with the oaken garland" (II,i,139-140). In the fifth act the Watch says of Coriolanus, "he's the rock, the oak, not to be windshaken" (V,iii,117). It is not until the fifth act that we realize that the oak symbolizes not only physical but also moral strength. For Coriolanus is not "windshaken" but stands firm in the strength of his innermost nature yielding only to the higher truth of the heart. Shakespeare repeats again and again that Coriolanus wears the garland of oak upon his "brow" symbolizing, perhaps, this dual nature of his strength.

If we remember that the oak was the tree sacred to Zeus, and that it was the talking oaks of Dodona's Wood which declared his will, we sense that the oak imagery associates Coriolanus with Zeus. Fire and thunder imagery, especially in the latter half of the play, connect him with the terrible, wrathful attributes of the king of the gods. But the image of the oak combined with the speech pattern suggests Coriolanus' affinity with the oracular, for when he speaks from the heart, it is as if he were seized with a divine madness to utter Truth. As we shall now see, Act II opens upon the human world of augury and half-truths against which Coriolanus maintains, to the end of Act III, an oaken resistance.
ACT II, 1: The Situation

"I had rather be their servant
in my way
Than sway with them in theirs."
(II,i,221-222)

This scene functions as an introduction to Acts II and III, for it brings together representatives of all the principle forces working in them. Rather than focusing on imagery I shall treat this scene, then, as exposition and attempt to show how it establishes the essential moral position of each of the main characters in the play.

Plato's distinction between augury and prophecy gives us a hint as to the significance of the opening line of Act II. Menenius says:

The augurer tells me we shall have news tonight.

We are immediately in the world of the human, that is, imperfect truth where the highest authority is the augurer. Both Menenius and the tribunes pretend to know the truth about each other but do not even know themselves. Brutus says:

Come, sir, we know you well enough.

And Menenius replies:

You know neither me, yourselves, nor anything.
(II,i, 74-76)

Lack of self-knowledge and insight into others characterizes Menenius, the tribunes, and almost everyone else in the play. Menenius asks the tribunes question after question pretending to be the wise man who holds all the strings to the answers. The tribunes are too clever and too concerned with their secret plans against Coriolanus to bother about what Menenius thinks. Like school boys they answer him mockingly in
chorus. The amusing thing is that almost everything Menenius accuses
the tribunes of might be applied to himself. He reminds them of their
age. "You two are old men" (II,i,15), he says, forgetting, as old
people will, that he is no younger. Menenius' display of self-knowledge
is a comfortable self-irony:

   Men: I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that
   loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying
   Tiber in it; said to be something imperfect in
   favouring the first complaint; hasty and tinder-like
   upon too trivial motion; one that converses
   more with the buttock of the night than the fore-
   head of the morning...

(II,i,52-59)

His self-knowledge certainly doesn't cut very deep. Menenius cherishes
himself as he is.

Throughout the scene Menenius defends Coriolanus against the
accusation of being "proud." The scene itself, as a revelation of
triviality and commonness, almost justified Coriolanus' sense of superiority.
But the most important function of keeping this accusation constantly in
mind through repetition is to set up a relationship between pride and
self-knowledge. Menenius taunts the tribunes:

   You talk of pride: 0 that you could turn your
   eyes toward the napes of your necks, and make
   but an interior survey of your good selves! 0
   that you could!

(II,i,41-45)

We sense that Shakespeare is speaking here to all men and that Menenius
is only the mouthpiece of a universal statement. The passage is prophetic.
It will be pride grown excessive through lack of self-knowledge which
will dominate Coriolanus' attempt at revenge.

This first scene between Menenius and the tribunes is a microcosm
of the Rome Coriolanus is returning to from Corioli. It is a world
which mocks the bond of nature, a world in which "nature teaches beasts to know their friends" (II,i,6-7). It is a world ruled by appetite:

Men: Pray you, who does the wolf love?
Sic: The lamb.
Men: Ay, to devour him; as the hungry plebeians would the noble Martius.

(II,i,8-11)

It is a world of luxurious living:

Men: I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't.

(II,i,52-54)

It is a world in which quality is translated into terms of quantity:

Men: In what enormity is Martius poor in, that you two have not in abundance?

(II,i,18-19)

It is the world of the many:

Men: I know you [the tribunes] can do very little alone; for your helps are many, or else your actions would grow wondrous single: your abilities are too infant-like for doing much alone.

(II,i,38-41)

It is the world of external values and public power:

Men: You [tribunes] are ambitious for poor knaves' caps and legs.

(II,i,77-78)

It is a world morally sick:

Men: When you [tribunes] are hearing a matter between party and party, if you chance to be pinched with the colic, you make faces like mummers, set up the bloody flat against all patience, and, in roaring for a chamber-pot, dismiss the controversy bleeding, the more entangled by your hearing...

(II,i,82-88)

This is the Rome Coriolanus comes back to now like a man from another world. He has been within the walls of Corioli, the walls of death, and
he has escaped. But the atmosphere of death "colours" his homecoming and gives the scene a peculiar poignancy. The death motif, sounded first in the image of the wolf and the lamb (I,i,8-11) is picked up again when Menenius perversely counts Coriolanus' wounds. He concludes:

Men: Now, it's twenty-seven: every gash was an enemy's grave.

(II,i,173-174)

Then Volumnia exults in her son's power to kill:

Vol: Death, that dark spirit in's nervy arm doth lie;
   Which, being advanc'd, declines, and then men die.

(II,i,179-180)

The next words are by the herald and remind us of how close to death Coriolanus was:

Her: Know, Rome, that all alone Martius did fight
   Within Corioli gates.

(II,i,181-182)

Coriolanus' beautiful greeting to Virgilia, "My gracious silence, hail" reminds us that he thinks of her in terms of the silent heart. But the remainder of his greeting gives the "silence" a darker meaning:

Wouldst thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home,
   That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah, my dear,
   Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear,
   And mothers that lack sons.

(II,i,195-198)

Virgilia, who doesn't speak a word, represents the silent and therefore uncorrupted truth against which the words and actions of others can be judged. She is the embodiment of the Good, that is, of the good possible to the human being rather than Plato's idea of the Good. Throughout the

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12I am using "colour" as Msgr. F.C. Kolbe does in his Shakespeare's Way (London, 1930), a book which Clemen points out as the only detailed study of Shakespeare's imagery previous to Caroline Spurgeon's pioneer work.
play we sense that the human is being set against the abstract. Virgilia is dramatically effective by the mere fact of being silently present on the stage. In her presence is reflected the ambiguous quality of Coriolanus' triumph, for from the human standpoint it can only be greeted with tears. It is a false triumph. His real victory will be won in Act V when he chooses human love rather than revenge.

If the first part of Act II, scene i, involving the tribunes and Menenius, has given us a picture of the materialistic Roman world, the homecoming in the middle of the scene presents us with three possible ways of dealing with that world, ways which establish three philosophical positions which are in conflict in the play. In terms of values we might describe these positions as follows: Virgilia represents the private or human values of the hearth, Menenius and Volumnia the relative or public values of the state, and Coriolanus the ideal values of absolute honour. Structurally we have here a confrontation of viewpoints. Though the values of the hearth will be in the background until Act V, they are always silently present just as Virgilia is present in this scene. The fact that these values constantly shine through by contrast, suggestion or implication saves Coriolanus from really becoming the cold, hard, abstract play it is accused of being.

The last third of Act II, scene i, involves only the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. Coriolanus' sudden popularity with the people make them envious and fearful for their tribuneship. They do not know Coriolanus well enough to know that he doesn't want the consulship, that he would rather be "their servant in [his] way / Than sway with them in theirs." (II,i,221-222). But they do know his weaknesses. They know
how dangerous his anger is to him when he is provoked and they know how fickle the people are. Though they have no deep insight, they instinctively recognize the weakest points of those whom they want to exploit and manipulate.

In terms of the values of the materialistic Roman world, the world of Menenius, this scene presents Coriolanus at the highest point in his life. Only Virgilia weeps. Menenius is wildly joyful. Coriolanus seems to have everything a man could wish for; he is the hero of the war, his mother exults in him, his wife loves him, the people of Rome throng to applaud him. Truly "all tongues speak of him" (II,i,223). In terms of pietas he would seem to be in right relationship to his country, mother, wife and friends. Yet this fulfillment of obligations has been accomplished by an inhuman war. The fundamental bond of nature between all men has been brutally violated. And now all the other more personal relationships are poisoned and overshadowed by death. Shakespeare takes pains to show us that all is not well. Each of the three sections of the scene we have examined has a darker side. In the first section (II.1-108) there is a sense of the unworthiness of this world for which Coriolanus is killing other men, for which Romans are dying. In the second section (II.109-223) there is the death motif and in the third section (II.224-288) there is the conscious and deliberate evil of the two tribunes who are beginning to plot Coriolanus' ruin.

Through the confrontation of values in this scene, we begin to gain a deeper sense for what each character "stands for." The action or, as D.J. Enright calls it, the "debate" begins in Act II, scene ii. We

13 Enright entitles his essay on Coriolanus in The Apothecary's Shop, "Coriolanus: Tragedy or Debate?"
will follow the debate by continuing to trace the four main image patterns established in the first act.
ACT II, ii

"...yet oft
When blows have made me stay, I fled from
words."

(II,ii,77)

Although the speech pattern is dominant in Acts II and III, the other three major patterns (name, nobility and nature) are constantly working side by side with it. The patterns cross, recross, interweave, and qualify one another as they move toward clusters of images, that is, toward summary or crucial speeches in which all of them occur. Such speeches form a nexus which ties the threads of images together, summarizes or recapitulates them, and clarifies and qualifies their relationships to one another. Within any one nexus there are varying degrees of emphasis upon individual images.

For example, Cominius' speech of praise (II,ii,87-127) is a nexus, a cluster of images which represent all the main patterns of meaning in Coriolanus. I will examine the way in which the images build up to this point in the play. Then I will examine the subsequent nexi one by one always attempting to follow the way in which they are prepared for imagistically. Sometimes it will be necessary to trace the movement of one pattern of imagery at a time. Sometimes I will be able to deal simultaneously with two or more patterns.

We must keep in mind what Shakespeare is doing in terms of structural design. Once we realize that Act II, scene ii, is chiefly concerned with stating the case for Coriolanus as a man who, in the eyes of other men, should be worthy of the consulship, we begin to see how all the
images imply facets of this main concern. The dramatic structure supplies us only with the simple situation. The images go far beyond the situation by suggesting countless implications inherent in it and by therefore deepening the meaning. Ultimately we are concerned not only with Coriolanus' worth as a prospective consul, but with his worth as a man.

Let us look at Act II, scene ii, in terms of the speech pattern first. We will be concerned with what other men say about Coriolanus rather than with what he himself says. As we have seen, Act II, scene i, sets up a moral opposition between speech and silence. At one extreme we have the talkativeness of Menenius who says:

What I think I utter, and spend my malice in my breath.

(II,i,59-60)

Menenius can well afford to say this for his thought is always directed toward his own advantage. He is pretending to be simple, straightforward and honest. But Menenius is a rational relativist. He says what he thinks, not like Coriolanus what he feels in his heart. Menenius may pretend, even to himself, that he is honest. The tribunes on the other hand deliberately misuse speech in the form of slanderous suggestion for their own ends. Brutus says:

We must suggest the people in what hatred
He still hath held them...

(II,i,264-265 - my italics)

And Sicinius says:

This, as you say, suggested
At some time when his soaring insolence
Shall teach the people -- which time shall not want
If he be put upon it.

(II,i,272-275 - my italics)
They are, like Plato's "skilful rhetoricians," concerned only with the "likeness of the truth" which they can manipulate.

At the opposite extreme, Virgilia stands in silence like a living principle. She is Coriolanus' symbol of wordless truth. He is constantly turning from words. He stops the Herald's report of his fame with:

Cor: No more of this; it does offend my heart:
Pray now, no more.
(II,i, 186-187)

In the next scene he leaves the Capitol rather than "idly sit to hear [his] nothings monster'd" (II,ii,81-82). He says:

...Oft
When blows have made me stay I fled from words.
(II,ii,76-77)

Coriolanus basically feels that words change things and they change him. His deeds are "monster'd," that is, made grotesque, unnatural. His sense of inner wholeness, his integrity of the heart, is fractured by words which take things apart and analyze them. What is said of him is never true because words never reproduce the whole truth at any one time. In this respect we might contrast Coriolanus to Hamlet who attempts to analyze every thought and feeling, and to Richard II who revels and loses himself in language.

Ironically, Cominius does monster his deeds, but not in quite the way that Coriolanus fears. Cominius' "campaign" speech (II,ii,87-127) is an account of Coriolanus' military career, the history of a prodigy. The force of the speech lies in the images. Although Cominius begins his speech with the premise that "valour is the chiefest virtue, and

\[1^4\] Kolbe, pp. 29-30.
most dignifies the haver" (II,ii,89-90), human dignity is of little consequence to him. To describe Coriolanus' prodigious feats of destruction he compares him to non-human powers which sweep all before them with overwhelming force. In his growing strength, his transition from adolescence to manhood, Coriolanus "waxed like a sea" (II,ii,104). We have the sense of a slowly gathering irresistible tide. Next he is compared to a "vessel under sail" sweeping men like weeds "below his stem" (II,ii,110-112). Then he becomes completely inhuman; he is monstrous, a "thing of blood, whose every motion Was tim'd with dying cries" (II,ii,114-115). With each succeeding image Coriolanus' destructive activity gathers momentum, gradually merging with its counterpart, death, until the action and the death force unite in the finality of the blow in "he...struck Corioli like a planet" (II,ii,119). He is one with the evil influences of the skies that wreak destruction indiscriminately and against which there is no protection. He becomes death itself.

This emphasis on the way Coriolanus' nature is changed and dehumanized in battle makes the nature pattern the most important and most overt pattern in Cominius' speech. The other three patterns are present more indirectly; for example, the name pattern. F.C. Kolbe has commented on the frequency of the personal pronoun (he, his and him referring to Coriolanus)\(^{15}\) in the play, attributing this use to an emphasis on his "isolation." Apart from the fact that it would have been impossible in poetry to constantly repeat Coriolanus' name, the

\(^{14}\) Kolbe, pp. 29-30.

\(^{15}\) Kolbe, p. 125.
use of the pronoun is certainly indicative, I think, not only of his isolation but of his central position in the play ("All tongues speak of him..." -- II,1,223), and of his ambiguous reputation (no one really knows him or can name him). The name of distinction, Coriolanus, cuts him off from others; the simple pronoun "reduces" him to the level of common humanity with which his fellow citizens can feel an affinity that Coriolanus despises and constantly attempts to transcend.

Thus the frequency of the personal pronoun gives the whole play a characteristic colouring and, in a few passages, takes on special meaning. In the passage Kolbe quotes from the dialogue of the envious tribunes (II,1,223-240), it is quite natural that the tribunes as conspirators, should avoid Coriolanus' name in favour of the pronoun. Apart from the question of secrecy, they avoid recognizing his name because it is a symbol of the honour they hope to divest him of. They are plotting to slander him, to take his "good name" away from him.

Kolbe also quotes from Cominius' speech of praise which is, in one sense, a justification of or explanation for the name, Coriolanus. Though he begins his speech with the name, he does not mention it again. Cominius' frequent use of "he," "his," and "him" has the effect of emphasizing the disproportion between the man these little pronouns represent and the superhuman dimensions of his actions. The name, "Coriolanus," won through these actions, comes to symbolize certain inhuman qualities in Coriolanus and in his commitment to the heroic absolute, the foreign, the "other."

The frequency of the pronouns also emphasizes the one against the many. Like Hector in The Iliad, Coriolanus is always the one warrior who drives all before him:
He... slew three opposers...
He prov'd best man i' the field...
He lurch'd all swords of the garland...
...he stopp'd the fliers...
...as weeds before/ A vessel under sail, so men obey'd,/ And fell beneath his stem...
...his sword, death's stamp...
He was a thing of blood...
...he did/ Run reeking o'er the lives of men...

(all of the above quotations are from II,ii,97-124 - my italics)

Like Menenius counting Corillanus' wounds, Cominius is impressed with numbers. He tells us that Coriolanus started fighting "at sixteen years" (II,ii,92), that "i' the consul's view [he] /Slew three opposers" (II,ii,99), and that he has fought in "seventeen battles since" (II,ii,105). Cominius can only attempt to express the quality of Coriolanus as a man in physical, quantitative terms. His speech is full of verbs of Coriolanus' violent action:

fight, drove, bestrid, slew, struck, waxed, lurch'd, stopp'd, pierce, run reeking

Cominius presents a man of action, not a man of deliberation; he measures Coriolanus' worthiness in deeds. Most important here is not Cominius' confusion of concepts, but the fact that it suggests Coriolanus' own mistaking of the glory won in battle for the highest kind of honour, a mistaking of the physical and the quantitative for the spiritual and the qualitative.
The question of worth inevitably leads into the nobility pattern. Let us go back to the beginning of Act II, scene ii again and see how this pattern is developed. The two anonymous officers at the beginning of the scene present a fair and objective view of Coriolanus. They summarize briefly the case for and against him. Unlike the malicious tribunes or the eulogizing Cominius, the officers have nothing to gain or lose by their "verdict." They are talking only to each other and they can afford to be unprejudiced. Since they are completely "outside" the play, their reactions are quite similar to those that the audience might be expected to have at this point. They weigh Coriolanus' service to his country against his pride; his honesty and "noble carelessness" (II,ii,16) against the usual deceptions of the politician, and decide that he is a "worthy man" (II,ii,40). It is interesting that the officers and Cominius speak of Coriolanus' "deeds;" the envious tribunes speak only of his "honours," as if he had done nothing to earn them. The second officer makes a distinction between honours and deeds:

...he [Coriolanus] hath so planted his honours in [the people's] eyes, and his actions in their hearts, that for their tongues to be silent, and not confess so much, were a kind of ingrateful injury; to report otherwise were a malice...

(II,ii,32-37)

In other words, the deed has an intrinsic worth which makes a certain moral demand upon those whom it benefits. (The question of gratitude will be a main issue in Acts II and III.) Honours are merely the outward signs of inner worth. The tribunes are as unconcerned with worth as they are with truth. To them, deeds and honours are "subjects all to envious and calumniating time," as Ulysses says in Troilus and Cressida (III,iii,173-174). People are fickle and soon forget. The tribunes
will help them to forget Coriolanus' deeds more quickly by provoking his choler. Sicinius says:

This, as you say, suggested
At some time when his soaring insolence
Shall teach the people--which time shall not want,
If he be put upon't; and that's as easy
As to set dogs on sheep--will be his fire
To kindle their dry stubble; and their blaze
Shall darken him for ever.

(II,1,272-278)

Here we have the first of the fire images signifying Coriolanus' anger. Fire imagery forms a minor pattern which will become prominent in Act IV. The tribunes know and accept the "ways of the world." Their complete lack of concern with moral worth places them in the realm of the relative where devouring time is the "great-sized monster of ingratitudes" (Troilus and Cressida, III,iii,147). In Act II, scene iii, the citizens themselves will assert that "ingratitude is monstrous." (I,10) It is monstrous because it is unnatural, that is, out of accord with a higher order of nature, a moral order which R.B. Heilman calls "an eternal fitness of things." Gratitude is the feeling of a certain natural obligation to order in this sense. The idea of "service" for its own sake receives its value from this moral order. We have already discussed Coriolanus' relationship to the selfless deed as a reflection of his true inner nobility (see earlier, p. 39).

One of the chief sources of complication in the play is that the noble deed in a "cruel war" (I,iii,15) may be itself inhuman and unnatural, a sign of disorder. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that although Coriolanus' intentions and motives may be essentially noble,
many of the actions which give them concrete form may be ignoble or 
misdirected. We are confused until we realize that Shakespeare is 
constantly indicating at least three different ways of looking at a 
concept such as nobility or the "noble." There is the meaning which 
Cominius gives it, the equivalent of valour. Coriolanus thinks of the 
"noble" as an abstract ideal of honour which he strives to reach again 
and again through the military means at hand. We sense, however, that, 
by negative criticism of these interpretations, Shakespeare is proposing 
a third conception of the noble which ultimately demands a kind of 
adjustment of a man's physical and moral being to the "normal, ordered 
functioning of the moral world." In Act V, Coriolanus will call this 
world "great nature" (V,iii,33).

Cominius, Volumnia, Menenius and the patricians admire Coriolanus' 
idealism as long as they can see some practical purpose for it such as 
winning the war. Although Cominius praises Coriolanus for the fact 
that "he rewards/ His deeds with doing them and is content/ To spend 
the time to end it" (II,ii,132-134), he does not really believe that 
Coriolanus is not ambitious for honour in the usual sense. No one is 
willing to take Coriolanus' objections to assuming the consulship 
seriously. Everyone is too busy trying to manipulate him to ask whether 
he is really the right man for the office. Everyone assumes that 
Coriolanus can switch from deeds to words, from the "casque to the 
cushion" (IV,vii,43) with no other consideration than that of the honour 
bestowed upon him. The inner man is completely left out of account.

17 Heilman, p. 119.
Since Cominius' speech of praise represents all the main image patterns, it gives the impression of being a comprehensive picture of Coriolanus and it carries, among the senators, the greatest weight in favor of him as a candidate. But ironically, Cominius' main point, the emphasis on the active character of the man, is what everyone is forgetting. There could be no greater contrast than that between the placing of the cushions for the senators at the beginning of the scene, and the narrative of Cominius.

No one questions whether a military man should also be an administrator. We must not forget that the usual way for a young nobleman to begin a public career in Rome was to serve a term first in the army, usually on the staff of a general. Coriolanus had seen much more action than the average noblemen who intended to go on to public office. But unlike them Coriolanus was quite content with a military career.

Cominius' eulogy of Coriolanus has an unreal, fairy-tale quality. No one really believes that Coriolanus "struck Corioli like a planet" (II,i,119). The deeds which Cominius describes are the things Valeria calls "wondrous:"

Val: In troth, there's wondrous things spoke of him.
Men: Wondrous! ay. I warrant you, and not without his true purchasing.
Vir: The gods grant them true!
Vol: True! pow, wow.
Men: True! I'll be sworn they are true.
Where is he wounded? 

(II,i,154-161)

Again we sense the ambiguous quality of Coriolanus' deeds and triumph. The ambiguity is in the word "wondrous" itself in which we feel a hint of their questionable nature. The deeds have been done at the price of Coriolanus' "true purchasing," that is, he acted from pure, selfless
motives. But only Virgilia questions whether the gods would consider
the deeds "true" or "fitting" in relation to the eternal order of things.
Menenius is interested merely in the truth of the facts; he asks for the
kind of proof of valour that a man can furnish outwardly on his body.
His first thought is, "Where is he wounded?" There is nothing really
"wondrous" for Menenius for he does not take the spirit into account.
For him, the wondrous is the sensational. For Cominius, the "spirit" is
the fighting spirit that triumphs over the weakness of the flesh:

    Com: ...then straight his [Coriolanus]
doubled spirit
    Requicken what in flesh was fatigate,
    And to the battle came he.    (II,ii,121-123)

"Spirit" is the power of the fighting will to destroy the enemy. Volumnia
describes it:

    Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie;
    (II,i,179)

The "wondrous" deed is not a deed of divine character as Virgilia would
interpret it, but an act of demonic destruction.

The ambiguous nature of Coriolanus' triumph is brought out by the
words "noble" and "worthy." After Cominius ends his inhuman portrayal
of Coriolanus in action, Menenius exclaims, "Worthy man!" (II,ii,128).
But after Cominius describes Coriolanus' sense of the intrinsic value
of the deed and of the timelessness in time, we agree with Menenius when
he says, "He's right noble" (II,ii,135). We are constantly aware of the
discrepancy between the deed and the idealism behind it, the motive and
the act. This is a major issue in the next scene.
ACT II, iii

"...if he would incline to the people, there was never a worthier man."
(II,iii,41-42)

In the first two scenes of Act II, the emphasis is on what other people say about Coriolanus. In this scene he must speak on his own behalf. He will be obliged to use words as words which are equally painful and ambiguous whether used by others or by himself when he is not speaking from the heart. When his "heart's his mouth" (III,i,255), as at the end of Act III, his words are like blows, honest and powerful. But in this scene Coriolanus will have to resort to irony and self-mockery, to indirect honesty.

The scene opens with a discussion among three of the citizens as they wait for Coriolanus to appear in the gown of humility. They feel that common decency requires their gratitude to Coriolanus; they have a sense for what is "fitting." There is a simple recognition here of the obligations of *pietas*, a natural debt of gratitude by the citizen to his and his country's protector, an acknowledgment of the common bond of nature which Coriolanus has almost no consciousness of. To ignore the obligations of *pietas* would be unnatural, "monstrous" (II,iii,10). The scene opens:

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: We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do.

In Act III, scene iii, *power* will be a major issue and we will see how the tribunes abuse and misuse the simple attitude of the plebeians towards
their own rights and power. The people’s natural sense of pieta carries with it a sense of their place in the scheme of things, of what they ought and out not do.

Coriolanus thinks that he makes his own place, "as if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin" (V,iii,36-37). His loss of a place in the world will be emphasized in Act IV, scene v, when he goes to Aufidius at Antium. In many ways these two scenes are parallels to, yet reversals of, each other. In both scenes Coriolanus feels that he is wearing a disguise, clothes which present him as something opposed to his true nature. But in both cases the "costumes" are more fitting than he realizes. In Act II, the gown of humility should remind him of a simple humanity he has in common with all men, but instead he feels that the gown degrades him and that he is like a beggar in it. He says:

...’twas never my desire yet to trouble the poor with begging.

(II,iii,75)

And later:

There's in all two worthy voices begged.

(II,iii,85-86)

In Act IV, scene v, when he is really a beggar, he is forced to disguise himself to hide his common bonds of nature with the Roman people. He does not recognize the existence of such bonds until he has attempted to sever them.

Coriolanus looks upon the "natural" situation in this scene as something imposed upon him by ancient custom. He questions whether the custom is not an empty matter of form. Menenius tells him:
Pray you, go fit you to the custom, and
Take to you, as your predecessors have,
Your honour with your form.

(II,II,147-149)

For Menenius, custom is merely form, meaningless in itself, something
one does because it has always been done. He has no sense for the custom's
rightness or fitness because, to him, obedience is a matter of policy.

Coriolanus will have to act the part of humility not because the
custom is something inherently false or hypocritical but because he,
himself, has an underdeveloped sense of the bond of nature. He is too
proud to believe in the custom, and this is the crux of the complication
in this scene. Coriolanus is being scrupulously honest. Unlike Menenius,
he knows that for him to make a show of humility would be an act of
deception; he would be violating his nature as he sees it:

It is a part
That I shall blush in acting.

(II,II,149-150)

Coriolanus believes that the intrinsic worth of a man's service is not
something which can be talked about, for words change and sully things.
As a true nobleman the idea of working for "gain" repells him. There is
a peculiar mixture here of admirable idealism and overbearing pride.
The power of the characterization of Coriolanus, especially in this scene,
lies in the constant tension between qualities in him which attract and
qualities which repel, or do both at the same time. The ambiguity is
stated by one of the citizens:

1. Cit: You have deserved nobly of your country, and you
    have not deserved nobly.
Cor: Your enigma?
1. Cit: You have been a scourge to her enemies, you have
    been a rod to her friends...

(II,II,93-97)
The nature and the nobility patterns merge here. The truly noble action for Coriolanus would be to admit his common bond of nature with others. In war he can "stand upon his common part with those/ That have beheld the doing" (I,i,39-40). In peace-time he can only think of the people as those that "roared and ran/ From the noise of our own drums" (II,iii,58-59).

There are two concepts in this scene which are superficially identical but actually run counter to each other, the terms "noble" and "worthy." They are often used ironically and their meaning changes according to who is using them. Because of their iteration we are forced to ask ourselves what the distinction between them really is. The clue to their meaning is given in the first part of Act II, scene iii by the citizens themselves. The third citizen says:

...so, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous....
(II,iii,8-10)

The "noble" is in harmony with a higher scheme of things whose worth is neither questioned nor denied. It belongs to the realm of quality and needs no justification beyond itself. "Worth," on the other hand, carries the sense of the measurable. A man is worthy when he has done so and so much that has value in men's eyes. Worth must have some tangible justification. For example, the third citizen says of Coriolanus:

...if he would incline to the people, there was never a worthier man.
(II,iii,42-43)
Coriolanus and the first citizen discuss the "price" of the consulship:

1. Cit: The price is, to ask it kindly.
   Cor: Kindly! sir, I pray, let me ha't: I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private. Your good voice, sir; what say you?
2. Cit: You shall ha't, worthy sir. (II,iii,80-84 - my italics)

Worth is something a man earns and therefore deserves. The noble is something he is. A man may be "worthy" against his own nature but never noble. The noble man cannot separate what he does from what he is. Coriolanus realizes this in Act III, scene ii, in the crucial speech in which he tells Volumnia, "I will not do't, Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth..." (III,ii,120-121).

Coriolanus practically gives us a definition of worthiness:

Your voices: for your voices I have fought; Watch'd for your voices; for your voices bear Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six I have seen and heard of; for your voices have Done many things, some less, some more... (II,iii,133-137)

After this bitter self-mockery which Coriolanus spits out with all his contempt for quantitative thinking, the first citizen says, "He has done nobly," a speech that plainly shows that all the mockery has been lost on him. Shakespeare points out that the two terms "worth" and "the noble," are constantly misunderstood. They represent the difference between the worlds of quality and quantity. The quantitative thinking in the play is reflected in the commercial terms used so frequently (e.g., worth, price, gain, buy, sell, desert, reward), in reference to things measured in amounts, degrees or numbers, and in a certain spirit of utility and bargaining found in all the characters except Coriolanus and Virgilia.
In this speech, and throughout the scene, "voice" is the most frequently repeated word. The people's voice basically means their vote, but Coriolanus is constantly using the word ironically. Fundamentally he is mocking himself for playing the role of a beggar for anything so fickle and superficial as the voices of the people. All his distrust of the spoken word is revealed in his contempt for their "most sweet voices" (II,iii,119). He is forced to ask for that part of the people that is least worth having. To the man who scorns the people for wanting his "hat" (II,iii,104) rather than his heart, their voices must seem equivalent to the caps which the crowd are always ready to fling into the air in senseless humility at the slightest provocation. In this scene there is a close association of the speech pattern and imagery of clothing and gesture.

This combination is particularly effective in the following passage where Coriolanus sees the public man in terms of the magician or charlatan. Note the underlined words:

I will, sir, flatter my sworn brother the people, to earn a dearer estimation of them; 'tis a condition they account gentle: and since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practice the insinuating nod, and be off to them most counterfeitly; that is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man, and give it bountiful to the desirers.

(II,iii,101-109 - my italics)

The bared head as a sign of humility and deference is associated with the common people and is so often referred to throughout the play that it becomes an image. It is the gesture which is "used" by politicians, and comes to symbolize self-debasement and deception by flattery. The two officers distributing the cushions talk about politicians who have "been
supple and courteous to the people, bonneted [that is, with hats off], without any further deed to have them at all into their estimation and report" (II, ii, 29-32 - my italics). These are the men who substitute gesture for worth. Volumnia had always taught Coriolanus that the common people were

...woollen vassals, things created
To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads
In congregations...

(III, ii, 9-11)

She is now trying to teach Coriolanus the gestures which will ingratiate him with the people:

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, --for in such business
Action is eloquence...

(III, ii, 73-76)

By the end of III, ii, Coriolanus dreads the false gesture required of him as much as the false words:

Must I go show them my unbarbed sconce?
Must I with my base tongue give to my noble heart
A lie that it must bear?

(III, ii, 99-101)

We will note as we approach the banishment scene that the images of gesture and speech tend to gradually merge. The relationship between what a man says and what a man does becomes a more tightly integrated whole. This will be a major issue in the third act. In the man of integrity, the undivided man, there is a complete harmony between words and actions.

The main speech in II, iii (ll. 120-131), is one of the two soliloquies in Coriolanus, the second occurring in Act IV, scene iv. For a play so concerned with loneliness it is interesting to note that only
twice is Coriolanus actually alone on the stage. Coriolanus is not a reflective man; in this sense he is the direct opposite of Hamlet. His absoluteness and his either-or nature give him an uncompromising certainty of heart. And so he feels no need to debate moral questions with himself. He does not allow his mind to analyze, or to reveal the ambiguities involved in, the choices he makes. His loneliness is a quality of the spirit which can only be grasped in Coriolanus' opposition to the world, in terms of dialogue.

As E.K. Chambers has observed, this speech is written in heroic couplets, which, he says, are used "to express the excited overstrained condition of Coriolanus. The citizens have got upon his nerves." It is characteristic of Coriolanus that when he is excited or angry his speech becomes more deliberate, more consciously constructed and balanced in ideas. We notice this in the first scene of the play where his censure of the citizens is expressed in neat antitheses (I,i,174-185). Against the praise of Lartius and Cominius, he uses deliberately plain, exactly balanced speech as a protection for his own individuality (I,i,15-19). Here, the strain of a situation so alien to his nature makes him intensely self-conscious, and his speech becomes considered, tightly constructed and slightly sententious. He is not really saying anything that he doesn't believe but the overly conscious state of mind reflected in the couplet form gives us a sense of self-mockery. He recognizes the ridiculous aspect of his situation:

...why in this wolfish toge should I stand here,
To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear,
Their needless vouches?
(II,iii,122-124)

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Tucker Brooke suggests that he is asking, "Why should I stand here like a wolf in sheep's clothing?" I agree with John Dover Wilson that this is "surely the wrong way about." The gown of humility symbolizes for Coriolanus the saying of what he does not believe, disguise and deception; it is the politician's gown. The men who customarily wear it are called the "worthiest men" (II,iii,54) but are the men who flatter, who talk "in praises sauc'd with lies" (I.ix,53). They are Plato's "skillful rhetoricians" symbolized by the wolf in the Phaedrus.

Coriolanus, as truth-teller, cannot approve of custom as a form adhered to regardless of a man's innermost feelings. He says:

...Custom calls me to't:
What custom wills, in all things should we do 't,
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd
For truth to o'er-peer.

(II,iii,124-128)

Though Coriolanus is basically conservative, he recognizes custom as a changing concept in relation to eternal truth. Shakespeare elsewhere shows how difficult it is for a man to judge whether an old custom still reflects higher truth or not. For example, Hamlet says:

...it is a custom
More honoured in the breach than the observance.

(I,iv,15-16)

Custom is something which a man must constantly question but not ruthlessly cast aside. There is always an aspect of customary ceremony which is based on the appearance of things for much of ceremony is a show.

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19 Tucker Brooke in his notes to the Yale edition of Coriolanus, p.149.

Coriolanus sees in custom only an outward "clothing" without recognizing that it is symbolic of deeper meaning. He has the seriousness, the essential qualities (and lack of imagination, perhaps) of the intrinsically "puritan" nature in its basic sense. He is an individualist for whom there exists only himself and his heart, his absolute.

In contrast to Coriolanus, Aufidius is ready to deliberately disregard custom without any moral considerations. Swearing his revenge on Coriolanus, he says:

Nor sleep nor sanctuary,  
Being naked, sick, nor fane nor Capitol,  
The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice,  
Embarquements all of fury, shall lift up  
Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst  
My hate to Martius. 

(I,x, 19-24)

Here again we see the basic difference between Coriolanus and Aufidius. Aufidius ruthlessly dispenses with custom, tradition, religion, values. Coriolanus tries to fit himself to custom out of a sense for the truth of tradition but he fails out of a deeper sense of honesty and integrity. Wrong as he often is, he has a high moral sense and a commitment to truth which ultimately guides him in spite of himself.

The last part of Act II, scene iii, is devoted to showing how the tribunes resort to the methods of demagogues. The people, puzzled by Coriolanus' behaviour, feel that they have been mocked and taken advantage of. For a moment one citizen defends Coriolanus:

2nd. Cit: He mocked us when he begged our voices.  
3rd. Cit: He flouted us downright.  
1st. Cit: No, 'tis his kind of speech; he did not mock us.  

Certainly, (II,iii,167-169)
Only the first citizen takes Coriolanus' nature into account. His nature is what everyone in the play talks about but is always disregarding, or like the tribunes, attempting to exploit. Ironically, the first citizen is, in a sense, right. Coriolanus was merely being honest as usual but in this situation the truth was mockery. What they all fail to understand is that Coriolanus was chiefly mocking himself. He declined to show them his wounds less out of pride than shame, for he feels that a warrior should hide his wounds. They are the proofs of his strength and his honour, his claim to "worthiness," but the noble man would be ashamed to exploit such claims. The wounds become a symbol for the conflict in Coriolanus, and the scene is dominated by this double sense of pride and shame.

In the end the people decide not for Coriolanus' "mocking" truth but for the demagogues' "likeness to truth" just as Plato assures us will always happen. The tribunes are concerned only with convincing the people, and therefore concentrate on making their "resemblances" to the truth sound probable. If, as Plato says, the probable is what the many think, all the tribunes have to do is to reinforce the opinion of the many against Coriolanus whose honesty is so unflattering and uncomfortable.

The citizens have given Coriolanus their voices out of a feeling of simple justice. The tribunes shame them for their "childish friendliness" (II,iii,183), reminding them of all the things they should have said to Coriolanus, the things which they have been generous enough to forget in their feeling of gratitude. Treating them like forgetful children and playing on their sense of inferiority, it is the tribunes
who really mock the people. There is a close parallel between this scene and Act III, scene ii, where Volumnia uses the same methods to "lesson" (II,iii,184) and "fore-advise" (II,iii,199) Coriolanus to play his part against the plebeians. Both Volumnia and the tribunes attempt to heighten the hostility between Coriolanus and the people. She compares the situation to war and calls the plebeians the "enemy" (III,ii,91-92), the same word the tribunes use for Coriolanus here.

Brutus says:

He was your enemy, ever spake against
Your liberties and the charters that you bear
I' the body of the weal...

(II,iii,187-189)

Both the tribunes and Volumnia encourage and help to intensify disorder in the state for personal ends. They are the true "traitors" to their country.

The speech pattern is very important here. Over and over again the tribunes tell the people what to say:

Say, you chose him
More after our commandment than as guided
By your own true affections.

(II,iii,237-239)

Say we read lectures to you,
How youngly he began to serve his country...

(II,iii,243-244)

Say you ne'er had done it--
Harp on that still--but by our putting on...

(II,iii,259-260)

The tribunes are teaching the people how to lie; an ironical twist to the supposed office of the tribuneship. Instead of being the people's mouths, the trubines are teaching the people how to misuse their own mouths. The emphasis on "say" echoes backward and forward in the play.
Coriolanus talked contemptuously of what the people "say" in Act I, scene i, and Volumnia will try to tell Coriolanus what to "say" in the next act. Coriolanus' distrust of language justifies itself more and more as he moves toward the banishment scene.
Chapter IV

ACT III, i

"His heart's his mouth:
What his breast forges, that his tongue
must vent..."

(III,i,256-257)

The banishment scene at the end of the third act is the first of the play's three climaxes, the other two being the "mercy scene" in V, iii, and the death of Coriolanus at the end of Act V. Each of the climaxes is a kind of "banishment": the first is Coriolanus' physical exile from the Roman world; the second his spiritual exile from that world's ambitions and values; the third his "exile" from life itself. From the beginning of Act III to the end of the play Coriolanus suffers an ever-increasing isolation.

Menenius sums up the third act "in little" when he says of Coriolanus:

His nature is too noble for the world...

(III,i,254)

Throughout this act Coriolanus is trying to become one with his ideal of the noble man. His triumph in scene iii is the ruthless triumph of the individual, beautiful in his devotion to the highest possibilities of his nature, but doomed to failure in forgetfulness of his human limitations. In giving his heart to the "absolute," to truth and to honour, Coriolanus embraces loneliness long before the people "see him
out at gates" (III,i,140). "I banish you" (III,i,121), Coriolanus tells the people. And in banishing them, he banishes his own humanity.

The dialogue between Coriolanus and Lartius at the beginning of III, i, is prophetic of the end of the third act. When Lartius, describing Aufidius' extravagant vengefulness, tells him that Aufidius is at Antium, Coriolanus says:

I wish I had cause to seek him there,
To oppose his hatred fully.  
(III,i,19-20 - my italics)

We sense that as long as Aufidius lives, Coriolanus does not feel that he has fully proved himself, for, obsessed with excellence, he must be the best warrior in the Roman world. Unconsciously willing his severance from bonds, he is welcoming a "cause" that will supply him with freedom to pursue honour. He wants the honour he can win "honestly" in combat, not the ambiguous honour of the consulship.

Unobtrusively, and sometimes only by suggestion, Shakespeare is using two basic submerged images in this scene. The plebeians are associated with water, Coriolanus with fire, and both images are partly expressed in mythological terms. The images colour the whole scene by providing a superhuman backdrop to the action. The aristocratic political philosophy which Coriolanus outlines here is supported by imagery involving the gods, for his conception of noble rule has a divine quality. The noble ruler is in harmony with an eternal order of things.

There is a kind of righteous fire in Coriolanus and his anger is like a divine scourge. In the preceding scene the first citizen has said of him:
1. Cit: You have been a scourge to your country's enemies; you have been a rod to her friends.

   (II,i,96-97)

Now Brutus says of him:

   ...You speak o' the people
   As if you were a god to punish, not
   A man of their infirmity.

   (III,i,79-81)

When the tribunes threaten to tell the people what Coriolanus has said, Menenius ironically makes Coriolanus' anger the excuse for his unpleasant honesty by pretending that, when angry, Coriolanus doesn't know what he is saying:

   Men: ...What, what? his choler?
   Cor: Choler!
       Were I as patient as the midnight sleep,
       By Jove, 'twould be my mind!

   (III,i,83-85)

As Coriolanus is associated in war with the god Mars (reflected in Volumnia's choice of his name, Martius), here he is associated with the ruler of the gods, Jupiter. These two aspects of Coriolanus' nature should make him an ideal "warrior chief" in Plato's sense (see earlier, page 69), but instead they reflect an antithesis in him. The characteristics of Mars are represented by blood imagery, those of Jupiter by fire. He is both like Mars, for his "every motion was tim'd with dying cries" (II,i,114-115) as Mars is often described, and like Jupiter whose tree is the oak and whose bird is the eagle. Coriolanus' association with Jupiter is less overt than that with Mars, but it is nevertheless unmistakable. In this scene Coriolanus swears twice "by Jove" and once by "yond clouds" (III,i,85,106,49), and, earlier in the play, his voice has been compared to "thunder" (I,v,59 and I,v,25-26). Coriolanus
associates the "nobility" of the patrician class (patres) with the father of the gods, calling the people "the crows" that must be kept in place or they will "peck the eagles" (III,i,138). Coriolanus is probably the most noble among the nobility and ought to be first among them. But the Mars and Jupiter in him cannot be reconciled; he cannot stop being the warrior to become the chief.

The fire imagery, which comes to a climax in Act IV, only smoulders in this scene. A senator warns Coriolanus:

Not in this heat, sir, now.

(Sicinius warns him:

...Stop
Or all will fall in broil...

Coriolanus' fiery nature is set off immediately against water imagery (III,i,88) as later in the scene his "worthy rage" (III,i,240) is immediately followed by the image of the people as "interrupted waters" (III,i,248). Menenius says of Coriolanus:

He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Of Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent.

Coriolanus' anger is like a storm and his voice, telling the truth, is like Jove's thunderbolt.

The use of water imagery for the plebeians is more direct and readily observed. Coriolanus mocks Sicinius as a ridiculous "Triton of the minnows" (III,i,88) who plays at being a sea-god but can only rule thousands of useless "minnows," the vulgar multitude. The multitude may be minnows but Coriolanus realizes that they have great latent power. They can become the sea-monster, Hydra. Coriolanus says:
...why,
You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
Given Hydra here to choose an officer,
That with his peremptory "shall," being but
The horn and noise o'the monster's, wants not spirit
To say he'll turn your current in a ditch
And make your channel his?

(III,i,91-96)

Here the plebeians are thought of as a powerful river current that might force the patricians out of the main channel of political affairs. Later in the scene Cominius warns Coriolanus:

...Will you hence
Before the tag returns? whose rage doth rend
Like interrupted waters and o'erbear
What they are us'd to bear.

(III,i,246-249)

Throughout this scene there is a mounting sense of danger in the dammed up force of the people on the verge of breaking loose. The opposing force, Coriolanus' anger, is smouldering. The tribunes, irresponsibly playing with and goading on both forces toward the clashing point for their own interests, are the instigators of the "confusion" which Coriolanus prophesies:

...when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
The one by th'other.

(III,i,108-111)

The tribunes are driving the nobility and the people farther and farther apart so that they themselves "may enter 'twixt the gap" and assume the whole power (as they do at the end of Act III). Menenius ineffectually tells them:

This is the way to kindle, not to quench.

(III,i,196)
Apart from water as a symbol of a force threatening to become uncontrollable, the image carries all the usual connotations of instability, formlessness, fluctuation and inconstancy. The water image is particularly apt for the plebeians because, just as water is an amorphous substance which readily takes the shape of any new container, so the plebeians are readily shaped by the tribunes. The motif of place enters here. With the rising power of the people distinctions will be blurred and no one will have a definite place in society any more.

Coriolanus warns the patricians:

...You are the plebeians
If they be senators.  
(III,1,100-101)

Refusing to accommodate himself to change, Coriolanus is the uncompromising nobleman at a time when democracy is beginning to emerge. He becomes symbolic of the nobleman as such for he completely loses his "place."

Coriolanus will be reminded again and again of this loss of place by the servants in Act IV, scene v.

The images we have been discussing do not "lead up to" the major speech in this scene. They surround it and colour the scene by increasing the sense of tension and subdued violence in it. Before we take a more detailed look at this speech, Coriolanus' defense of the nobility and the conservative political position (III,1,118-170), I shall outline the main arguments. Coriolanus maintains that the senate's generosity in distributing free corn to the people will be interpreted as weakness and fear of their numbers, and that rebellion will surely follow. If the nobility have to depend upon approval by vote of the ignorant multitude, nothing will be accomplished in the state. Withdrawing the vote from the
people may seem dangerous, but it is risking more to let them keep it. For if the people have a voice, the state cannot act with complete integrity. Since the tribunes were granted to the plebeians in a time of crisis, it is only reasonable that they should be dispensed with at a "better hour" (III,i,168).

In terms of Coriolanus' usual attitude toward speech, there is a reversal here occasioned by his anger. The patricians who earlier urged him so insistently to speak to the people now try to stop his words:

Sen: No more words, we beseech you.

(III,i,74)

But Coriolanus claims his right as one who is worthy to speak because he has served his country:

How! No more!
As for my country I have shed my blood,
Not fearing outward force, so shall my lungs
Coin words till their decay against those measles,
Which we disdain should tetter us, yet sought
The very way to catch them.

(III,i,74-79)

The concept of service is essential here. Coriolanus objects to the distributing of the corn because the people have done nothing for it:

They [the plebeians] know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assur'd
They ne'er did service for't.

(III,i,119-121)

The real source of Coriolanus' hatred of the people is their cowardice in war:

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

(III,i,124-127)
Coriolanus is expressing again his belief that only the deed "speaks." Conversely, he is warning the senate that the people, given the vote or "voice," will turn their words into actions. Their rebellious action will be their voice. He prophesies:

\begin{quote}
Let deeds express
What's like to be their words: 'We did request it;
We are the greater poll, and in true fear
They gave us our demands.'
\end{quote}

(III, i, 131-134)

Here we have a merging of the motifs of voice and deed which have been antithetical up to this point. This passage is prophetic of Act III, scene iii, where Coriolanus' own voice, his act of speaking from the heart, will be the deed which calls forth his banishment. Again and again we discover in the play these ironic parallels between Coriolanus and the people. For example, the water imagery in this scene parallels or echoes the sea image for Coriolanus in Cominius' speech of praise (II, ii, 104). The parallels suggest that the people represent that unspiritualized, physical, mortal part of human nature which Coriolanus despises in himself.

There is another important aspect of the speech pattern here. Shakespeare is preparing for the banishment scene in III, iii by giving us a sense of the power of language. We feel it in the verbs and in the image of the crows and the eagles. In the space of twelve lines (III, i, 126-138), we have the following words, all of which are associated with the mouth, with the functions of speaking, eating, and finally pecking:
From the neutral "spoke" through "demands" to "peck" there is an increasing aggressiveness in speech reflecting the process of words becoming actions so that at last the common crows can "peck" or attack the eagles, the nobility. Language, which should characterize the human in man, leads to animal violence; the mouth becomes a beak, a weapon.

Earlier in the scene Coriolanus has said to the tribunes:

> You being the people's mouths, why rule you not their teeth?

Have you not set them on? 

(III,1,35-36)

The voting power of the plebeians is a threat to the state and is averse to the whole natural order of things, as Coriolanus sees it.

Criticizing the senate for distributing free grain, he says:

> ...Thus we debase The nature of our seats, and make the rabble Call our cares fears. (III,1,134-136 - my italics)

The nobility rule by natural right and any concession made to the plebeians is ignoble, and debases the nobility. Order in the state depends upon everyone being in his natural place. The nobility, as the absolute rulers who form the "one" over the many, represent a wholeness, an "integrity" in harmony with an absolute idea of the noble. When they rule *alone* they maintain their integrity, and their judgment is true and noble, but the order breaks down if their oneness is fractured by the intrusion of the imperfect many. Coriolanus says:
...Your dishonour
Mangles true judgement, and bereaves the state
Of that integrity which should become 't,
Not having the power to do the good it would,
For th'ill which doth control't.

(III,i,156-159)

The image for this wholeness in the state is that of a healthy body. A breaking down of order is expressed again and again in disease and poison images. Since the plebeians are infecting the pure body of the absolute state and preparing its death, the only cure is to risk rebellion by depriving them of their vote:

You that will be less fearful than discreet,
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on't, that prefer
A noble life before a long, and wish
To jump a body with a dangerous physic
That's sure of death without it, at once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison.

(III,i,149-156)

Sicinius uses the same poison image against Coriolanus:

It is a mind [Coriolanus']
That shall remain a poison where it is,
Not poison any further.

(III,i,85-87)

Later in the scene, Sicinius calls Coriolanus a "viper" (III,i,262) and a "viperous traitor" (III,i,285). Sicinius does a lot of name-calling with no real argument behind it. He calls Coriolanus the "disease that must be cut away" (III,i,293). There is an exact statement about the risks involved in a cure of the disease. Sicinius says:

...To eject him hence
Were but one danger, and to keep him here
Our certain death...

(III,i,285-287)
By "our" Sicinius means of course the tribunes themselves.

The device Shakespeare employs here of making the diagnosis of and remedy for the sickness in the state by Coriolanus and the tribunes parallel in terms of imagery, is extremely effective. It sets off the essential contrast between their methods and motives. They are two doctors dealing with the same disease but each finds it in a different part of the body.

Coriolanus has a moral foundation for his judgment for he bases his cure on a political philosophy which he conceives of as harmonious with a higher order of nature. He recommends rigorous and immediate action, but only after consideration of what is meet: time of peace, when choice is not determined, as in a crisis, by sheer necessity. He is attempting to interpret the law; Sicinius is taking it in his own hands:

Sic: He [Coriolanus] shall be thrown down the Tarpeian rock
With rigorous hands: he hath resisted law,
And therefore law shall scorn him further trial
Than the severity of the public power.

(III, 1, 265-269 - my italics)

Sicinius, acting only out of self-interest, does not want to help but to use the people for his own ends. He is exploiting and increasing disorder in the state to cover up his real motives for action, self-power. We are reminded of Ulysses' speech on degree from Troilus and Cressida:

Take but degree away, untune the string
And hark, what discord follows!...
Then everything includes itself in power...

(I, ii, 109-110, 119)
"Would you have me False to my nature? Rather say I play The man I am."

Coriolanus has seen more clearly than anyone else that an absolute political system can survive only if it retains its whole power intact. But he has not been able to admit to himself that it might have been fear that made the patricians grant the people corn gratis. To admit that fear could be the motivating force would contradict his ideal of the nobility as rightful rulers. He has not yet realized that the nobility are not truly noble. The success and rightness of Coriolanus' political philosophy rest on the assumption that the elite are really, that is, essentially, an elite with an inner nobility quite apart from the facts of birth, title, heredity or wealth.

Coriolanus has seen the Roman state as it ought to be, not as it is. For him, the truth of the political situation lies in its relationship to a higher fitness of things, a natural order that bestows certain absolute rights. Coriolanus is a truth-teller in the sense that he sees the ideal state so clearly in his mind that he can accurately prophesy what the consequences of disorder will be. But since he fails to see the corruption of the nobility, he places the whole blame for disorder on the common people.

Just as Coriolanus is unable to believe that the nobility granted free grain to the plebeians out of fear, he cannot understand how his mother, his exemplar for all that is noble, could want him to compromise. Fear and compromise are perhaps the two most ignoble things Coriolanus
can imagine. His mother has taught him to scorn both. Now she begins to urge him to compromise, or fear the consequences. She does not realize that the precepts which she has taught him as a means to an end have become, for Coriolanus, the one end and absolute goal of his life. Coriolanus has taken seriously what all the other characters in the play merely pay lip-service to. He has grown up believing what a Roman boy should believe about honour and duty to the state. Like Hamlet, he has not "matured." That is, he has not grown practical, compromising and unprincipled under the guise of adult expediency. Ironically, his military service has shielded him from having to deal with the social and political world of ideal appearances and base realities. Like Hamlet, too, he suffers a severe moral shock at discovering the true nature of his mother's character. Coriolanus has diligently emulated her character. He is one of those people who learn their lessons too well and, ultimately, outdo their teacher. Coriolanus tells his mother:

...you were used to load me
With precepts that would make invincible
The heart that conn'd them.

(IV,1,9-11)

Coriolanus' heart is and remains invincible. The problem is that his heart has "conn'd" his mother's precepts, while they have been largely unexamined by his mind. He thinks with his heart. But his integrity of feeling is maintained at the expense of self-knowledge. He does not calculate the consequences of his actions for he does not intend to compromise. The problem of compromise is often a problem of difference in age, whether it should be or not. Coriolanus is a victim of ideals
set up by a society which is practical enough to separate its own actions from its ideals. Often, especially in time of war, the ideals of a society appear in intensified form in the young men. The tragedy of Coriolanus is, to a great degree, determined by the discrepancy between the real and the ideal in society and by his own futile attempt to reconcile them within himself.

What the preceding scene debates in terms of the state, this scene debates in terms of the individual. We are concerned with Coriolanus' relation to truth, nobility, nature and speech. (The name pattern enters only indirectly in the form of Volumnia's concern with fame.)

The central pattern here, as in the preceding scene, is the nature pattern. The first thing that Coriolanus says to Volumnia is:

Why do you wish me milder? Would you have me False to my nature? Rather say I play The man I am.  

(III,ii,14-16)

This is the key to the scene. Volumnia thinks, or would like to think, that Coriolanus is merely acting the part of the idealist. She does not really understand him. In her world everyone is always acting some role or other for the sake of expediency. For Volumnia, a person's "nature" has no organic connection with a higher natural order of things. There is no one right way to act in accordance with a person's innermost conviction for there is no sense of inner wholeness or integrity that must feel in harmony with the "eternal fitness of things" (Heilman). She plays the part or role that is of most use to her and, since her heart is not attuned to any higher truth, she is incompletely human, a
part of the woman she should be. (This play on the idea of acting a part as symbolic of loss of connection with "great nature" V,iii,33 and a fracturing of inner integrity will become very important in Acts IV and V.)

Obviously, in Volumnia's world, no one takes the righteousness of a young man seriously. Coriolanus is "overdoing" things. She tells him:

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 you were dispos'd...

(III,i1,19-22 - my italics)

Again, Volumnia is mixing up quantity with quality. "Enough" is a typical mother's word that breaks in upon a child's joy a dozen times a day. She still thinks of Coriolanus as a boy who is "too absolute," as if he were going through a passing phase. She pretends that absoluteness has degrees; all her arguments hinge on amounts or degrees of things. She tries to scale values by referring, as in the above passage, to "less" or "more" against Coriolanus' absolute either-or. Volumnia lives between right and wrong where values are relative to what the situation demands in terms of her best advantage. She is her own authority for her mind dictates her actions, not her heart. She tells Coriolanus:

I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

(III,i1,29-31)

Volumnia senses that she is leaving the heart out of account but she has a certain contempt for the heart typical of the ambitious woman who admires hardness and the brittle certainty of the calculating mind. She puts even her emotions to good use. Anger spurs on her mind to scheme for her greater advantage.
Volumnia uses her mind to circumvent moral issues. Against Coriolanus' adherence to the dictates of his "nature," Volumnia sets the dictates of necessity. She says:

...You are too absolute;  
Though therein you can never be too noble,  
But when extremities speak.  

(III,ii,39-41)

Both Volumnia and Menenius slough off responsibility for their actions by claiming that a time of crisis affords no free choice. Compromise is necessity. In other words, when life becomes really serious, ideals are out of place. Menenius would defend Coriolanus if it were not for "the violent fit o'the time" (III,ii,33). He is thinking in terms of what is timely, Coriolanus in terms of the timeless.

Volumnia tries to convince Coriolanus that the present crisis demands war ethics. She says:

...I have heard you [Coriolanus] say  
Honour and policy, like unsever'd friends,  
I'the war do grow together: grant that, and tell me,  
In peace what each of them by th'other lose,  
That they combine not there.  

(III,ii,41-45)

Volumnia's equation of war with the political situation is revealing. She sees no difference in the tactics used against an enemy and those used against the Roman people. Policy and honour go hand in hand in war because war is inherently amoral, unconcerned with any other distinctions than those of kill or be killed. Policy is simply strategy against the enemy when the one aim is to destroy him, and his death brings honour. There is an oblique criticism here of this kind of "honour." If we make a point to point analogy with the political situation, policy is the trickery or falsehood practiced by the public
man toward his enemies or even his fellow citizens, in order to destroy their power and bring him honour. The patricians are inviting rebellion by employing the tactics of war. Urging Coriolanus to go and speak with the people, Volumnia says:

Go, and be rul'd; although I know thou hadst rather
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf
Than flatter him in a bower.

(III,ii,90-92 - my italics)

Volumnia and Menenius are ruthlessly violating the natural ties between themselves and their countrymen, the obligations of pietas between the ruler and the ruled. At the same time they use and appeal chiefly to Coriolanus' sense of pietas. Volumnia tells Coriolanus:

I would dissemble with my nature where
My fortunes and my friends at stake requir'd
I should do so in honour: I am in this
Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles...

(III,ii,62-65)

Volumnia has Coriolanus in a vise. In his ideal world there should be no discrepancy between allegiance to his own truth and the fulfillment of his obligations to his mother, his family and his friends. Thus the basic disorder in society is directly mirrored in Coriolanus' conflict of loyalties. The concept of honour is split between honour in terms of the individual, isolated situation, and honour in harmony with a higher conception of nobility. Ideally, one kind of honour should reflect or complement the other.

The blood imagery characterizes Volumnia and the patricians here. The mother that exulted in Coriolanus' "bloody brow" (I,iii,38) and "Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood" (I,iii,46) in the first act, shrinks from blood now that she feels rebellion near and her own ambition
at stake. Trying to convince Coriolanus that he should speak to the people in "such words that are but rooted in [the] tongue" (III,ii,55-56), she says:

Now this no more dishonours you at all
Than to take in a town with gentle words,
Which else would put you to your fortune and
The hazard of much blood.

(III,ii,58-61)

Suddenly bloodshed becomes less glorious and desirable when it is a question of her own family and friends, and when it might mean the losing of the consulship. There is nothing glorious about civil war and, what is more important, there is nothing to be gained by it. For Volumnia ambition is all, as for the tribunes power is all. Volumnia is quite ready to let Coriolanus risk his blood in a war on foreign soil. Even his death would bring her honour. But a civil war would only spoil her plans. In the preceding scene, a senator has warded off rebellion with the words:

    Noble tribunes,
    It is the humane way: the other course
    Will prove too bloody, and the end of it
    Unknown to the beginning.

(III,i,324-327 - my italics)

This is true, of course, but it is revealing that the "humane way" is only remembered when the battle is uncomfortably close.

Throughout this scene Volumnia is manipulating Coriolanus. She has the upper hand because Coriolanus is the respectful son trying to be obedient as he has always been even though he is silent with wonder at Volumnia's "about face." She twists her arguments to fit her uses so that her methods closely resemble those of the tribunes at the end of Act II when they tell the plebeians over and over again what they must
"say." Volumnia "lessons" (II,iii,185) Coriolanus:

...or say to them,
Thou art their soldier, and being bred in broils
Hast not the soft way which, thou dost confess,
Were fit for thee to use as they to claim,
In asking their good loves...

(III,ii,80-84)

She is trying to put words into Coriolanus' mouth just as the tribunes, the "tongues o' the common mouth" (III,i,22), are supplying words for the people. Coriolanus' contempt for the people's debasement in this respect has prepared us to share the intensity of his humiliation here.

There is no one speech in this scene which forms a nexus of images. But at this point in the play the four basic patterns of meaning and the minor image patterns are so firmly established that Volumnia's reversals and falsehoods, manipulations and conscious misinterpretations are readily grasped and become intensely meaningful. Shakespeare can play with the patterns for ironic effects and can subtly twist them to give us a sense for Volumnia's opportunism and lack of moral responsibility. Her demands on Coriolanus contradict everything she has stood for in his eyes. She makes a travesty of mother love, pietas, honour, and truth.

Her most effective argument is that Coriolanus must not think of himself alone, that he has an obligation to his natural ties. And so he gives in, finally, saying:

Well, I will do't:
Yet, were there but this single plot to lose,
This mould of Martius, they to dust should grind it,
And throw't against the wind.

(III,ii,102-104)

At the moment of surrendering his will to a higher order he is still lyrical with defiance. He feels the conflict of worldly and absolute honour. If he had only his earthly "mould," himself, to consider he
would fight with honest blows to the death. Even in death he would oppose the wind, the fickle forces of change, the non-absolute. (Wind imagery will become important in Act V, where Coriolanus refuses to be "wind-shaken" - V,ii,117).

Unable to deal with the falseness of his situation, Coriolanus resorts to self-irony as he did on the market-place in his gown of humility. He pretends that he, like Volumnia, can reverse his nature at will. The imagery reveals how contemptible and false he will be in his own eyes if he carries out Volumnia's wishes. This speech (III,ii,111-120) marks the high point in the acting motif throughout this scene. When Coriolanus acts a role he loses his cherished individuality; he becomes someone else and suffers a feeling of inner corruption. Coriolanus' truth resides in the correspondence between his inside and his outside. As he says at the beginning of this scene, "...I play the man I am" (III,ii,15-16). Now he imagines the many different people he will have to become:

Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turn'd,
Which quir'd with my drum, into a pipe
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lulls asleep! The smiles of knaves
Tent in my cheeks; and school-boys' tears take up
The glasses of my sight! A beggar's tongue
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees,
Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath received an alms!

(III,ii,111-120)

The images are all concerned with the speech pattern or with mimetic action, that is, gesture. They represent a corruption of Coriolanus' ideal of the "manly." Ironically this ideal was expressed most vividly by the second citizen in the first act:
The kingly crowned head, the vigilant eye,  
The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,  
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter.....

(I,i,121-123)

He feels that acting against his nature will make a boy of him again,  
emasculate him and ultimately degrade him to a beggar.

In three concentrated lines he sums up what the deeper implications  
of betraying his own nature would be:

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,i,120-124)

Coriolanus sees quite clearly here what he is to forget after his  
banishment. He knows instinctively that a man cannot act falsely  
without degrading his character. What a man does cannot ultimately be  
separated from what a man thinks. Coriolanus feels the organic  
relationship between the truth of his heart guiding his physical actions,  
and a higher truth guiding his heart. There may also be an implication  
here which Coriolanus himself does not understand. His inhuman action in  
war has already marked his soul for he almost completely lacks a sense  
for the common bond of nature between himself and all men.

But in spite of what he knows, Coriolanus realizes that he will not  
be able to deny his mother's wishes. With a certain quiet resignation  
that is prophetic of his sense of the significance of his "surrender" in  
the mercy scene in Act V (V,iii,185-189), he says:

Pray, be content:  
Mother, I am going to the market-place;  
Chide me no more.

(III,ii,130-132)
This is the third mention of the market-place in the last fifty lines of the scene. With the rest of the play in mind, we begin to sense the significance of the repetition and feel the foreboding in it. The market-place has many associations. There Coriolanus is expected to sell himself. It represents the outside world where the people gather and exchange their opinions and their goods, where speeches and reputations are made, and, perhaps, executions held. Plato often contrasts the wisdom of the market-place with the true wisdom of disinterested thought. It is on the market-place in Corioli that Coriolanus will be murdered. We sense that the market-place becomes a symbol for the destructive force of the outer world intolerant of the solitary inward turning spirit.
ACT III, iii

"Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth..."

(III,ii,121)

The banishment scene has been so well prepared for that we experience a sense of inevitability here which we do not feel later in the second climax, the mercy scene of V, iii. In the mercy scene Coriolanus, not acting in anger, makes a more conscious moral choice than he does here. In this scene and in the third climax at the end of the play, his "nature" suddenly and violently breaks through all restrictions upon it. Although in this scene Coriolanus breaks free from the Roman state, his mother, and the patrician friends ambitious for him, he does so in rage. His "nature" takes over and a kind of "divine madness" (Plato) releases him from the human ties that ordinarily bind him. He attains freedom but it is of a dangerous kind for it takes him from the "human" and strands him in the emptiness of an absolute freedom. Paradoxically, by a recognition of his human ties in the mercy scene, he will achieve the true freedom appropriate to the complete human being, the freedom to choose between good and evil, the freedom to ally one's own nature to a higher nature or not.

The scene begins with the tribunes planning exactly how to bait Coriolanus. Like Volumnia in the preceding scene, they are "rehearsing" their parts and coaching the actors with their own words. Sicinius is instructing the plebeians to echo in chorus whatever he happens to say. He tells the Aedile:
Sic: Assemble presently the people hither;  
And when they hear me say, 'It shall be so,'  
I'the right and strength o' the commons, be it either  
For death, for fine, or banishment, then let them,  
If I say, fine, cry 'fine,' - if death, cry 'death,'  
Insisting on the old prerogative  
And power i' the truth o' the cause.

Aed: I shall inform them.

Bru: 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,iii,12-22)

This is a scathing comment on political action. Coriolanus will be banished not by the Roman people but by the tribunes and what they "chance to sentence." We are reminded of Plato's discussion of the skilful rhetorician:

...an orator has nothing to do with true justice,  
but only with that which is likely to be approved  
by the many who sit in judgment.¹

It is often the ruthless manipulators who make important decisions. If they can convince the people that they are facing a great evil, the people, concentrating on the evil, will consent to the most flagrant infringements on their own rights in the interests of destroying it. The tribunes have convinced the plebeians that Coriolanus "affects tyrannical power" (III,iii,1-2), an accusation which certainly has a great "likeness to the truth," for they have all felt his absoluteness and his pride. It is more probable to assume that he will rule tyrannically than justly. The tribunes have reinforced and organized the opinion of the market-place, and they can rely upon the power of sheer numbers to make it effective. The tribunes deflect the attention of the people from their own tyranny, and focus it on Coriolanus.

¹Plato, p. 303.
The atmosphere of play-acting is emphasized by Coriolanus' sarcastic remark:

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The 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,iii,33-37 - my italics)
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This speech, half bitter irony and half a prayer, has a peculiar poignancy. The senator and Menenius see in it only a prayer. Like everyone else in the play they miss Coriolanus' irony for they do not take his mind seriously. Coriolanus has a fine mind but he is a true anti-intellectual in his distrust of the purely "mental" which he associates with calculation, ambiguity and deception.

Everyone dutifully plays his part except Coriolanus who is too whole and has too much inner integrity. He lives in terms of action, not acting, and his soul is still essentially undivided. He has promised to be humble and he keeps his promise so long as only his pride is involved, but, when the tribunes call him "traitor," his honour is at stake. He has not promised to allow himself to be defamed. At the end of the preceding scene he said:

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Let them accuse me by invention, I
Will answer in mine honour.

(III,ii,143-144)
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The tribunes have discovered his most sensitive spot, his honour. They know that they need a really flagrant lie to touch off Coriolanus' anger so that he will speak "what's in his heart" (III,iii,28-29). Ultimately, Coriolanus' truth will "break his neck" (III,iii,30). The truth is the last thing to win the sympathies of the market-place for "from opinion
comes persuasion, and not from truth."

Coriolanus' truth lies not so much in what he actually says, not in verbal wisdom, but in his refusal to compromise the truth of his own nature. Above and beyond the demands of any outside tie, he fulfills the obligations of his innermost sense of justice which is absolute and has no "degrees." He uses hyperbole to show the tribunes his contempt for quantitative thinking:

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 voice as free
As I do pray the gods.

(III,iii,68-73)

The tribunes' threats of death, in however great quantity, cannot compromise him. The people shout, "To the rock! - to the rock with him!" (III,iii,74), but Coriolanus is himself "the rock, the oak" (V,ii,117) of truth. He will not bargain for his life as if his truth were a ware to be sold in the market-place:

...I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word.

(III,iii,88-89)

Truth, integrity, absoluteness, value, quality exist only in their wholeness. Coriolanus will not give in an inch for he knows that if he does all that he values will be destroyed.

The word that Sicinius the tribune uses most frequently in this scene is "power." In various parts of the scene he charges that Coriolanus' "tyrannical power" (III,ii,2 and 64) is "seeking means to pluck away [the people's] power" (III,ii,93-94), that Coriolanus is "here defying those whose great power must try him" (III,iii,78-79).  

\[2\text{Plato, p. 303.}\]
He banishes Coriolanus "in the name o'the people, in the power of us the tribunes" (III,iii,97-98 - my italics). Power is the one thing the tribunes value and it is, at the moment, completely in their hands. The plebeians are powerful in "name" only. (The name pattern has taken an ironical twist.) Sicinius banishes Coriolanus with the words:

...i'the people's name
I say, it shall be so.

(III,iii,102-103 - my italics)

Justice has become a mere name, for abuse empties concepts of their meaning. Sicinius, who now has full "tyrannical power," is everything that he has tried to prove Coriolanus guilty of being. Twice Sicinius has accused him of "opposing laws with strokes," referring to the time when Coriolanus was obliged to defend himself against the unlawful violence of the tribunes themselves. It is the tribunes who are ignoring the law and "opposing" it with power supplied by the people who have allowed themselves to be reduced to sheer physical force. By echoing everything told to them with an unthinking, automatic response, the plebeians justify Coriolanus' judgment of them and let themselves be debased to the level of animals. The first words of Coriolanus' final speech are:

You common cry of curs!

(III,iii,118)

The animal imagery here hits home as it could not have in the first scene of the play. In this speech most of the play's leading images are touched upon briefly like sparks of Coriolanus' anger. Breath and smell imagery points up the decay of Roman society and the moral corruption of the people:
You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
As reek o'the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you.

(III,iii,118-121)

As in Richard II, the banished becomes the banisher (I,iii,279-280).

In spirit, Coriolanus has always banished them.

Coriolanus curses the Roman people with their own weaknesses and evil. They live in a world of half-truth, relativity and vague fear, for they do not have his wholeness nor his certainty of heart. He sees them as banished from his cherished land of the ideal, from truth and honour:

And here remain with your uncertainty!
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes
Fan you into despair!

(III,iii,122-125)

He, himself, will soon be that enemy! Bitterly he turns Sicinius' word "power" back upon them all:

...Have the power still
To banish your defenders.

(III,iii,125-126)

He wishes upon them the greatest dishonour a soldier could conceive of:

Your ignorance, -which finds not till it feels, -
Making but reservation of yourselves, -
Still your own foes, - deliver you as most
Abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows!

(III,iii,127-131)

It would serve them right to lose their own city by the same kind of "humane" trickery which Volumnia suggested as honourable and politic in the preceding scene (III,ii,59-61). They are cursed enough if they are victims of their own devices.
This final speech is powerful, sarcastic and full of irony, but it has the melancholy quality of prophecy. Coriolanus' anger is not only the result of hurt pride; it is the painful anger of a man who suddenly sees the world around him almost too clearly. His parting words form one of the most moving lines in the play:

There is a world elsewhere.  
(III,iii,133)

We sense that this other world can only be death.

Although all four main patterns of imagery are involved in Acts II and III, the nature pattern is dominant. The major concern is to define order in terms of the natural relationships associated with the concept of pietas. At least for this part of the play, if not for Coriolanus as a whole, we must agree with F.C. Kolbe that the play's "central idea is Pietas." He gives us an excellent definition of this concept:

King Lear has this in common with Coriolanus that its central idea is Pietas. Why did we ever lose for English the meaning of this noble word? To convey the full flavour of it we have to define it. It means the reciprocal fulfilment of all obligations arising from the ties of Nature,—those between the Creator and His creatures, between the citizen and his country, between man and wife, between parent and child, between friend and friend, between feudal lord and vassal, between employer and employed. It was good to have the one word Pietas to show that all these ties are akin.

Each of these relationships (except the last two which cannot really apply here) has been explored and defined in Acts II and III. Ideally, the obligations arising from natural ties should interconnect and overlap, so that by fulfilling one obligation, a man would partially fulfil or complement another. The degree to which these obligations sometimes

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3Kolbe, p. 131.
4Ibid.
conflict can be a measure of disorder in the individual or in those around him, or in both.

In the real world, these relationships can at best be held only in a tenuous balance. Man tends to place a disproportionate emphasis upon one or another of them, forgetting, or not recognizing, that "all these ties are akin." He becomes the victim of conflicting loyalties.

As Coriolanus has an underdeveloped sense of the bond of nature between himself and all men, he has a proportionately more intense desire to ally himself with a higher order of things whose authority he recognizes as the truth of his heart. He feels his own nature as an organic part of a larger, absolute scheme of things. In Act III, scene iii, he becomes completely identified with order, and attains a classical balance between his mind and his heart. As a representative of order, it is inevitable that he should clash with his surroundings. Rome has forgotten the highest bond of nature and the State has usurped the realm of the ideal. Pietas has become an idea which is everywhere used and abused rather than recognized and followed.

At this point in the play the situation is highly ironical. Although the Romans abuse the bond of nature on many levels, they use it, as Volumnia did, against Coriolanus. In banishing him, Rome is paying negative tribute to natural order and to the human ties which are a man's most precious possession.

Coriolanus has attained the freedom of a man completely in tune with the order of the universe. There is a paradox here closely allied with the Christian concept of the freedom attained by the soul which is in harmony with God. It is a moment of freedom which implies release
from everything which gives it human meaning. Coriolanus' banishment condemns him to live out this "moment" forever. We sense already that his freedom has been purchased at too high a price.
Chapter V

ACT IV, i

"I'll do well yet..."

(IV,i,21)

Coriolanus has attained complete freedom but he doesn't know what to do with it. Though his banishment is a kind of triumph, it is not final for he has not understood that his moral victory was greater than any mere war exploit could ever be. Ironically, he tells his mother, I'll do well yet" (IV,i,21). In his farewell to his mother, wife and friends, we realize that he has passed beyond a high point in his life which cannot be sustained. The relative calmness of his farewell is less a result of resigned clarity about his situation than of the fact that he hasn't fully realized yet what it means.

To the man of action the victory of mere words is not quite real. Already in this first scene we sense that Coriolanus is attempting to assert himself against his fate in the one way natural to a warrior, that is, physically. The hardness of the language betrays his agitation, his straining at the reins. His first speech is full of plosive consonants, b,t,k,st:

Come, leave your tears: a brief farewell: the beast With many heads butts me away. Nay, mother, Where is your ancient courage? you were us'd To say extremity was a trier of spirits; That common chances common men could bear; That when the sea was calm all boats alike Show'd mastership in floating; fortune's blows When most struck home,—being gentle, wounded, craves A noble cunning: you were us'd to load me With precepts that would make invincible The heart that conn'd them.  

(IV,i,1-11)
And note the hard _ sounds here. Coriolanus tells his mother:

...your son
Will or exceed the common or be caught
With _autelous baits and practice.

(IV,i,31-33)

Coriolanus' need for action, finding an outlet in his speech, is perceptible in verbs and nouns of combat scattered throughout the scene; for example, "butts, blows, struck, strike, strokes, thrust." Already beginning to see his exile in terms of a fight, he attempts to fall back into his familiar element, the world of opposition and blows. He thinks that he can still pursue his old dream of excellence, of "exceed the common," not realizing that he has already triumphed morally over the "common" as he has over the Roman commonwealth. Coriolanus' banishment has not only cut him off from his natural ties but from opposition.

And for a man of his either-or mentality who sees life as a conflict of extremes, the lack of an "enemy" is less supportable than a deprivation of family and friends. Coriolanus' use of the word "common" three times in this scene reveals his attempt to convince himself that he still has a raison d'être, a dragon to slay.

His prophetic use of the image of the "lonely dragon" is one of the most successful and fascinating images in the play:

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

(IV,i,29-31)

The dragon is mentioned only three times in the play, but its suggestivity is enormous. Already we sense that Coriolanus sees his banishment as a kind of lonely identification with an enemy, not yet the Volsces, but some vague and fierce romantic enemy. Cut off from
Roman civilization, he sees himself as the outcast monster condemned to live in the fens, a word Coriolanus associates throughout the play with the common people to suggest their unwholesomeness and sloth. Ironically, Coriolanus will become this dragon when he turns to revenge and plays the role of an evil monster, unspeaking, dreadful, and unapproachable. Ultimately, Coriolanus will have to fight a dragon again, not in physical but in spiritual combat. He will have to slay the dragon within himself.
ACT IV, ii

"Anger's my meat..."
(IV,ii,50)

In terms of dramatic structure this is one of the most interesting scenes in the play. It forms the first of two short scenes which together make up a transition between Coriolanus' farewell and his arrival at Antium. Though scenes ii and iii seem at first glance merely to fill a space of time needed at this point to make Coriolanus' volte-face plausible and yet sudden enough for dramatic contrast, they fulfil many other purposes. Indirectly, scene ii dramatizes Coriolanus' decision to take revenge on Rome. Volumnia is consumed with anger and, through the mother, we sense what is going on in the son. It is Volumnia's spirit working in Coriolanus which ferments in him and finally bursts out in rage. Now that Coriolanus is alone, and there are no social pressures from the outside to influence him, the inescapable emotional force of his whole upbringing takes over. The intensity of Volumnia's anger and wrath in this scene (people "say she's mad" - IV, ii,9) convinces us that Coriolanus' decision is largely determined by emotions long fostered by his mother. Therefore the substitution of Volumnia for Coriolanus has the effectiveness of vivid dramatic economy. To use a soliloquy here to dramatize Coriolanus' state of mind would be completely out of character for the main point is that Coriolanus does not think out or analyze his choice of revenge; he has nothing to soliloquize about.
It is in Volumnia's speeches that the fire imagery, so important in Acts IV and V, is first overtly established. Fire, redness, heat, anger and revenge are all facets of an image pattern which was submerged but discernible in Act III. Already in the farewell scene Volumnia sounds the note of revenge:

Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,  
And occupations perish!  

(IV, i, 13-14)

It is interesting how indirect some of these images are. For example:

Vol: ...I would my son  
Were in Arabia, and thy [Sicinius'] tribe before him,  
His good sword in his hand.  

(IV, ii, 23-25)

As in the dragon image we sense a fascination with distant, exotic glory, here, revenge in the burning desert. Volumnia is concerned with the romantic and the uncommon just as Coriolanus was in the preceding scene. She says:

As far as doth the Capitol exceed  
The meanest house in Rome, so far my son,—  
This lady's husband here, this, do you see,—  
Whom you have banished, does exceed you all.  

(IV, ii, 39-42 - my italics)

This parallel in concerns reinforces the structural dramatic parallel we have observed between Volumnia and Coriolanus at this point in the play. We sense that they are both still obsessed by a dream of excellence, but now the emphasis is less on excelling in terms of the noble and the honourable than in terms of the uncommon. Divested of its foundation in patriotism, in bonds to the state, Coriolanus' idealism is transformed into a kind of "romantic" outlawry. Freed from the definite limitations imposed upon a man by his place in the world, his pride soars, and
self-assertion replaces the surrender of the self in the service of a higher cause. Coriolanus resorts to a "noble cunning" (IV,i,9).
This scene, like II,ii, is a short summing up of the situation at this point. But the Volscian spy and the Roman informer here are more personally involved in the action than were the officers in Act II. They give us both a subjective and objective view of things: subjective, because the danger of their position involves them intimately in political events; objective, because their secret missions between the two countries place them to some degree outside the action. This blurring of the usual distinction between objective and subjective, inside and outside, adds to the atmosphere of confusion this scene establishes for the whole of Act IV.

We are immediately in the world of appearances, and the question is, how do we know one another:

Rom: I know you well, sir, and you know me: your name I think is Adrian.
Vols: It is so, sir: truly, I have forgot you.
Rom: I am a Roman; and my services are, as you are, against 'em: know you me yet?

(IV,iii,1-5)

The truth about a man is associated with what he says:

Vols: You had more beard, when I last saw you; but your favour is well appeared by your tongue.

(IV,iii,8-10)

Recognition between the spy and the informer is an identification of one another's disguise. Knowledge equals appearance, and appearance equals deception. The stage directions for the Folio edition of 1623 list Micanor and Adrian as "a Roman and a Folsce" with the implication that,
in terms of the enemy country, a man is not an individual with a name, but a representative of his own people. Though Nicanor is an informer, he identifies himself by saying, "I am a Roman" (IV,iii,4), the one fact which no man can, in the long run, disguise. Nicanor's identification of himself in terms of his country generalizes his particular defection, and we sense the inner division of Rome itself. The concept of service is reversed, and Roman is working against Roman. In the following scene Coriolanus, forgetting that he is still a Roman in spite of his banishment, goes to Aufidius as an individual to avenge a private wrong and identifies himself only as "Coriolanus."

On a public and private level there is a reversal of values, loyalties, and roles. The Volscie says to the Roman:

You take my part from me, sir.  
(IV,iii,55)

Not only does this scene reveal confusion and treachery on a national scale; it also furnishes an immediate comparison with Coriolanus' betrayal. We automatically identify Coriolanus in IV,v, with Nicanor, and realize that he is acting no differently than the common informer did.

By this point in the play the indirect image patterns (the minor patterns of service, identity, disguise, and playing a part, connected with the major patterns of name and nobility) are as readily discernible as the fire pattern which functions prophetically in this scene:

Volscie: ...Our state thinks not so; they are in most war-like preparation, and hope to come upon them in the heat of their division.
Rom: The main blaze of it is past, but a small thing would make it flame again...This lies glowing, I can tell you, and is almost mature for the violent breaking out.

(IV,iii,16-21, 25-27 - my italics)

Just as the "Roman" prepares us for Coriolanus' treachery, the fire imagery for Rome prepares us for the imagery of Coriolanus' red anger.

This scene and the preceding one are like wedges in the action which point forward and focus all the surrounding events and images upon Coriolanus alone.
ACT IV, iv

"O world, thy slippery turns!"

(IV,iv,12)

In this short scene Coriolanus is, for the second and last time in the play, alone on the stage. Nothing could give us a deeper sense for the unnaturalness of what he is doing than the fact that he is reflecting upon the irony of his situation. As we observed in his brief soliloquy in Act II (II,iii,119-131), Coriolanus takes refuge in the mind and resorts to self-irony when forced to play a role which he feels is against his nature. In wrath, he withdraws his heart now from his action, and his mind begins to rationalize his choice.

He tries to convince himself that his own defection is a consequence of the nature of things:

O world, thy slippery seems to wear one heart,...

On the dissention of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity...

(IV,iv,11-12, 17-18)

How strange to hear the man who always used only himself and his heart as the standard for all things, "philosophizing" in terms of the weakness and inconstancy of others. The same man who has scorned fickleness and change throughout the play, now uses them as an excuse for his willful action, his treachery.

The imagery here has a striking resemblance to that in Hamlet's last soliloquy (Hamlet, IV,iv) Let us compare the two passages.

Hamlet says:

...I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,'
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor's at the stake.

(IV,iv,47-56 - my italics)

and later:

...I see

The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds.

(IV,iv,59-62 - my italics)

Coriolanus says:

...so, fell'est foes,
Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep
To take the one by the other, by some chance,
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends
And interjoin their issues. So with me:
My birth-place hate I, and my love's upon
This enemy town.

(IV,iv,18-24 - my italics)

In each case the argument turns on the justification for revenge. Hamlet
is appalled by the nature of things, by war without a cause, by violent
action at the dictate of a whim. He feels that violent action is
justifiable only when honour is involved. Fortinbras has the ability,
which Hamlet envies, to act, even though his cause is as empty of honour
as an "egg-shell." Hamlet sees clearly that Fortinbras' action has no
sanction in terms of honour, but he is apparently not sure whether his
own action against Claudius would be truly honourable or not. One of
the main problems for both Hamlet and Coriolanus is the recognition of
the difference between private honour, and honour in relationship to a
higher scheme of things. Hamlet seems unable to equate the two kinds of
honour in his individual situation. He believes that he has more cause
for action than does Fortinbras; but is it cause enough, of the right
kind?

Coriolanus, too, has cause for revenge, and certainly his "honor's
at the stake" (Hamlet, IV, iv, 56). But having the "cause and will and
strength and means" (Hamlet, IV, iv, 49) does not necessarily give a man
the right to take action. We cannot help thinking of the third citizen's
distinction between means and authority in Act II:

We have power in ourselves to do it,
but it is a power that we have no
power to do...

(II, iii, 4-6)

Coriolanus must rationalize his action because he no longer has the
authority of his heart's truth. To justify his willingness he devaluates
his world, and throws himself upon the contingencies of chance. Ironically
this devaluation makes his betrayal as senseless as "some trick not worth
an egg" (IV, iv, 21).
In Act IV, scene v, we see more clearly perhaps than anywhere else in the play how Shakespeare has constructed the scene in terms of the dominant image pattern. Dramatic structure is here "image" structure for the two are organically fused. Shakespeare exploits the familiar dramatic function of servants commenting on the action to introduce the most common meaning of service. "Servingmen" appear both at the beginning and at the end of this scene in which Coriolanus transfers his "service" to Aufidius in a manner strongly suggestive of servitude. The whole scene echoes and amplifies the servingman's exclamation in the first line, "What service is here!"

Here we have an illustration of the way in which ideas, through constant repetition, take on the character of images. By this point in the play we are sensitive to the idea of service as symbolizing a whole area of meaning for Coriolanus. It is typical of Shakespeare's late method that an image is often built up indirectly and is so organically related to the rest of the play that it does not call attention to itself as such until it becomes dominant in a particular scene. Then we suddenly become aware that the image has imperceptibly gathered to itself a wealth of meaning which we can set against the present situation.

If we go back and trace the word "service" through the play, we are surprised to find that it has appeared almost unnoticed at several
crucial points in the action. For example, at Volumnia's first mention of the consulship, Coriolanus tells her:

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

(II,i,220-222 - my italics)

The essence of his life is service to the Roman state as a warrior. When he is finally convinced that he should accept the consulship, he thinks of it as a different form of service:

Men: The senate, Coriolanus, are well pleas'd
To make thee consul.
Cor: I do owe them still
My life and services.

(II,i,137-139 - my italics)

What Coriolanus most balks at in the market-place is having to brag to the people, "Look, sir, my wounds! I got them in my country's service" (II,iii,56-57 - my italics). The chief sources of Coriolanus' hatred of the common people are their cowardice and their unwillingness to give themselves to Rome as soldiers. He, unlike the senate, would have denied them corn and let them starve, for "they n'er did service for 't" (III,i,121 - my italics). In the banishment scene it is Brutus' allusion to Coriolanus' service to his country which brings out his bitterest defiance (III,iii,81-89).

The complete reversal of loyalties and values in Act IV is summed up in the act of pledging service to another master. We realize how much service meant to Coriolanus by his insistence now on betraying it, for, in counter-service, he wants to strike back at Rome with a hatred as strong as his former love. Since Coriolanus recognizes only conflicts of extremes working themselves out in action, he must fight for Rome, or against her; the inactivity of banishment is insupportable compromise.
Coriolanus tells Aufidius:

...make my misery serve thy turn: so use it
That my revengeful services may prove
As benefits to thee, for I will fight
Against my canker'd country with the spleen
Of all the under fiends.

(IV,v,94-98 - my italics)

These few lines, which sound like lines of Volumnia, reveal the extent to which Coriolanus has turned his back upon his former self and plunged into the world of utility and expediency. Now willing to use his deeds for a purpose beyond themselves, Coriolanus, who once scorned reward, does everything for the ignoble reward of revenge. He who once tried to cure his sick "canker'd country" by an appeal to a higher truth now joins the forces of evil, the "under fiends," against her.

The pattern of meaning surrounding "service" implies the even more basic concerns of action and deed. Hamlet, for example, by not taking action, kept himself free from the degradation which is the inevitable price which must be paid for the satisfaction of revenge. Coriolanus, when he was thinking clearly and in opposition to his mother, realized that the outward directed deed could not be separated from his inner moral integrity. He told Volumnia:

...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,ii,120-123)

Alone, in his banishment, without the benefit of clear-cut opposing issues to decide between, Coriolanus follows or becomes the victim of his strongest instincts, the dominant elements of his nature. He must act. By long habit, he feels that action is good for it has always been
channeled in a direction which the heart could approve of. He does not stop to think that the channel, service to Rome, was a condition of his existence, nor that it subsumed a whole network of relationships, dictated by his place in the world, that seemed to sanctify his deeds. But, in banishment, the non-contemplative warrior is cut off from all channels for effectiveness in terms of the Good. Caught by circumstances and by his own nature, Coriolanus' scorn of the mind becomes now a tragic flaw. Not allowing his mind to distinguish between them, he willingly mistakes vengeful wrath (his "heart of wreak" - IV,v,91) for that "divine madness" of the heart which dictated his action in Act III. Driven by his instinct for action, he enters, "in mere spite" (IV,v,88), the only door left open to him, that of the enemy.

Negatively, the whole nobility pattern is involved here. Up to this point in the play Coriolanus gave service, that is his whole self in surrender to the deed, for its own sake, and he attained the freedom of the noble soul in harmony with the truth. Now that he is exchanging his service for personal advantage, he is selling his freedom and placing himself in the servitude to the enemy and to his own anger.

Though Coriolanus has always scorned the opinions of the many, his pride is finally damaged by ingratitude:

My surname Coriolanus: the painful service,
The extreme dangers, and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country are requited
But with that surname...

(IV,v,74-77 - my italics)

Coriolanus feels, or thinks he should feel, that his name is not reward enough. We sense that much of his complaint to Aufidius (IV,v,71-107), true as it may be, is for Coriolanus rationalization after the fact.
The chief source of his anger is his helplessness, his inability to do anything, the torture of having to sit and wait. The imagery of sitting will become increasingly important from now on and will reach a climax in the fifth act.

His speech (IV,v,71-107) to Aufidius forms a nexus of images representing all the patterns, like the nobility pattern, in their negative aspects. The name pattern complements and interweaves with the nobility pattern. For example, Aufidius' superficiality, his lack of inner nobility, is apparent in the emphasis he places on identifying Coriolanus by name. "What is thy name?", he asks again and again. He needs the reassurance of name, in the sense of a worldly claim to respect, to affirm his own judgment that Coriolanus really shows "a noble vessel" (IV,v,68).

We have here the opposite of the situation in Romeo and Juliet: Juliet's musing, "What's in a name?" (II,i,85) early in the balcony scene. Again and again Romeo and Juliet assure one another that a mere name, no matter what it represents in terms of family ties or the outside world, is not ultimately a "part of thee" (II,i,90). Romeo says:

...By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am.
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself
Because it is an enemy to thee.

(II,i,95-97)

In terms of the heart, a name is meaningless. Yet not to take into account the facts of the natural ties it represents can be disastrous, as Romeo and Juliet soon learn.

At the beginning of Coriolanus' speech to Aufidius (IV,v,71-107), Coriolanus makes a distinction between his name, Caius Martius, and his
surname, Coriolanus. Plutarch carefully explains how, among the Romans, a third or additional name was awarded for "some act or notable service, or for some mark on their face, or of some shape of their body, or else for some special virtue that they had." He also points out that the Romans "used more than any other nation to give names of mockery."¹

Coriolanus' third name, the only reward for his noble service to Rome which he did not refuse, symbolizes his honour and his cherished singularity. At the same time, it is evidence that Coriolanus shared the common human need or weakness for some "sign" by which his inner, noble, unnamed self might be recognized. This surname sums up many aspects of the name pattern.

An honourable name should be the outer proof of inner nobility. But reputation, fame, honour, making a "name" for oneself, are concerns of the outer world which often become ends in themselves. Men sell themselves to these ends as Coriolanus sells himself to Aufidius, and names become meaningless because they lose their inner justification. Ironically, Coriolanus' statement about his surname that "only that name remains" (IV,v,79 - my italics), is quite fitting, for the heart has gone out of him. His honour is now only a name.

It is as if this name, won by the shedding of "tuns of blood" (IV,v,105) in the service of death and war, had become a force of its own, estranging and mocking the man whom it once honoured. It is the mark upon him of death waiting in Corioli. With this name, Coriolanus betrays his name, Caius Martius, not realizing that it is just the family name which no one can ever take from him, for it represents ties which

exist and claim his inner being even in banishment. In the fifth act Coriolanus will have to choose between the two names again. But in the meantime he identifies himself with his surname, the name for pride.

In this scene and throughout the fourth act, Shakespeare suggests that Coriolanus' impiety was symbolic of the age. We are reminded again and again of an earlier time in Rome when other values were cherished, by the iteration of the adjective, "ancient." At the beginning of the farewell scene, Coriolanus reproaches his mother, saying, "Where is your ancient courage?" (IV,i,3). Volumnia has always preached the old stoic Roman virtues. In the next scene, Sicinius consciously abuses tradition. He tells Brutus:

...Bid them the people home.
Say their great enemy is gone, and they
Stand in their ancient strength.
(IV,ii,5-7 - my italics)

In the fifth scene, Coriolanus tells Aufidius that he presents himself to his "ancient malice" (IV,v,102 - my italics), and Aufidius replies that Coriolanus has "weeded from his heart a root of ancient envy" (IV,v,109 - my italics). These passages colour the act with an atmosphere of degeneration and decay in an age which abuses time-honoured values.

We also find in this scene impiety in terms of the unnatural glorification by Aufidius. If, as we observed at the beginning of the second act, in the Roman world love has been institutionalized and rigidified in the service of the ideals of the state, it is also true that physical passion finds its greatest satisfaction in combat.

Throughout the play war is compared to the marriage bed. In Volumnia's
first speech in the first act, she tells Virgilia, "If my son were my
husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour
than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love." In
the midst of the battle for Corioli, Coriolanus tells Cominius:

...O! let me clip ye
In arms as sound as when I woo'd, in heart
As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
And tapers burnt to bedward.

(I,v,29-31)

Now, in this scene, Aufidius greets Coriolanus like a lover:

...Know thou first,
I lov'd the maid I married; never man
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold.

(IV,v,119-123)

The embrace of war, the lust for physical violence, has replaced the
human passion of the marriage bed. Destructive force has replaced
creative instinct.

At the end of the scene the same reversal in values is echoed by
the servants in its baldest form, with neither the rationalizations or
revenge motives of Coriolanus, nor the glorification of Aufidius:

1. Serv: Let me have war, say I; it exceeds
peace as far as day does night; it's
spritely, waking, audible, and full
of vent. Peace is a very apoplexy,
lethargy; mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible;
a getter of more bastard children than
war's a destroyer of men.

(IV,v,237-242)

This is the cynical world of perverted values and sensation, the world
without spirit, without the righteous voice of an uncompromising
Coriolanus. Truly, as the servingmen tell him again and again at the
beginning of the scene, there is no place for Coriolanus here. From the first words, "Wine, wine, wine" to the last, the scene defines the service of the body. "The feast smells well" (IV,v,5), says Coriolanus who has never been concerned with any food but that of the soul. At home food, bodily comfort and family affection were taken for granted. Coriolanus never thought about them or assessed their true value.

There is the same emphasis on the hearth here that there is in Plutarch. North translates:

So he went directly to Tullus Aufidius' house; and when he came hither, he got him up straight to the chimney hearth...²

Coriolanus tells the servingmen, "I will not hurt your hearth" (IV,2,27 - my italics), and later he says of Aufidius, "Now this extremity has brought me to your hearth" (IV,v,85 - my italics). This word carries the whole significance of what Coriolanus is attempting to deny. It evokes the whole world of his home and betrays his longing for it.

Coriolanus does not yet realize that life finally cannot be divided by a simple scheme of either-or, that good and evil are, sometimes almost inextricably, interwoven. He feels that he is compromising himself when he is in a situation where right and wrong are intermingled, and he must constantly distinguish between them. He is too impatient for fine qualifications, and for the daily uncertainties of small choices. Not realizing that the physical world of appearance and imperfection, and the good world of the family warmed by the pure affection of the heart,

²Plutarch, p. 336.
are inseparable, Coriolanus' tragic flaw is his inability to live between the extremes. He cannot give his heart to the ideal by spiritualizing his life, but only by denying it.
"You and your crafts! you have crafted fair!"
(IV,vi,119)

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this scene is the reaction of Menenius, Cominius, the tribunes and the people to Coriolanus' betrayal. In the preceding scene we felt intensely the unnatural, evil quality of Coriolanus' actions. Back at Rome, in the minds of the guilty realists, the deed is taken as a natural consequence of the banishment. The rightness or wrongness of the revenge is beside the point; revenge is part of the way the world works and the Romans are only concerned with manipulating the world to their own advantage. Their "guilt" consists less in a feeling of sincere regret for what they have done to Coriolanus than in a feeling of irritation that their actions should for once have put them on the losing side of things. Very little or nothing has been done by the nobles to bring Coriolanus back. Sicinius observes with satisfaction at the beginning of the scene:

We hear not of him, neither need we fear him;
His remedies are tame i' the present peace...
(IV,vi,1-2)

Menenius' reply to the tribunes' slander of Coriolanus is a brief and timid, "I think not so" (IV,vi,33). Only after the news of Coriolanus' march on Rome, does Menenius become his old talkative self again. He and Cominius blame the citizens again and again for the situation they are in:

Com: O! you have made good work! (IV,vi,81)
Men: ...You have made good work.
You, and your apron-men; you that stood so much
Upon the voice of occupation...

(IV,vi,96-98)

Men: ...You have made fair hands,
You and your crafts! You have crafted fair!

(IV,vi,118-119)

Here we have of course all of the contempt which a Roman nobleman felt
for those who did common work. When the common man tries to "work"
politically he makes havoc of everything. The people are referred to
here as tradesmen, apron-men, occupations, crafts, rather than as the
mob or the rabble. In the farewell scene Volumnia dams them, saying:

Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,
And occupations perish!

(IV,i,13-14)

The emphasis is on the fact that the people make things with their hands,
while it is the head that rules the state. Here, as elsewhere in the
play, there is an implied comparison of the people with Coriolanus; they
live by the work of their hands, he by the blows of the warrior. Neither
should encroach upon the work of the government for they are both out of
place. The people had their chance to prove what they could make of the
political situation in Rome. Ironically, of course, it was the calculating
tribunes who artificially made or created the present unnatural state of
affairs by moulding the people into mechanical obedience. The tribunes
are the true "crafty" craftsmen.

It is fascinating how Shakespeare works with simple words, the verb
make here for example. In establishing it as characterizing the workmen,
he inserts this description of Coriolanus:

Com: He is their god: he leads them like a thing
     Made by some other deity than Nature,
     That shapes men better...

(IV,vi,91-93 - my italics)
All our sense for that which is mechanically made by the craftsmen
Menenius is scorning, is transferred to Coriolanus so that already we
gain a feeling for his robot-like inhuman rigidity.

The fire imagery in this scene takes the form of continual
references to the Romans' fear of having their city burned down by the
enemy. As in Act IV, scene iii, this imagery is repeatedly taking us
away from the Romans to focus our attention on the anger of Coriolanus.
It is through the imagery that Coriolanus is always intensely present
throughout the play even in those scenes where he does not actually
appear.

Another function of the imagery in this scene is to qualify our
attitude toward Coriolanus, for we must ask ourselves the same question
Cominius asks:

Who isn't can blame him?

(IV,v1,106)

Even now there is an aspect of Coriolanus' action which is a result of
admirable qualities in his character. By using two juxtaposed images,
Cominius reminds us that our attitude toward Coriolanus remains
ambiguous:

...they the Volsces follow him,
Against us brats, with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies.

(IV,v1,93-96)

Although Cominius is ostensibly describing the Volsces, the butterfly
image transfers the reference to Coriolanus. He is still the boy
pursuing the fragile, beautiful idea of honour to "mammon" (I,iii,71)
it in sudden rage. But the boyish irresponsibility in the man, Coriolanus,
lowers him to the level of the common butcher killing the common fly.
Coriolanus' immaturity lies not in the boyish, enthusiastic, idealistic
qualities he has preserved in spite of his upbringing, but in his inability
to cherish this nature for itself, that is, to catch the butterfly, the
fragile, fleeting beauty of the honourable moment, and then to let it go
again. He wants some kind of finality even though it costs his life.

These images remind us again of the complexity of our own attitude
toward Coriolanus, and prepare us for Aufidius' summing up of his "nature"
in the next scene.
If we look at Act IV as a whole, we are struck by the concern throughout to define the way in which a man is bound and constrained within the limits of his birth, his nature, and his circumstances. At the end of the third act, Coriolanus broke through to a moment of almost complete freedom from these determining bonds. This fourth act explores the reasons why Coriolanus could not sustain his moral victory. Scene by scene we are shown how he is trapped by inner qualities and outer factors which he cannot change. At the risk of repetitiveness, let me quickly review the scenes in Act IV.

In the farewell scene, Coriolanus' lack of self-knowledge makes it clear that he has not realized the significance of what he has done and that his pride and idealism are still pitched to performing the uncommon, glorious deed. Scenes one and two remind us of the strength of Coriolanus' emotional ties to Volumnia and of the still prevailing influence of her ruthless, hard, inhuman "precepts" (IV,i,10). National ties are emphasized in the third scene, for a Roman remains a Roman no matter what he does; he can disguise, but not change, his identity. In the fourth scene, Coriolanus tries to break out of the web of natural ties by convincing himself that he has no absolute obligations because fickleness and betrayal are in the very "nature" of things. In the fifth scene, Coriolanus, by denying his identity in order to be "full
quit of his banishers" (IV,v,89), becomes more deeply enmeshed in constraining bonds, for he is neither actually nor emotionally free from Rome, nor is he free is any other sense. He has servanted himself to the enemy and taken upon himself the additional bonds of conflicting, ultimately irreconcilable, loyalties. In the sixth scene Coriolanus' action is seen only in terms of his anger, before which the Romans, and he himself, are helpless.

Coriolanus cannot get out of himself or his situation for he cannot change his nature. This is what Aufidius shrewdly realizes in the seventh scene. He says of Coriolanus:

...yet his nature
In that's no changeling, and I must excuse
What cannot be amended. (IV,vii,10-12)

In order to successfully use Coriolanus, Aufidius must be aware of that part of him which can be manipulated but not altered. His calculating rationality is revealed in the involved structure of his thought which takes everything into account. He tells his lieutenant:

I understand thee well; be thou sure,
When he shall come to his account, he knows not
What I can urge against him. Although it seems,
And so he thinks, and is no less apparent
To the vulgar eye, that he bears all things fairly...
(IV,vii,17-21)

Aufidius makes distinctions Coriolanus is too impatient to make, and so Aufidius easily gains the upper hand.

Aufidius has to admit Coriolanus' greatness:

...I think he'll be to Rome
As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it
By sovereignty of nature. (IV,vii,33-35)
For Aufidius, "sovereignty" is immediately associated with rapacious conquest. In contrast, we are reminded of the Hercules images (IV,i,17 and IV,vii,100) which were conspicuous earlier in the act but only now seem to fall into place. Coriolanus certainly has "sovereignty" in terms of sheer physical strength. The mention of Hercules, a frequent symbol for Christ in seventeenth-century English poetry, suggests the possibility that this strength might also have an inner, moral counterpart.

Because Aufidius understands men and the ways of the world, much of what he says is true as far as it goes. We must not forget that he is not completely objective, or is so only to the degree he thinks he must be to discover Coriolanus' chief flaw. He knows that at Rome Coriolanus "could not carry his honours even" (IV,vii,36-37). He speculates on the reason why Coriolanus could not sustain his position, questioning whether it was his "pride, which out of daily fortune ever taints the happy man" (IV,vii,37-39 - my italics), or whether it was "defect of judgment, to fail in the disposing of those chances which he was lord of" (IV,vii,39-41 - my italics), which was to blame. Both of these faults play their role in Coriolanus' banishment, of course, but not in the sense in which Aufidius thinks of them. He is defining flaws in terms of the practical man, for his imagination is limited by his utilitarian view of things. His last speculation comes closest to the heart of the matter:

\[\text{Auf:} \]
\[\ldots \text{or whether nature} \]
\[\text{Not to be other than one thing, not moving} \]
\[\text{From the casque to the cushion, but commanding peace} \]
\[\text{Even with the same austerity and garb} \]
\[\text{As he controll'd the war...} \]
\[(IV,vii,41-45)\]
Coriolanus' "vicious mole of nature" (Hamlet, I,iv,24) is less a quality in his nature than the sheer inability of his nature to be anything but what it is. His "dram of eale" (Hamlet, I,iv,36) consists in his being too much himself. The emphasis on the "one thing," though unconscious on Aufidius' part, carries all the associations built up throughout the play around the notion of the one and the many. Coriolanus' qualities of singularity and absoluteness, which made possible his harmony with a higher order, work against him now. Aufidius senses that Coriolanus' own nature tends to counteract itself:

Auf: One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail;
    Rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths
do fail.(IV,vii,54-55)

But in describing Coriolanus' faults, he does not make the mistake of forgetting the preponderance of his "merit":

Auf: ...he has a merit
    To choke it his flaw in the utterance. So our virtues
    Lie in th' interpretation of the time;
    And power, unto itself most commendable,
    Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
    To extol what it hath done.

(IV,vii,48-53)

Coriolanus' "merit" is equivalent to his worthiness as we have discussed it earlier (see p. 93). It is only the virtues of worth which depend upon the "interpretation of time." Aufidius is talking about external fame rather than inner nobility. It is "power" in this world with which he, like the tribunes, is concerned. He realizes that Coriolanus will lose his power over Rome shortly after he has won it, for his inability to adjust himself to the inactive role of administering it will prove fatal to him. The imagery of sitting, the "cushion" (IV,vii,43) and the "chair" (IV,vii,52), is prophetic here and is preparing for its climax in the third scene of Act V.
The fourth act, from the first to the last lines, has dealt with the factors that determine a man's actions, with qualities and circumstances which he is at a loss to change. But Aufidius' speculation on "virtues" here, even in their most worldly significance, seems to point forward and suggest by sheer contrast another world, undetermined and free, in which the choice a man makes depends upon none of the limiting factors defined in this act but only upon his recognition of Truth, upon the perception of the heart reconciling itself to the absolute.
Chapter VI

ACT V, i

"He would not seem to know me."
(V,i,8)

This scene, with its emphasis on "knowing," is an apt introduction to the last act in which the definition of "knowledge" is crucial at both of its high points. In the "mercy scene" (V,iii) Coriolanus recognizes the truth about himself, his situation, his place in "great nature" (V,iii,140), and his probable fate. But in the last scene we see that, forced back into the everyday world, Coriolanus falls prey again, in spite of what he "knows," to the pressures of outer circumstances and inner unrest. The moment of recognition, in which his mind was infused with the knowledge of the heart, has passed away again, and he must continue to struggle with recalcitrant and conflicting elements of his "nature."

In this scene we are struck with a sense of everyone working at cross purposes or to no purpose because of lack of insight into themselves, each other, and Coriolanus. The constant references to "knowing" throughout the play reach a kind of climax here which, in turn, gives wider meaning to their separate occurrences and pulls them together to reveal a minor pattern of imagery concerned with insight. As in the case of "service" in Act IV, scene v, I am using "image" in the sense of an abstract idea which has gathered multiple meaning by association and repetition.
As we discovered in the last scene, Aufidius has a shrewd worldly knowledge of Coriolanus. But Aufidius never attempts to understand him in any true sense, for Aufidius is concerned with only the negative aspects of his inner being, the sources of his weakness. Just as Aufidius undervalues the "noble" in himself and in his whole outlook, he undervalues (though he cannot deny) Coriolanus' idealism. His "knowledge" of Coriolanus, like that of everyone in the play except Virgilia, is distorted by his own limitations of feeling and imagination, for he thinks with the mind alone uninformed by the heart.

Coriolanus' friends constantly misjudge him. Since they have never taken him seriously, they are at a loss when they try to establish contact with a man they do not really know. Apparently Cominius and Menenius always considered Coriolanus' high-mindedness a kind of external adornment. They cannot imagine that a man could allow sheer force of principle to guide his actions either positively, or, as in this case, negatively. As embassadors begging for mercy, they should disinterestedly oppose some absolute value, some purely human worth to his inhumanity. But instead of appealing to Coriolanus' highest moral sensibilities, Cominius reports that he appealed to his sense of reputation and the utility of good appearances:

\begin{quote}
I minded him how royal 'twas to pardon
When it was less expected...
\end{quote}

(VI,19)

He treats the matter as if it were a game rather than a question of moral principle. Instead of demanding absolute mercy, he suggests compromise for the sake of "private friends" (V,1,24). Coriolanus' reply is typical of his one hundred per cent nature:
Com: ...his answer to me was
He could not stay to pick them in a pile
Of noisome musty chaff: he said 'twas folly,
For one poor grain or two, to leave unburnt
And still to nose th' offence.

(V, i, 24-28)

There is probably no other image in the play which more effectively represents Coriolanus' refusal to sort out the good from the evil in life.

Neither Cominius nor Menenius rises to the occasion. Menenius is as shallow, insincere, sentimental and food-loving as he has been throughout the play. He calls Coriolanus, "my son! my son!" (V, ii, 76), and we know that he has been closer to him than any of the other patricians. But Menenius cannot understand him for his own philosophy of life is diametrically opposed to that of Coriolanus. He knows that his task is to make Coriolanus' soul "suppler" (V, i, 56). But though "wine and feeding" (V, i, 56) would work for Menenius, they will not work for Coriolanus; he needs a different kind of "food:"

Over and over again in the play we have situations in which a man's insight into another depends upon what he does or does not know about himself; the less self-knowledge he has, the less insight. We are reminded here of Menenius' arrogant judgment of the tribunes in the second act:

You know neither me, yourselves, nor anything.

(II, i, 76)

This is a statement that could be made by almost any character to any other throughout the play; an expression of the human condition. There is a depressing sense of the isolation, not only of Coriolanus, but of all men within the limitations of their insight. They attempt to identify one another by disguise as Adrian and Micanor do:
Rom: I know you well, sir, and you know me: your name I think is Adrian. (IV,iii,1-2)

A man's appearance is his disguise and he is known by his face, his tongue and his name. When Coriolanus comes to Aufidius he first unmuffles his face, then speaks, asking repeatedly, "Know'st thou me yet?" Aufidius replies, "I know thee not. Thy name?" (IV,v,69-70). This is an excellent example of how deftly the image patterns are fused with one another and with the action.

Coriolanus, who was too proud to bare his head before the Roman people, unmuffles himself before the enemy. Gesture constantly supports and is supported by the image structure. For example, in this scene we get a sense of Coriolanus' whole situation merely from his attitude of sitting. Cominius describes Coriolanus' new psychological state in purely visual terms:

I tell you he does sit in gold, his eye
Red as 'twould burn Rome, and his injury
The gaoler to his pity. I kneeled before him;
'Twas very faintly he said 'Rise'; dismissed me
Thus, with his speechless hand.

(V,i,64-68 - my italics)

Remembering Aufidius' comment in the preceding scene, "And power...
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair / To extol what it hath done"
(IV,vii,50-53 - my italics), we immediately sense the quality of degeneration in Coriolanus' inactivity. What a contrast to the man who said in Act II:

I had rather one scratch my head i' the sun
When the alarum were struck than idly sit
To hear my nothings monster'd.

(II,ii,79-81 - my italics)
In the third scene of this last act he will sum up his whole failure by saying,

I have sat too long.

(V,iii,130 - my italics)

Here the same man who refused to bow for the consulship is sitting like a king on a throne - a golden throne as if he had sold himself. The red eye symbolizes the wrath which possesses him. Blind with passion, he "sees red." He speaks faintly or in gestures though he was wont to roar out his opinions at home. Though Menenius could once say of him, "His heart's his mouth" (III,1,255), now, to make himself appear completely heartless toward the Romans, he must be silent.

He has decided to play a part - the role of traitor, but to "carry" the role, he must deny a part of his own nature. He becomes what the classical world regarded as incompletely human; out of balance. The rigidity of his physical attitude is a counterpart to the spiritual inflexibility of a man who has deliberately hardened his heart.

His loneliness is now total isolation. He communicates only with his "speechless hand" (V,1,68), for gesture has taken the place of knowledge. Cominius says wonderingly:

He would not seem to know me.

(V,i,7)

Like Macbeth attempting to deny his memory, Coriolanus tries to cut himself off from what he knows by refusing to recognize himself, his friends and his fellow Romans. And also like Macbeth, he tries to act blindly (the "mercy scene" - V,iii,-- in which Coriolanus recognizes all that he has attempted to deny, is pervaded by imagery of eyes and seeing). Since the ironic and prophetic outburst of Coriolanus in the banishment
scene, "I'll know no further" (III,iii,85 - my italics), he has steadily sought to divest himself of what his heart knows. I mean, of course, not only self-knowledge and recognition of Truth, but also a sense for one's place in the scheme of things, mirrored basically in the Greek concept, "Know thyself." To some degree all knowledge is grounded in, and often ineffectual without, self-knowledge. Coriolanus suffers from the disproportion between his self-knowledge (which is slight), and the intuitive knowledge of his heart. This latter kind of knowledge, unexamined or untested by the mind, can be dangerous, but without it, a man cannot transcend himself. If he totally surrenders to this knowledge he goes beyond his place as a human being, becoming absolute and god-like; if he completely ignores it he becomes inhuman and brutish. Finally, the two extremes amount to the same thing. Self-knowledge, or the mind's awareness of the self, should mediate between these extremes. It is this function which Coriolanus will not allow his mind to fulfill.

Because of his refusal to compromise, Coriolanus epitomizes certain tendencies in his culture. By carrying their assumed ideals or unconscious biases to their logical extremes, Coriolanus often confronts his fellow patricians with themselves as they would be if they really lived what they pretended to be, if they practiced what they preached.

In this scene, Coriolanus epitomizes Rome with its rigid inhuman ideals, its brute force, and its blind war-mindedness. Cominius says of him:

...Coriolanus
He would not answer to; forb'd all names;
He was a kind of nothing, titleless,
Till he had forg'd himself a name o'the fire
Of burning Rome.

(V,i,ll-15 - my italics)
Coriolanus wants to merge with Rome as its scourge and be known as its destroyer as he was known as the conqueror of Corioli. He will take his identity from Rome even at the price of doing away with everything that could give his identity meaning.

It is not merely the constant repetition of the word "Rome" in this scene and the next, but also the way it is used that strikes us. We sense that Rome has divine qualities for Cominius and Menenius. We are reminded of Menenius' exaltation of Roma aeterna in the first scene of the play:

...you [the plebs] may as well
Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
Against the Roman state, whose course will on
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
Of more strong link asunder than can ever
Appear in your impediment.  

(I,i,71-76)

The state is their god, all the more to be worshipped because they themselves form part of it. Allegiance to Rome supercedes allegiance to one's friend. We cannot help feeling that this is what the grammatical inversion implies here:

Bru: Only make trial what your love can do
   For Rome towards Martius.  
(V,i,41-42)

Rome comes first. Menenius' sentimental excuses for not going to Coriolanus are immediately cast aside when Sicinius hints at the ensuing reward of gratitude from Rome:

Sic: ...Yet your good will
     Must have that thanks from Rome, after the measure
     As you intended well. 

Men: I'll undertake it.  

(V,i,46-48)
The tribunes manipulate everybody. Menenius does not stop to think that if his mission fails there might not be anything left of Rome to reward anyone's good intentions.

Self-glorification through glorifying a human institution, the work of man not of a god, takes the place of human love which connects men to each other and to the great natural order of the universe. Only now, in fear for themselves, do the patricians talk of "love" between friends. In the next scene Menenius brags to the Watch, "Thy general is my lover" (V,ii,14). And Coriolanus' words from the farewell scene echo in their full irony:

I shall be lov'd when I am lack'd.

(IV,1,15)
If, in the preceding scene, Coriolanus symbolizes the negative aspect of Rome's ideals made absolute (as he formerly represented the positive aspect, Rome as it should be), in this scene Menenius represents Rome as it is, appetitive, compromising, full of pretense.

This scene has some interesting parallels and contrasts to Act IV, scene v, in which Coriolanus comes to Aufidius disguised and hesitant to speak his name. He comes to Aufidius with nothing but himself; Menenius comes to Coriolanus with nothing but his name, with which he insists on impressing the guards. Menenius, taking his identity from it, values a name for the use a man can make of it, for the power it has to open doors. After his meeting with Coriolanus, the Watch sarcastically asks Menenius:

Now, sir, is your name Menenius?
(V,ii,101)

Menenius is naively proud of his position ("I am an officer of the state" - V,ii,3), and of his high connections. He tells the Watch:

...you shall know that I am in estimation.
(V,ii,65-66)

Menenius' half-humorous word-play with the Watch over his portrait of himself as a righteous liar on Coriolanus' behalf has a deeper meaning than we are likely to ascribe to it on first reading. The truth about Menenius is that he tells lies. Always pretending to be something he isn't, he symbolizes the lie that is Rome, the falseness of her ideals.
Menenius says of Coriolanus:

...I have been
The book of his good acts, whence men have read
His fame unparallel'd, haply amplified.
(V,ii,14-16)

Rome has always tried to make of Coriolanus something that he wasn't, for the fame which she bestowed upon him was for a false nobility, not for his true, intrinsic quality.

There is an excellent example of Menenius' quantitative thinking here:

For I have ever verified my friends-
Of whom he's chief --with all the size that verity
Would without lapsing suffer:
(V,ii,17-19)

Menenius is a master at stretching the truth. He is commending himself, not Coriolanus, by confessing that, in his generosity, he was apt to praise him even beyond what he deserved. Ironically, Menenius, in order to prove his closeness to Coriolanus, is suggesting just the qualities in himself which Coriolanus least cherishes. Menenius can judge Coriolanus only in terms of himself.

Menenius' ineffectiveness against Coriolanus' scourging fire is expressed by images of water and wind. He tells Coriolanus:

O my son! my son! thou art preparing fire
for us; look thee, here's water to quench it.
(V,ii,76-77)

This one reference to water is enough to call up all the associations which were established for water imagery in Act III, scene i, qualities of instability, formlessness, and inconstancy. There is no hard substance in Menenius to pit against Coriolanus' absoluteness. He is merely a wave against the "rock" (V,ii,117). We find the same opposition of fire
and water imagery in _Othello_ for similar purposes:

Oth: She was _false as water_.

Emil: That she was false.  Thou art _rash as fire_ to say

(V,ii,133-134)

The main direct imagery in this scene is that of _wind_. The Watch asks Menenius:

Can you think to blow out the intended fire your city is ready to flame in with such weak breath as this?

(V,ii,48-50)

We sense that at this point Menenius' "breath" can only fan Coriolanus' anger higher. Although Menenius always attempts to sound authoritative and strong, he is prey to every new change in Rome's political weather. He says:

...I have been blown out of Rome's gates with sighs.

(V,ii,80)

Menenius is, as usual, a real windbag. But wind is also the perfect symbol for fickleness, and Menenius is proof that Rome goes the way the wind blows.

When the second Watchman ends the scene with,

...he's Coriolanus the rock, the oak, not to be wind-shaken,

(V,ii,117)

we feel the double force of the image. For "not to be wind-shaken" foreshadows Coriolanus' greatest victory, that over himself; essentially he remains the _oak_. Like the oak, Coriolanus will be swayed one way and another in the stormy, next scene.
As the scene opens, Coriolanus is congratulating himself on his steadfastness in not yielding to either Cominius or Menenius. Ironically he thinks of Menenius' embassy to him as Rome's "latest refuge" (V,iii,11), a last resort. Has Coriolanus completely forgotten his own family? In denying his "true" heart, he seems to have set aside that whole part of his life connected with his wife, his son, and his mother. It never occurs to him that they will inevitably suffer, and probably lose their lives when, as he tells Aufidius,

We will before the walls of Rome to-morrow
Set down our host.
(V,iii,1-2)

His rage blinds him to the simple realistic situation outside of himself and to the most obvious consequences of his actions. Since Coriolanus decided on revenge, his family has ceased to exist for him, or exists only as a part of himself which he refuses to recognize. They were such an integral part of him that he forgot them when he "forgot" himself. In this scene they come to him to beg mercy for themselves and for Rome, and their coming is a symbolic return of his true inner being to himself.

To a great extent it is the sheer physical reality of his family's presence which penetrates Coriolanus' rigid pose of heartlessness. He has to be brought back to reality, to his senses. He must be made to see clearly with the outer eye so that he may begin to see more clearly with the inner eye. And he must finally realize that the way to higher
love and truth is *by way of* the affections of the human heart rather than by a forfeiture of those affections in the service of a heartless ideal. It is the *visual image* of Coriolanus' bonds of affection which dominates this scene.

Our purely visual attention has already been heightened by Cominius' description of Coriolanus sitting "in gold" (V, i, 64). Since the beginning of Act IV, we have been in a completely disordered world expressed by abstract idea patterns revealing confusion in concepts of *service*, *identity*, *knowing*, etc., and by concrete images of elemental chaos in *wind*, *water* and *fire*.

Now Coriolanus watches his family approach his tent in a *formal procession* suggestive of time-honoured, ancient traditions of natural order. He says:

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My wife comes foremost; then the honour'd mould
Wherein this trunk was fram'd, and in her hand
The grandchild to her blood.
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(V, iii, 22-24)

The order in which they come is symbolic. Coriolanus' most vital bond of nature is his wife; "best of my flesh" (V, iii, 42), he calls her. His mother and son come second, for they can never be as close to him as his wife. His wife claims his heart, his mother his duty, and his son his protection. In Plutarch's story, Coriolanus greets his mother first, and then his wife:

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...first he kissed his mother and embraced
her a pretty while, then his wife and little
children.1
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1 Plutarch, p. 352.
Shakespeare makes a point of reversing this order. Coriolanus' love for his wife is self-justified and has a spiritual quality that ultimately distinguishes it from the kind of feeling, intense though it may be, that he has for his other blood-relatives, for his mother and his son.

Immediately, Coriolanus feels his position "threatened" by the authority implicit in natural order. He says:

...But out affection!
All bond and privilege of nature, break!

(V,iii,24-25)

"Nature" here implies the natural structure of a man's relationships to family, friends and country within the divine order of the universe, relationships which determine and define his place in life. Even in his denial of nature, Coriolanus thinks of it as both the "bond" which binds and limits his freedom, and puts certain claims on him, and as the "privilege" which gives him certain rights over others. He tries emotionally to "break" the bonds as if they were chains which he can burst by physical force. This image of breaking bonds echoes the one Menenius used in the first scene of the play when he described Rome as a law unto itself, "whose course will on the way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs of more strong links asunder..." (I,i,73-75).

Coriolanus' only possible defence of his position is a stubborn insistence on a reversal of values. He is defying nature as directly and as wilfully as Macbeth does when he says, "Let the frame of things disjoint" (Macbeth, III,ii,16). Coriolanus declares:

Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.

(V,iii,26)
Here "virtuous" is used ambiguously, for it strongly suggests the Latin meaning of *virtus*, "strength." Coriolanus wants to reduce the meaning of virtue to pure power. As in the fourth act (see earlier, p.145), he is trying to believe that power can justify itself, that might can equal right.

The struggle within Coriolanus is dramatically emphasized by his alternate recognition and denial of Nature. There is a counterpoint between what he says he sees concretely and what he refuses to "see" with the inner eye. The "real" world, whose claims he has tried so long to deny in his pursuit of personal honour and revenge, is at last asserting itself.

The imagery Coriolanus uses to describe each member of his family suggests unwittingly his recognition of the sacred quality of natural relationships:

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What is that curtsy worth? or those doves' eyes
Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others. My mother bows,
As if Olympus to a molehill should
In supplication nod; and my young boy
Hath an aspect of intercession, which
Great nature cries, 'Deny not.'
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(V,iii,27-33)

It is the sight of his son which makes him feel most intensely the impossibility of his denial. His son is his "intercession" with Nature because he is Coriolanus' physical link with the continuous processes of nature, with the future and immortality. Against the force and urgency of this appeal, he must oppose his strongest affirmation of destructive power and self-will:
...Let the Volscæ
Plough Rome, and harrow Italy; I'll never
Be such a goosling to obey instinct, but stand
As if a man were author of himself
And knew no other kin.

(V,iii,33-37)

But the subjunctive mood here, "As if a man were author of himself,"
betrays his wishful thinking. He does not really believe that he can
stand completely alone.

Coriolanus tries to express the change in himself to Virgilia
by referring to his eyes:

These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.
(V,iii,38)

It is fitting that imagery of eyes and seeing, as well as the purely
visual imagery of symbolic gesture, should be so pervasive in this scene
in which Coriolanus' eyes are finally opened to the true meaning of his
situation. As we might expect, Virgilia misunderstands Coriolanus'
indirect confession of change. For her, he can never change; she locks
at his heart.

Through the imagery of acting, which completes the pattern so firmly
established in Act II, we sense that Coriolanus is beginning to connect
his present with his former self and to apply his former standards of
judgment to his situation. At this point, though he does not yet know
it, Coriolanus gives up his role as revenger. He says:

...Like a dull actor now
I have forgot my part, and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace.
(V,iii,40-42)

But it is Virgilia's kiss which gives Coriolanus to himself again and
makes him whole and human. "Instinct" (V iii,35) is stronger than
worldly honour.
He immediately resumes his natural attitude toward his mother, and kneels to her. Here Volumnia cleverly reverses postures and roles with her son. She lifts him up and kneels instead, to show him, now that he is open to being shown, in vivid, concrete, visual terms what his reversal of values really implies. He is so shocked to see the unnatural situation of a mother humbled before her own son, to see the consequences of his inhumanity in terms of his immediate family, that he imagines that the universe is turned upside down:

...What's this?
Your knees to me! to your corrected son!
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Fillip the stars; then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun,
Murd'ring impossibility, to make
What cannot be, slight work.

(V,iii,56-62)

Here we are reminded of Clemen's observation that "almost all the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies stand in close relationship to the cosmos, the celestial bodies and the elements."²

At the end of his mother's speech, Coriolanus turns his thoughts to the heavens in resigned self-mockery:

...O, mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold' the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at.

(V,iii,182-185)

We might compare Coriolanus' feeling that the supernatural should somehow directly reflect his bewildering situation and his sense of aloneness (for Coriolanus is never more alone than when he recognizes his connectedness with all things), with Othello's anguished desolation after the murder of Desdemona:

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²Clemen, p. 93.
In both men, their inability to grasp or deal with the immediate human situation on this earth, turns their imaginations outward to find some echo of their plight, or corresponding disorder, in the cosmic order. Clemen tells us that in the tragedies, this "appeal to the elements makes it appearance at definite turning points. Not until they begin to despair of men and earth do the tragic heroes turn to the heavens."\(^3\)

For Coriolanus it is less an "appeal" than a sudden ironic realization of his human **place** under the heavens. He is experiencing a heightened sense of self-consciousness and of insignificance at the same time. It is the inevitable conclusion to a chain of events which began with Coriolanus' vague feeling of foreboding in Act I when he said:

The gods begin to mock me. (I,i,x,79)

After Coriolanus has greeted Virgilia and restored his wholeness, his use of language becomes lyrical and rich in imagery. Apparently unconscious of the implications of what he says, he speaks emotionally, from the heart. Everything he says involves purity, virtue, or nobility. His love of goodness and **excellence** rushes forth again. To Virgilia he says:

...O! a kiss
Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!
Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss
I carried from thee, dear, and my **true** lip
Hath **virgin'd** it e'er since.

(V,iii,44-48)

\(^3\)Clemen, p. 94.
Volumnia he calls, "the most noble mother of the world" (V,iii,49).

Valeria is:

The noble sister of Publicola,
The moon of Rome; chaste as the icicle
That's curdied by the frost from purest snow
And hangs on Dian's temple. (V,iii,64-67)

To his son, he says:

The god of soldiers,
With the consent of supreme Jove, inform
Thy thoughts with nobleness; that thou mayst prove
To shame unvulnerable, and stick i' the wars
Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw,
And saving those that eye thee! (V,iii,70-75)

This speech is doubly effective because we realize that Coriolanus is speaking as much to and of himself as he is speaking to his son. We have here the most concise and the most moving statement of Coriolanus' immediate inner conflict. To give in to his family and to Rome at this point would be to put himself in "full disgrace" (V,iii,42) in terms of worldly honour. What Coriolanus is doing, as he says these words, is "informing" or moulding his own "thoughts with nobleness" to make himself "to shame unvulnerable." He is gathering moral strength to be the "great sea-mark," the rock, so that he might be able to make the truly noble choice. In the very language, in words which he has so often scorned, he is rediscovering the world of the noble.

But he is not yet actually conscious of what is going on in himself; he does not yet know that he has suffered a "change" of heart. Instinctively he fears his mother's attempt to convince his mind, with her "colder reasons" (V,iii,86), that he must spare Rome, for he has now only a kind of mental obstinacy to hold against the recovery of his heart.
He scorns the mind at the same time that he is trying to use it as a defense.

His first reaction to his new dilemma is to separate his feeling for his family from his responsibility to Rome. He tells Virgilia:

...but do not say
For that, 'Forgive the Romans.'

(V,iii,43-44)

Perhaps the main underlying idea in this scene is the impossibility of separation. It is neither possible for Coriolanus to separate himself from his "author" (V,iii,36), nor from himself, nor from his family, nor from "great nature" (V,iii,33) itself, the order of the universe, though Coriolanus tries desperately to twist his reason to wriggle out of the close net of relationships drawn about him.

Though ostensibly Volumnia is pleading for the family, actually she is another spokesman for Rome and for the duty a Roman son owes to a Roman mother. Never for a moment does Volumnia forget that she is a mother to whom a certain kind of respect and duty is due. As in Act III, her mind controls her emotions, and uses them. Though many of her arguments are perfectly just, she has the peculiar coldness of a person who never gives way to natural feeling. And she has the conscious "superiority" not only of a mother over her child, but of the rationalist over the idealist. At the same time she uses all the instinctive wiles and practices of the woman and the mother to get the sympathy she demands. And she does not stop talking. Basically, most of her arguments are centered in herself and her own importance, for she never really "kneels" to Coriolanus. She cannot kneel.
Volumnia does not trust her actions to speak for themselves. When
she kneels to shame him, she tells Coriolanus what she is doing with
self-righteous sarcasm:

...with no softer cushion than the flint,
I kneel before thee, and improperly
Show duty, as mistaken all the while
Between the child and parent.

(V,iii,53-56)

She knows how to demand duty of her son, but not how to inspire love.

She reminds him that she made him:

...Thou art my warrior;
I hulp to frame thee.

(V,iii,62-63)

She warns him that he is a bad example for his son, his "poor epitome,"

Which by th'interpretation of full time
May show like all yourself.

(V,iii,68-70)

But Coriolanus does not seem to really hear her, or, if he does, he
continues her thought on quite a different plane. He begins his speech
to his son (quoted from earlier) half to himself, half to his son,

...inform
Thy thoughts with nobleness.

(V,iii,71-72)

This speech has absolutely no meaning for Volumnia; she passes over it.
The irony is manifest. She is appealing to the "best" in Coriolanus,
but she does not recognize it when it comes pouring out of him. No
doubt she feels that he is merely talking unrealistically as usual. Their
minds essentially miss each other.

Volumnia believes that her main task is to make Coriolanus see in
vividly realistic terms what his action is bringing about. She warns
him:
...for either thou
Must, as a foreign recreant, be led
With manacles through our streets, or else
Triumphantly tread on thy country's ruin,
And bear the palm for having bravely shed
Thy wife and children's blood.

(V,iii,114-118)

She is right that Coriolanus must be made to see what he is doing, but what he needs to see is so little and yet so much. Kinds of seeing are being distinguished here. Coriolanus is ultimately not moved by Volumnia's mental "word" pictures, but merely by the faces of his loved ones. He says:

Not of a woman's tenderness to be
Requires nor child's nor woman's face to see.
I have sat too long.

(V,iii,129-130)

The sight which touches the heart gives insight. For Coriolanus, words are pale and empty in comparison with the reality of the human face, the reflection of the soul. He sees, as he thinks, with his heart.

So much of the imagery in Coriolanus is double-edged. Here, for example, Coriolanus' attitude of sitting, his inactivity is not only suggestive of degeneration in a man of action, of a falsifying or distortion of his nature, but also, paradoxically, of regeneration in the sense that Coriolanus has gained time to recognize a higher meaning in the scheme of things which denies or supercedes the life of action. As a man he triumphs; as a man of action he is undone.

Volumnia, trying to make Coriolanus see his own situation, neither senses nor sees what is going on inside him. When he rises from his chair after speaking the words we have just discussed, she implores him:

...Nay, go not from us thus.

(V,iii,131)
She doesn't realize that he has been supplying her with the only "argument" that has power over him, the simple existence of love. But Volumnia herself does not feel that love, that natural, instinctive bond of family affection. Therefore she cannot understand the fundamental human truth that Pascal so finely formulated in *Les Pensées*:

"Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point."

And she rushes on, glorying in her own voice, with all the sensible reasons of the mind.

She recommends compromise as usual for she always finds a way out that avoids an actual moral choice. All of her arguments turn on the way in which Coriolanus can salvage his worldly honour, his "name" in the sense of sheer reputation. Coriolanus makes no reply for he has already returned again to that earlier self which was not at all concerned with mere worldly opinion. Volumnia demands:

Speak to me, son!

(V,iii,148)

But he remains silent.

Volumnia begins to realize that she is not getting through to Coriolanus, perhaps because she is not talking about honour in a more "poetic," romantic sense. She knows that her son is idealistic even if she doesn't understand why. And so she says:

Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,
To imitate the graces of the gods;
To tear with thunder the wide cheeks o' the air,
And yet to charge thy sulphur with a bolt
That should but rive an oak.

(V,iii,149-153)
Both Tucker Brooke and E.K. Chambers explain this passage as meaning literally that, although Coriolanus has made such a "terrible show," he hasn't really meant any harm to his mother. But it seems to me that the implications of the passage are far more complex. Is not Volumnia betraying here an attitude toward any concept of idealistic honour for its own sake as being basically trivial? She talks about honour in terms of "fine strains" or refinements and of "imitating the graces of the gods" (my italics), as if honour were something completely external which a nobleman acquires like polished manners or puts on like an elegant uniform. Then she associates this supposedly finer kind of honour with Coriolanus' attempt to take a god-like revenge on Rome. But she implies that Coriolanus must not be really serious about these ideas of honour, creating, as Jupiter does, a storm whose thunderbolts only "rive an oak" but do not do real human damage. Surely he did not mean to be so unrealistic.

By defining it falsely and equating it with the aims of Coriolanus' revenge, Volumnia is hoping to discredit honour in any idealistic sense. She is, in effect, telling Coriolanus that, like a boy, he has always played with "divine" ideas and liked to "tear...the air" with thunder, to speak a lot of fine words that were ineffectual in the end. Coriolanus' idealism was something Volumnia always used but never shared nor understood. She understood his moral triumph in Act III as little as she understands the present situation.

Again Volumnia demands some kind of reaction from Coriolanus. "Why dost thou not speak?", she cries, extremely irritated now by the

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-Tucker Brooke, in his notes to the Yale edition of Coriolanus, p. 156.
continued silence. She tells Virgilia, "Daughter, speak you," and she urges her grandson, "Speak thou, boy." (V,i,113,153 and 155-156). Nothing could injure her vanity more than this utter lack of response. Coriolanus holds only a silent communion with Virgilia.

Volumnia becomes more and more desperate. She berates Coriolanus like a child:

...Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy;
When she--poor hen! fond of no second brood--
Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home,
Loaden with honour.

(V,i,113,160-163)

Here we have the "mother" with a vengeance, full of dishonest self-pity and self-glorification. She takes credit for everything. And, at last, frustrated almost beyond endurance by Coriolanus' silence, she becomes utterly ruthless, and taunts him unmercifully:

This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Corioli, and his child
Like him by chance.

(V,i,113,178-180)

This is too much. Coriolanus' innermost sense of honour is touched — for it is the honour of the heart.

He breaks his silence, no longer the sign of his heartlessness but of Virgilia's "gracious" grace-giving silence of the soul. He returns to speech, and to the human, with the recognition that he cannot live in this world with silence - neither with the silence of the monster nor of the saint.

He has made his decision for mercy and he knows, this time, what the consequences of his action will be. Ironically, Volumnia has sacrificed her son to Rome. But with the calmness of Hamlet before the
duel, he accepts the conditions under which his own nature must work out its destiny within the framework of social and absolute moral order. He says to Volumnia:

Most dangerously you have with him [i.e. me] prevail'd,
If not mortal to him [me:] But let it come.
(V.iii,188-189)

The "let" here is no longer willful but yielding. He speaks in the third person of himself, for he has gained a detachment that allows him to see himself objectively. In the simple words "but let it come," Coriolanus accepts and, by accepting, transcends death. He is ready to die; as Hamlet says, "The readiness is all" (V.ii,226). He stands at last in right relation to the gods. He has matured, but at the price of ripening toward death.

He has the tragic realization that he cannot escape his place in life, that no man can, for there is a kind of inscrutable paradox inherent in the human condition. Coriolanus is determined, but also in some sense freed by the complex structure of inner and outer relationships which define him.
"Is 't possible that so short a time can alter the condition of a man?"

(V, iv, 10-11)

The fourth scene opens with an ironic contrast to the end of the "mercy scene" (V, iii). Menenius is attempting to justify his failure to influence Coriolanus by emphasizing the impenetrability of his inhuman state. In a series of images already familiar to us, he sums up Coriolanus' career as a continual metamorphosis. The basic image is that of the butterfly:

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

(V, iv, 12-15 - my italics)

Menenius implies that Coriolanus' development has been a reverse process, from butterfly to grub, "from man to dragon." He has become increasingly inhuman:

Men: ...when he walks, he moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before his treading.

(V, iv, 20-21)

A similar image is used by Cominius in praise of Coriolanus in Act II:

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

(II, ii, 114-115)

Here Menenius ends his description with a picture of Coriolanus as absolute tyrant who
...wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in.
And Sicinius replies:
Yes, mercy, if you report him truly.

(V,iv,25-28 - my italics)

These statements all reveal aspects of Coriolanus' inhuman absoluteness. We sense that Shakespeare is summing up here the ambiguity involved in the nature of the man's dominant characteristics, or the "o'ergrowth of some complexion" (Hamlet, I,iv,27). The same tendency in a man can tip the scale toward good or evil, and there is a delicate poise here.

Coriolanus' absoluteness is neither a good in Cominius' sense, nor, in the end, an evil in Menenius' sense. His absoluteness became an inhuman quality which made him "a thing of blood" (II,ii,114) at Coricli, his moment of highest worldly honour, and a god-like quality, which enabled him to ally himself with such fatal self-forgetfulness to absolute Truth, in Act III. And it was also the monstrous quality which made him "move like an engine" (V,iv,20) against Rome with such a drastic reversal of loyalties in Act IV. This absoluteness, combined with his uncompromising either-or nature, which has forced him to live at extremes, was the source of his failure in this world. But, ultimately, it was also the quality in his nature which made it possible for him to give himself up so completely to the dictates of his heart once he recognized the supremacy of human love above any ideal of honour that separates a man from the natural and the human. Paradoxically, in deciding for mercy, Coriolanus becomes "absolutely" human.

Sicinius' seemingly casual comments pose important questions for the play as a whole. He casts doubt on Menenius' interpretation of
Coriolanus and, obliquely, on everyone else's, when he says, "if you report him truly" (V,iv,28). There is a depressing sense here that neither Menenius nor anyone else grasps the meaning of this metamorphosis of Coriolanus, nor will they, even when his merciful decision is known. No one will realize that Coriolanus has performed a truly god-like deed. Volumnia gets all the credit, and the only thought given to Coriolanus is to rejoice that he is gone. Gratitude is constantly misplaced. No one comes to an understanding of either Coriolanus or himself. No one tries to answer Sicinius' wondering question:

Is't possible that so short time can alter the condition of a man? (V,iv,10-11)

Menenius and the others do not understand the alterations in Coriolanus because they themselves are unaltered by the whole course of events. Coriolanus has been altered but not in the way Sicinius thinks. He has transcended the conflicting conditions within him. A man only seems to alter so swiftly because he has both the butterfly and the grub within him, and the continual metamorphosis of his being is the struggle between the two for supremacy.

Only Coriolanus has gained a moment of recognition and true knowledge. But that spiritual moment passes again and, as we realize in the last scene, he must go on struggling with his nature to the very end.
"Yet he shall have a noble memory."

(V,v,155)

The last scene of the play is laid in Corioli as Coriolanus returns from Rome at the head of the Volscian army. It is the same city Coriolanus subdued almost single-handedly in the first act, and it is still mourning the deaths of sons, brothers and husbands who fell beneath his sword. The name Coriolanus won here has become a symbol not only of conquest over a city but, because of Coriolanus' almost miraculous escape from it, over death itself. He entered the gates of this city alone, and he came out of them alive.

In the first speech of this scene Shakespeare directs our attention to Corioli itself. Aufidius says:

Go tell the lords o' the city I am here:
Deliver them this paper: having read it,
Bid them repair to the market-place; where I,
Even in theirs and in the commons' ears,
Will vouch the truth of it. Him I accuse
The city ports by this hath enter'd, and
Intends to appear before the people, hoping
To purge himself with words: dispatch.

(V,v,108 - my italics)

The city and the market-place begin to take on threatening entities, as the market-place did in Act III, scene ii (see earlier p. 121). In the third act the market-place represented public opinion against Truth, the many against the one, and the forces of the outer world against the inner man.

The city of Corioli now represents all of these things for Coriolanus, but it is also a testimony to his crime against the many, against
humanity itself in the butchery of war and in his disregard of the bonds of nature. Again and again throughout the play, Coriolanus stands alone in opposition to a whole city as conqueror, truth-teller and destroyer, - a figure both monumental and monstrous in the assertion of his individuality. Corioli, the scene of Coriolanus' triumph as an individual and his failure as a human being, is a symbol of Shakespeare's double view of his hero, and of the tension between sympathy and censure which characterizes our emotional responses to him.

In several places in the play an entry into a city has been the focal point, and has always been somehow associated with death. In the earlier scenes of Act V, there were numerous references to the "gates" of Rome. If Coriolanus had entered the gates it would have been as a scourge of fire, making them the entrance to a burning hell for the Romans and for his own soul.

As this last scene of the play opens, the people of Corioli cheer Coriolanus' return. The first conspirator compares his entrance into Corioli with that of Aufidius. He tells Aufidius:

> Your native town you enter'd like a post,
> And had no welcomes home; but he [Coriolanus] returns,
> Splitting the air with noise. (V,v,50-52)

Coriolanus has always associated a city with falseness and with the talk and flattery of men. Now, with the same noise that accompanies the "honest" blows on the battlefield, and with the trumpets that celebrate the bloodshed of others, the city welcomes him to betrayal and death.

Aufidius and the conspirators plan to confront and murder Coriolanus before he has a chance to talk to the people. The third conspirator says to Aufidius:
Ere he express himself, or move the people
With what he would say, let him feel your sword,
Which we will second.

(V,v,55-57 - my italics)

Ironically, it is words which might save Coriolanus now for he can
"move the Volscian people" as he never could the Romans except to anger
and rebellion. There is no arrogance in Coriolanus' report to the lords
and people of the spoils he has "brought home" (V,v,77). He tells them
with matter-of-fact dignity that he has made a peace agreement with
the Romans, that is, a compromise:

With no less honour to the Antiates
Than shame to the Romans; ...

(V,v,80-81)

He has "reconciled them" (V,iii,136) both, as Volumnia suggested. He
has been the good "boy" his mother wanted him to be, though not for her
reasons nor for any boyish ones of his own. But Aufidius is shrewd
enough to see how sensitive Coriolanus might be to a distorted
interpretation of his actions in the light of emotional dependence upon
his mother.

Aufidius, with the same instinct for Coriolanus' weakest point
which Sicinius exploited in the third act, first attacks Coriolanus'
honour before he has a chance to gain the sympathies of the people.

Aufidius "advises" the lords:

...tell the traitor, in the highest degree
He hath abus'd your powers.

(V,v,84-85)

Aufidius uses the same word "traitor" which Sicinius used to rouse
Coriolanus' choler. And, in addition, he takes from Coriolanus his
last token of true worldly respect, his surname. When Coriolanus went
to Aufidius disguised in Act IV, he told him that of all his former self
and glory, "only that name remains" (IV,iv,79). The name symbolized his invulnerability. Now Aufidius taunts him with the incongruity of bearing this name in this city:

Ay, Martius, Caius Martius, Dost thou think
I'll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol'n name
Coriolanus in Corioli?

(V,v,88-90)

There is the horrifying sense here of what it really means to be banished, to be the eternal foreigner. In winning his name, Coriolanus embraced the loneliness of being "distinguished," marked out from all the rest of his fellows by the name of a conquered foreign town. But the name also symbolized a part of him which was somehow "foreign" to his innermost self. It was this foreign self, concerned with honour in the conquest of the outer world rather than of the inner self, which brought him to the Volscians. Now this foreign city of Corioli is a projection of that wilful individuality which deceived him into pursuing a false excellence, that is, the uncommon, the different, and the other for its own sake (see earlier, p. 135).

Coriolanus has already in the mercy scene given up this false part of himself and the kind of honour admired in the cities. He has given up the city of Rome and all that the "city" stands for, and redeemed himself in the eyes of the gods. But in human terms he must live out the consequences of his actions and pay for his decision. Aufidius taunts him with the loss of Rome. He tells the lords:

He has betray'd your business, and given up,
For certain drops of salt, your city Rome,
I say 'your city;' to his wife and mother.

(V,v,92-94)
In the deepest sense, Coriolanus has betrayed them, for he has given his first allegiance to a higher order, an authority above theirs. But although he has already chosen between them, he is still not quite aware that he is no longer serving two masters. He does not realize yet to what extent, by following his heart, he has set himself at odds with the world.

He is basically as guileless as Othello in not suspecting Aufidius' true nature. In his adolescent idealization of him, he has identified Aufidius with his own noble nature. Therefore Aufidius catches him completely off-guard. Coriolanus' first shocked reaction is to call upon Mars, the god of warriors, and to look heavenward for counsel in his anguished sense of confusion and disappointment. Aufidius cries:

_Name not the god, thou boy of tears._

(V,v,101)

Aufidius has built up his accusations, making each cut deeper than the former, until Coriolanus can no longer contain his rage. There is just enough truth in each of them to touch Coriolanus' sense of honour to the quick. But even deeper than his honour is doubt of his own emotional maturity and his own manliness. In the eyes of the world the virtues of the heart, of true manliness, are too often attributed to feminine weakness. And Coriolanus has been ruled by Volumnia too long to fully realize that he has at last outgrown her influence.

But if Aufidius can touch Coriolanus' weakest points, Coriolanus, with the sudden insight of the betrayed, can reply to "boy" as stingingly. "O slave" (V,v,104), he calls Aufidius. And we have just heard Aufidius admit:
Coriolanus is conscious of an inner moral freedom in contrast to Aufidius who is as much the "slave" of his own designs now as Coriolanus was at Antium in Act IV.

Coriolanus still has enough control over himself to ask "pardon" of the Volscian lords, a control which reveals his painful awareness of his position as a foreigner in Corioli. He cannot speak from the heart as he did at Rome, and so he calls upon the judgment of the lords, making an appeal to reason and justice:

...Your judgments, my grave lords,
Must give this cur the lie: and his own notion--

Instinctively Coriolanus and the Volscian nobility feel an affinity with each other. In this time of political transition it is everywhere essentially the nobility, even at its proudest and weakest, which represents order, a higher law. Coriolanus appeals to the lords and to Truth to give Aufidius "the lie." But when the first lord cries,

Peace, both, and hear me speak.

he is as ineffectual as Menenius was in Act III with his

On both sides more respect.

No one hears him, not even Coriolanus. Having begun to speak, Coriolanus' own words sweep him into anger and, for a fatal moment, he forgets that he has given his service to a higher nobility which only the heart can name. He brags to the Volscies of his own butchery of them and dares them:
He defends himself in terms that the world will understand and, ironically, the Volsces understand him far too well. This is what Aufidius has been waiting for. Coriolanus has pronounced the very words which justify his death in the eyes of the Volscian people. The crowd is a precarious and irrational force in its love and its hate—and a man's fate may hang on a chance word pronounced at the wrong moment. Coriolanus is betrayed by the "speech" he has so long distrusted.

His own tongue has released again the waiting chaos. The lawlessness of Aufidius and the mob surrounds (in the very pattern of the speeches), and closes in upon, the small core of noblemen who attempt to support principles:

All People: Tear him to pieces. --Do it presently.--He killed my son.--My daughter. --He killed my cousins Marcus.--He killed my father.

2. Lord: Peace, hot no outrage: peace! The man is noble and his fame folds in This orb o' the earth. His last offences to us Shall have judicious hearing. Stand, Aufidius, And trouble not the peace.

Cor: O that I had him, With six Aufidiuses, or more, his tribe, To use my lawful sword!

Auf: Insolent villain!

All Consp: Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him. (V,v,121-132)

To the very end of the play the sense of ambivalence at the heart of things is maintained. The murder of Coriolanus is not only the high point of the action but the point at which the conflict in our sympathies
is most intense. The weights on the scales of justice seem to be constantly shifting. The common people cry out their simple human appeal against the ravishes of the sword. At the same time they themselves become the inhumanly brutal, chaotic crowd. The nobility plead for order and reason, for justice based on civil law rather than on the revenge code of an eye for an eye retribution. Yet they do not call upon a higher justice. Even here they express the "noble" in purely worldly terms as the "fame that folds in this orb o' the earth," and we are reminded that it was largely the nobility's perversion of values and of the noble way of life which created the present situation. And Coriolanus, though he has been morally strong enough to resolve for a moment the conflicting demands life has made upon him, cannot ultimately extricate himself from the tangle of existence. In the conflict of passion and reason, chaos and order, the mob and the nobility, all the forces which have been struggling within Coriolanus cry out here for a "judicious hearing." With extreme dramatic compression the basic issues of the play crystallize just before the climax. In his last speech before he is killed, there is still the conflict, the insupportable tension between the individual anarchic will and the "lawful" sword. But Coriolanus does not raise his sword against order; he refrains from action and allows himself to be destroyed.

The order that resides in the heart attuned to a higher will is restored and is triumphant in spite of death. But there is the melancholy sense that again and again in this world it is the sword, not the heart, which finally settles the issue.
For Coriolanus' world lives by the sword. Rome's greatness is nourished by the blood of her neighbors, and the military conqueror is her god. Good and evil are matters of conquest and defeat. How fitting then that the fate of one of her greatest warriors should be worked out in terms of kinds of conquest.

Without attempting to over-schematize Shakespeare's design, we note that the "taking" of a city is crucial at three points in the play. How each city is taken has meaning in terms of the basic imagery and the symbolism of the over-all plot structure.

In the first act, Coriolanus takes Corioli by blows, by an almost inhuman physical force. In the fourth act, he veritably conquers Antium by means of the calculating mind, by the "gentle words" (III,iii,59) he has always despised as ambiguous and dishonest. In the fifth act, he abstains from either blows or words, from power or policy, and withdraws from Rome. His conquest is a spiritual one of the heart and the inner self. For a moment he enters, not the city of Rome, but the "city of God."

He is both the conquered and the conqueror. As his victory in Corioli was ultimately his defeat, so his defeat before Rome is his true victory.
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