

RÔLE-PLAYING AND RÔLE-TAKING: A STUDY OF CORIOLANUS

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Rôle-playing in this paper has been taken as the activity that governs the thematic development of *Coriolanus*. The hero plays a very specific game, that of war. To perform this game he plays a rôle which, regardless of his circumstances, he never discontinues. He cannot substitute his rôle, that of the man-warrior or soldier, for another, because after playing it continuously he is unable to distinguish soldiers from citizens, or Rome from the field of battle. His life evolves about martial activities. When this type of hero is confronted with a situation that has nothing to do with war, with a different audience and with a novel play-ground he cannot cope with it: he cannot act a part that has nothing to do with his familiar rôle and so he flounders. Coriolanus is no exception. For him, any change requires a reversal from «doing» something physical to «saying» something suitable for an occasion that requires interaction, and he cannot do thus. When he has to confront a different predicament he tries to solve it by imposing what is idiosyncratic in the rôle that he always plays and thus he fails¹.

The purpose of our investigation is to explore the reasons for Coriolanus's unique rôle and the way his behaviour conditions the structural development of the play. Shakespeare has created a hero who acts like a mechanical creature. He repeats again and again the same performance so that the playwright cannot indulge in variety of plot. He has to construct his play following a rigid and monotonous duplication of events, grammatical structures and words. Coriolanus, unlike other Shakespearean heroes such as Cleopatra or Richard III, who play games², to

¹ Coriolanus is not an unique case. See «A forgotten Play and a Dated Hero: A Study of Chapman's The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron», written by the present writer. In print, *A.A.V.T.*

² See my paper, «Cleopatra's Rôle-taking: A Study of Antony and Cleopatra», *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, N. 12 (Abril, 1986: 55-74) In this paper we have considered the variety of plot that characterizes this play arising from Cleopatra's rôle taking as opposed to the lack of variety in *Coriolanus*.

name only two, cannot move beyond the stage of rôle-playing³. This inability explains several things: his obsession with being faithful to his ideals, his hubris, his inflexibility, and finally his decision to join Aufidius against his own people. Coriolanus's child-like nature must be examined because it is lack of maturity that determines his incapacity to move beyond the activity of rôle-playing.

Before starting with an analysis of the quality of his rôle-playing, we wish to delineate the differences between rôle-taking and rôle-playing, as we perceive them. Much has been written about rôle-playing in Shakespeare, yet the dissimilarity between rôle-taking and rôle-playing has not been considered. For example the type of game played by Richard III and that of Coriolanus has not been clarified on the basis of the differences between these two activities, or the combination of both. Critics tend to speak of rôle-playing in a broad sense. By adhering to a single definition, that of rôle-playing, the differences inherent in the activity of the players are explained by qualifying the rôle that they play according to the enterprise inherent in the rôle. The tendency is to write that he or she plays the rôle of the villain, or the rôle of the lover or the rôle of the idiot, to give three examples⁴. However when a person plays the rôle of hero he may do so for two reasons. The first, because he wants too much to be a hero and so, unawares he behaves like a hero, disregarding every thing unrelated to heroic exploits: this is rôle-playing. The second, because playing such a rôle, at a given moment may be necessary or profitable: this is rôle-taking.

Bearing in mind these differences, it is not a question of ascertaining the rôle that a person plays by giving it a name or definition. It is necessary to determine the quality of the rôle based on the attitude of the player towards the part that he plays. There are marked differences between Richard III and Coriolanus that stem from the dissimilarities between rôle-playing and rôle-taking. Richard and Cleopatra are capable of both rôle-playing and rôle-taking as opposed to Coriolanus who is incapable of taking rôles. In rôle-playing we have the explanation of the repetitive quality of the play: both language and structure must be tautological because the hero produces the same part again and again. It must be repetitive and monotonous because the thematic development of the play derives from what the hero can do: play a single rôle, as opposed to what he cannot do: take various rôles.

Rôle-taking is an activity which requires of the player two things: one to be cognisant that he is playing a game. Other, to be able to adapt the quality of his

³ An analysis of plays such as Marlowe's *Edward II*, Shakespeare *Richard II* and *Richard III* serves to demonstrate the existence of a game deriving from either rôle-taking or rôle-playing. In each case the part that they play becomes the cause of their downfalls.

⁴ See Thomas, F. Van Laan, *Role-playing in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). We wish to mention how role-playing is understood in this study. For example «Viola's role-playing is the result of a calculated decision and is undertaken so that she can retain some control over her destiny», p. 77. For us this is not rôle-playing but rôle-taking. She, unlike Coriolanus, knows when she must take a different rôle as part of her game and play. When Van Laan comes to the analysis of Coriolanus, he defines his behaviour as rôle-playing, but without explaining why it has to be monotonous and thus without defining the differences between Menenius who takes rôles and Coriolanus who plays a rôle. See. pp. 212-3.

play to circumstances. A person who is well disciplined in the artistry of rôle-taking will put on as many masks as necessary. He will be able to change from the mask of the saint to the mask of the perfect lover. Rôle-taking, at times, is oriented to please or to delude others. Rôle-taking demands variety. Hence it is an activity that helps the playwright to create diversity of tone, language and plot when writing a play. When the character takes on rôles, there are bound to be many alternatives to play with: modifications of language, linguistic deviations, synthetic usage of linguistic norms, costumes, masks and so forth. The player must be sufficiently versatile to offer a myriad of faces. He puts on diverse masks precisely because he has decided to play specific rôles. Rôle-taking demands of the player a high degree of skill, maturity and understanding of human nature.

There has to be interaction with others in rôle-taking because it is an enterprise that forces the player to project himself towards the exterior world. Rôle-taking is oriented, consciously or not, towards engaging others in order to catch them in a web to make them play the part that the player has assigned them. The outcome of the parts that the player enacts depend on the way he manages to manipulate others to act according to his wishes. To be able to achieve an acceptable degree of verisimilitude the player must be capable of constant change while he is interacting with others. Rôle-taking, combined with rôle-playing, entails a certain amount of dissembling so that it may be at times a deceitful exertion.

Rôle-playing, unlike rôle-taking, is an activity that does not require significant interaction with others⁵. This is the case if the player does not combine rôle with rôle-playing. In fact, rôle-playing is a monolithic activity. It is founded on a learned action based on observation or on coaching. A child, at a very early stage on life plays rôles. He can do this all by himself: he does not need to interact with other children. Rôle-playing is a necessary activity deriving from the process of learning. A child plays many rôles as part of his schooling process. As the child learns to play different rôles he becomes aware of the existence of other people and begins to share his activity. Once he begins to interact with others he has to take rôles thus accommodating himself to the needs of the group that he is part of. To do this he must adapt himself to the demands of other players so that he will have

⁵ The basic differences between rôle-playing and rôle-taking have been taken from Ritchie P. Lowry & Robert P. Rankin, *Sociology: the Science of Sociology* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 68-9. Iona and Peter Opie studies the manner in which children play games by acting, pretending, daring and the like. According to some of the studies on war games, «occasionally when they play a war game there is only one side, the enemy is non-existent, the battle an illusion», p. 339 This explains in many ways why the sense of fear and of death cannot be apprehended by the player. *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1970). See Berne, *Games People Play* (London: Penguin Books, 1984). An interesting paper on game playing to be applied to literature is that of Elizabeth W. Bruss, «The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games», *New Literary History*, vol. X (1977: 154-72). Some of the theories related to game playing are applicable to Coriolanus's relationship with his world. The element that interest us is that of parity, but not as Bruss understands parity between reader and text, but between Coriolanus as a player and his opponents. We do not believe in the existence of parity between reader and text. To explain our reasons is beyond the scope of this paper. We do follow the idea that every game has its rules. See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* chapter «Nature and Significance of Play» (1938; rpt, New York: Beacon, 1972).

to embrace attitudes that are appropriate to the dynamics of the group in order to give a valid significance to his own activity. The second stage is very important in the development of a child. He begins to apprehend the world not only according to his needs but according to the needs of group, and so he will take on rôles that he will play in order to interact with the group. As he grows older, the combination of both rôle-playing and rôle-taking will transform him into a fully realized social being. Hence when we speak of rôle-playing we are speaking of that type of activity which does not require taking rôles. We are speaking of the part that a person or a child plays taking into consideration his own needs not the needs of a group. In rôle-playing, when not combined with rôle-taking, we have an activity that entails pastime and self-fulfilment. We can speak of rôle-playing without rôle-taking. However this is not possible in the case of rôle-taking⁶ since a person cannot take a rôle without playing a rôle.

Coriolanus's behavioural paradigm fits in with the customary workings of rôle-playing, rather than those of rôle-taking. He is not an exceptional case in Elizabethan drama. This type of hero must be inflexible because he plays the same rôle over and over again. He cannot act differently: he only knows how to play one game and thus one specific rôle. The rôle that he adopts is what justifies his existence not only as a character in the play but also as a human being acting a part. Rôle-playing is an enterprise that controls several things; it rules him as a character, it governs the thematic development of the play, it controls the language that the character uses and justifies the existence and as well as presence on stage of other characters. Rôle-playing is what explains why Coriolanus cannot stop being Coriolanus and also why the pattern of the play is repetitive.

Coriolanus has to confront his own downfall precisely because of his inability to rectify his behaviour so as to adapt himself to a set of circumstances demanding the modification of his attitude, and changing the part that he has been playing. Coriolanus plays a single and unique game, a game that is controlled by a rigid set of rules, those of the game of war. These rules commit him to a behaviour that he cannot change and so the rules, under no circumstance, can be altered. For Coriolanus his game and thus his rôle-playing is the most important thing in his life. The drive to play the part⁷ of the man-warrior is so strong in him that

⁶ A student must play the rôle of student: however, fully aware of this he may take on the rôle of the attentive listener when in fact he is not listening, or the rôle of the rebellious student when he likes both the system and the classes.

⁷ Coriolanus's activity show characteristics which transform his pattern of behaviour into play: play as a drive that controls him. This is to be expected from role playing, because as Huizinga points out, «First and foremost, all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it. By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process. It is something added there-to and spread out over it like a flowering, an ornament, a garment. Obviously, freedom must be understood here in the wider sense that leaves untouched the philosophical problem of determinism. It may be objected that this freedom does not exist for the animal and the child; they must play because their instinct drives them to it and because it serves to develop their bodily faculties and their powers of selection. ...Child and animal play because they enjoy playing, and therein precisely lies their freedom». Johan Huizinga, *op. cit.*,

he prefers facing death than making any concession in his game. Coriolanus is very conscious of the rules inherent in his game and thus of the implications intrinsic in the deviation from these rules. When it comes to war-games he is in the right. However the problem is that he applies these rules to his other activities, independently of time, area, or players that he is encountering.

As observers of his performance, we can see when his game is correct and played in the right place, but we can also appreciate when his rôle-playing becomes unsuitable and unacceptable. Unsuitable, because he is not in the correct playground: in the area where both the rôle and its rules are operative. Coriolanus cannot distinguish when he is not at the right place hence he cannot alter his pattern of behaviour to a great extent. The playwright invites his public to evaluate his performance according to his own social norms. We can appreciate the quality of his rôle-playing, yet we know when the game is finished and hence when he is playing badly. We are not the creators of the game, thus we cannot change the outcome of his game. There is not parity between Coriolanus as player and us as spectators of his game. In spite of this we know when his rôle is unnecessary. This knowledge transforms us, although indirectly, into active players, for more likely than not, while Coriolanus is playing his rôle, our minds are rehearsing different alternatives because he is playing his game out of context. The audience, unlike Coriolanus, can go over the mode in which he should have taken on a specific rôle, rather than playing the same rôle, thus defying the requirements of the moment according to his needs. Unawares, we are contriving our own literary game, while fully cognizant of the fact that Coriolanus's game cannot be altered.

The play opens with a situation that offers the audience information about Coriolanus. In no time the poet has managed to awake our expectations about him. He has not appeared on the scene and yet our minds are full of Coriolanus. The data is critical. We know we are about to see a hero who, up to this moment, has been a perfect soldier, a man who moves constantly in one specific arena, the field of battle.

The predicament that gives rise to our anticipations is devastating; the informants, or the rabble if you wish, interacting as a social group «are all resolve[d] rather to die than to famish?» (I,i,4)⁸. This is a group of people acting out a part, taking the rôle of rebels owing to a very specific situation, their hunger: this predicament has been created by another group that of the patricians. The rabble as a group has taken upon itself a rôle, that of fighting to the death for their rights rather than dying of hunger. Their attitude is not permanent. Surely the rabble would not be willing to die if they were not hard pressed by hunger: as soon as the cause of their acting as a group disappears, they will not confront the patricians

9-10. Perhaps in Coriolanus's case the element of freedom may be questioned since he plays always the same game because he cannot do anything else. Of course, we are talking of psychological freedom, not of freedom taken in the general sense of the word. There is not question that Coriolanus's enjoys his game. The drive or necessity to play is very marked in Coriolanus, hence he cannot move into other areas if activity.

⁸ Ed. by Philip Brockbank, *Coriolanus* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1976). Note, all quotations from this ed.

and even less will be willing to die for anything. Their natural inclination is that of living in peace as long as their basic necessities are covered. The cause of their hunger and thus of the rôle they must take at this moment, are the patricians who are not distributing the corn, and specifically Coriolanus. Their anger has been directed towards a single person, Coriolanus, as if his rôle as a hero were so overpowering as to transform his own social group, the patricians, into some sort of shadow whose only visible shape is himself in the eyes of the rabble and thus the most apt target for their anger.

As soon as Coriolanus appears on the scene, the motives for channelling their hatred are disclosed to the audience. The famine is real and their desire to kill Coriolanus is equally real: they would have his head if they could.

It is not for nothing that the beginning of the play is very abrupt; it serves to set in motion from the start the machinery that will eventually kill Coriolanus precisely because he is who he is⁹, the opposition between rôle-playing and rôle-taking is already operative in this confrontation. The clash between a social group interacting to resist a monolithic figure who challenges them all, as if they were a group of enemies, has been well depicted as two different ways of acting. From the very beginning we have been presented with an unpopular hero, and he is disliked because of the rôle he plays. He is the autocrat who must be destroyed because he is inflexible, and thus incapable of understanding the needs of others. This is because such an empathy would entail a change of attitude towards interaction, putting aside, for a moment, his activity as soldier. Now he does not have to play this part to prove his worth as soldier, but to take the rôle of a perceptive patrician capable of listening to the people. Coriolanus will not attend to their demands, on the contrary, the group has to listen to him, so that he is a hero who runs the risk of being killed, not so much in the field of battle as at the hands of the common people for making them feel unworthy of a proper hearing.

Coriolanus hates the rabble and his abhorrence derives from his perception of the rôle that he plays, that of the feared soldier who disdains people who are not part of his world. However the rabble, in part, can apprehend the worth of his rôle in the field of battle. They can equally perceive his reasons for being a hero and this is what they cannot sanction. In their judgment Coriolanus's logic has nothing to do with theirs, with their need to be safeguarded from enemies. For Coriolanus any type of demeanour, viewpoint on life or need which does not fit in with his pre-conceived idea of what is laudable and what is not, is irrelevant. This attitude towards people converts him into a hero «manqué».

Coriolanus's rôle-playing is a knife with a double edge. Shakespeare is not denying that there is virtue in his rôle-playing; he is the best player that Rome has, because he can surpass everybody in the field of battle. He is a brave fighter, a noble soldier when it comes to defending Rome against her enemies. The rabble, as if voicing the playwright's opinion, does not deny Coriolanus his merit, attaching

⁹ «But this inauspicious entry, surely one of the most disconcerting initial utterances ever put into the mouth of a tragic hero, casts a light of its own upon the uneasy balance between his powers and his failings». Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare, the Roman Plays* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1963), pp. 213.

however little excellence to it for reasons which have nothing to do with the quality of his rôle. What they are stating is that they, as group, have little cause to be obliged for the part that he plays; they know that Coriolanus is not acting as he is because he wants to defend them; they recognize he does not play his rôle for the benefit of his community, but because his rôle is what gives him the occasion to be unique: (I,i,35-9). Coriolanus acts answering only himself and his mother¹⁰. He is playing the rôle that he has been taught to play by his mother and hence he plays it to gratify her.

The speech of the nameless citizen is full of significance. He uses the verb to «do» on three occasions when referring to Coriolanus's deeds. The first time, when he conveys that «he hath done famously», he suggests that Coriolanus has been able to play his rôle so perfectly that he has become famous. On the second occasion his remark serves to clarify that the quality of Coriolanus's play has been determined by his wish to do «famously». With his third allusion the nameless citizen refers to the event that «he did it to please his mother» (I,i,38) hence he implies that Coriolanus plays his rôle with accuracy to do «famously» precisely because he craves the applause of one particular person, his mother. The most upsetting fact of this speech lies in Coriolanus's motives, which are not his country but his personal needs.

Initially we take this information with a grain of salt: it comes from a group of people that, unlike Coriolanus, are not interested in «doing famously» by engaging themselves in Coriolanus's pursuit. The speech has been uttered by a nameless citizen who has neither a proper name nor a surname. He represents a community; his voice is that of a group of people acting out a part, induced not by the desire to be famous but by a very elementary need, that of having food in order to survive¹¹. As a group, they are undertaking a rôle, that of «the mutinous members» (I,i,148) of the state demanding corn. There is nothing heroic in their behaviour; they have been pushed by necessity to take a rôle, that of rebels, interacting as an «assembly» that has been able to reach a collective decision.

¹⁰ For G. Wilson Knight, «Coriolanus's love is largely a love of his mother's admiration». *The Imperial Theme* (1931: rpt, London: Methuen, 1975), p. 177. See Chapter VI, «The Royal Occupation: An Essay on Coriolanus», pp. 154-198. Coriolanus «was brought up by a widowed mother, and was chiefly animated by the desire to please her. Plutarch is at pains to emphasize this». Harry Levin, «Coriolanus: An Introduction», ed. A. Harbage, *Shakespeare: the Tragedies* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 171.

¹¹ «Cade's rebellion is of course, simply awful, and for Shakespeare, proletarian rebellion would seem to be absolutely indefensible. There is an interesting variation in *Coriolanus*: the mutinous citizens in act I, scene i, certainly have a case, although perhaps not an adequate one, for rebellion; Menenius's musty parable of the belly and the body does not answer it. But, most important, the unnamed First Citizen is not Jack Cade: he is highly intelligent, shrewd, articulate, literate, professional proletarian revolutionary. He is a bad actor but a bright one, and he represents a danger that Shakespeare clearly perceived in the first decade of the seventeenth century». C.G. Thayer, *Shakespearean Politics: Government and Misgovernment in the Great Histories* (London, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 79. To know if Shakespeare considered hunger as an inadequate cause for rebellion is not an easy matter. What is well known is that hunger has been, more often than not, the germinal cause of many rebellions and so hunger must not be taken as a trivial matter.

The nameless rebel does not sound like an ignorant oaf: his words are the utterance of the community. The way he questions Menenius reflects the coherence inherent in the part that they are playing. As a group, their words reflect the needs of the community. Menenius is wrong when he tells him that he «Lead'st first to win some vantage» because the «vantage» is not grounded on his personal needs. (I,i,159). The nameless citizen takes the rôle of leader because the «assembly» needs him to reap a very basic «vantage», that of corn.

Menenius is a clever man; he knows exactly the rôle that he must play before this group of people. He is confronted with a battle of words, so he fights his opponents with the same instrument, words. He perceives when and how he must try to interact with the rabble. He addresses himself to them as if they were his equals, «Why masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours,/Will you undo yourselves?» (I,i,61-2). He knows that the game must be played out on their own level. Menenius has his own weapons, the correct weapons at his disposal, to fight the opposing party, words.

Unlike Coriolanus, Menenius knows when he must take a rôle and how it must be played, even if he does not like it. He is smooth and obliquely treats them as inferiors. He adopts a fatherly inflection; «and you slander/The helms o'th'state, who care for you like fathers,/When you curse them as enemies». (I,i,75-77). He tries to explain, by means of the belly-fable, the rôle that each group must play as part of the body politic¹². He is going to tell them «a pretty tale», a yarn that «may be [they] have heard». He is deceptive for he claims that it is a fitting story and so he is willing to repeat it in order to make them aware of what they are and of how they must behave. He takes the rôle of a tolerant, kind and patient patrician. His performance demands of him the task of pretending to accept the fact that his «friends and "neighbours" are dull, and thus in need to be informed by something like a «pretty tale». He feigns that he has to do so in a simple fashion because his «friends» are not very imaginative. By allotting the assembly the rôle of an obtuse group of children Menenius forces them to allow that they are in need to be told, once again, what their duties and obligations towards the state are.

Within certain limits the rabble acquiesces to the rôle that Menenius assigns it. Yet, now and then, the First Citizen protests, while the rest are silent, watching the verbal play that takes place between them. The First citizen is never satisfied with the explanations of his «friend». From a theatrical point of view the situation is interesting. The assembly becomes the stage-audience and Menenius and the First Citizen two actors impersonating a public debate that the anxious «assembly» watches.

What Menenius is trying to do is to convince them that each group has a part to play within the body politic: that it is wrong to move into areas of activity that they know nothing about, such as rebellion. Menenius is a good actor: he treats the mob as an irresponsible group of people playing the wrong part. He is trying

¹² The fable of the belly has been analyzed by most critics who study Coriolanus. Hence there is hardly a comment to be made about it. See the original source or sources: Livy's *The Early History of Rome* and Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*: Sir Thomas North's translation.

to convince them that by becoming rebels they are acting badly and that they had better abandon their game in order to play according to their position in society.

Coriolanus's entrance interrupts Menenius's discourse; it is devastating and the effect is that of a violent hurricane capable of swallowing all that is in his way. Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *Coriolanus* is the only character who makes such a violent entrance on the stage. The sense of drama is present from the moment in which he appears on the scene. This is not a drama in which the hero moves from a happy situation to a catastrophe, because both his stage-audience and the public see very little cause for joy and happiness in his behaviour. As soon he appears on the scene he begins to play his part without a prelude. Shakespeare is presenting his public from the very beginning with a magnificent actor playing his rôle to perfection. The problem is that he only knows how to play one rôle, unawares of the existence of other rôles, or unwilling to rehearse other rôles. He is comfortable with the degree of perfection that he has achieved playing the rôle of the feared soldier. When he is on stage he does the only thing he knows how to do: play the soldier's rôle. As we watch him, a certain amount of antipathy is awoken in the audience. His show is too extravagant and out of context. However it cannot be otherwise because his entrance constitutes the start of his acting out his rôle-playing. According to his idea of himself he acts as he must, intimidating the rabble with the power inherent in his rôle of man-warrior.

The warning that he will «do» something destructive does not come as a shock. «Do», «act», and «make» are the three verbs which comprise the activities that characterize Coriolanus's rôle. The nameless citizen uses the verb «do» three times to refer to Coriolanus's actions. In addition to his inclination to «do» something deleterious, what Coriolanus reveals about himself is pride in the rôle that he plays: he is good and he knows it. As the public, we must accept that he knows how to play his part with a high degree of perfection. The arrogant soldier confronts the common people and the way he does so infuriates both the public and his stage-audience. The two levels —that of Coriolanus's stage-audience and public sitting in the theatre, are important. The rabble, becomes, his stage-audience, hating the rôle that he plays. The public likes the way he plays it while perceiving why his audience does not esteem him. The stage-audience watches Coriolanus's rôle-playing while becoming, at the same time, the object that allows him to enact his rôle. The merging of stage-audience, as the cause that will permit Coriolanus to play his rôle, and public is a brilliant stroke of dramatic strategy. Actor, stage-audience and public become the necessary ingredients that go into the making of a play: components which justify the play as an activity that demands that everybody take rôles. Coriolanus plays his part, involving both his stage-audience and the public. However it is the public that justifies the relationship between Coriolanus as performer of a rôle and his stage-audience.

The way that he speaks infuriates people¹³. His voice is like a drum that evokes war-cries. Never has a player been presented as so fully self-contained as

¹³ Coriolanus provokes people constantly. This could be taken as a need to demonstrate his masculinity. Although we are not going to touch upon Coriolanus's sexual problem it is worth consider-

Coriolanus in relation to the rôle that he plays. The problem is that he is not on the field of battle but in Rome. Yet the effectiveness of his rôle-playing is shown by what he manages to achieve, to arouse hostile and violent feelings in his stage-audience. Because he treats them as enemies, hostility, energy, and heat are directed against him as their opponent. Their need to inflict on him some physical damage is comprehensible. He has ignited in the rabble the primitive instinct of self-defense, and he is their foe.

At this moment Coriolanus does not only address to them as if he were a drum but also tells them that he has weapons. Heated by the sound of his own voice, as if he were hearing the distant drums of war calling him to play his rôle, he is ready to use his weapons against them:

And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
With thousand of these quartered slaves, as high
as I could pick my lance. (I,i,196-7)

There is violence in his words; an intensity that will remain as a constant throughout the play, thus admitting no variation whatsoever. His behaviour, although correct in the field of battle, is incorrect here. This is not the way to solve social dilemmas.

Coriolanus has employed the verb to «use», that is to say a verb related to doing things by means of something, in this case his sword. «Use» here has the semantic dimension of threat, of action, and the endeavour behind this intimidation is that of war. He is asking permission to transform the city into a fighting arena, thus using war-tactics as if the rabble were a group of enemies to his country. For him the proletariat becomes the fit occasion to test his capacity to play the soldier's rôle. Observing Coriolanus' performance the public begins to feel that maybe the nameless citizen was right after all. He used the verb to «do», and Coriolanus is trying to «do» something to them, to attack them, to transform them into slaves. Already Coriolanus gives the impression of being a man who whether in Rome or on the battle-field uses the same strategy, and the same language.

For Coriolanus his sword is the instrument that he must «use» to solve every problem: whenever he speaks he refers to what he can «do» with his sword because his sword is the vehicle that permits him to play his rôle. Now he speaks alluding to what he can «do» with his sword. In consideration of the rôle he plays, both his sword and the verbs «do» and «make» must be part of his acts and rhetoric. Coriolanus cannot be Coriolanus without his war impedimenta. His language fits in well with his implements and with the consequences inherent in the «use» of those instruments. He wants to make a «quarry» of the rabble, to transform them into «slaves».

Coriolanus lacks a practical sense of achievement. He wants to transform the «slaves» into «quartered» creatures. By converting them into «quartered»

ing the relationship between war, violence and sex as part of his private game. Eros and death are always present in war. For the study of the relationship between Eros and War see G. Bataille, *El Erotismo* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1979).

persons they become useless for the community. War-spoils, that is to say, slaves, are not «quartered» by any practical man of war but used for the benefit of his people. Coriolanus cannot see this because his rôle-playing limits him to physical action, not to positive and practical accomplishments arising from physical action. In this case, the positive were he on the battle-field, the capture of slaves to work for the community cannot be apprehended by him. The rabble are slaves, defeated enemies, hence he wants to «make» of them a heap of «quartered» animals. His opponents, being civil citizens, are simple animals that he can hunt. «Quarry» is an uncomfortable word as is its related meaning, «hunting» and thus game playing¹⁴. However it is appropriate coming from Coriolanus because his words relate to game playing, and the game is war. The words «quarry» and «hunt» embody different senses of the word game.

One could hardly define Coriolanus's nature as mild. His behaviour is that of a browbeater because he is obsessed, not to say possessed by the idea of opposing others, of confronting the rabble to «make them feel», as he expresses it, the power of his weapons. The fact that Coriolanus is obsessed with himself precisely because he is consumed by the rôle that he plays is revealed in the fact that he is incapable of following the most elemental rules pertaining to social interaction and manners. The other side of the coins is perhaps that Coriolanus's fixation may derive from a preoccupation with himself that can be only realized by becoming possessed by his rôle-playing.

When he arrives, Menenius salutes him respectfully with a «hail, noble Martius» (I,i,163). Coriolanus answers him with an unacceptable conversational deformity:¹⁵ he breaks the rules inherent in communication based on a linguistic coda of politeness that is owed to the manner in which Menenius salutes him. All that he is capable of saying by way of reply is a rude, anxious and dry «thanks». There is not a cooperative principle in Coriolanus's language. It must be so because he understands his rôle-playing as an activity that entails both conversational

¹⁴ Coriolanus's sense of values has been well defined by the way in which he uses the word «quarry» as part of his rôle-playing. In my paper «Cleopatra's Role Taking: A Study of Antony and Cleopatra», we gave a list of the senses inherent in the word «game». The seventh sense was that of «prey, quarry», whereby the commoners become Coriolanus's «object of pursuit» that is to say, things to play with. An interesting paper discussing different ways of apprehending Coriolanus is that of W. Hutchings, «Beast or God: the Coriolanus's Controversy», ed. C.B. Cox & D.J. Palmer, *Shakespeare's Wide and Universal Stage* (Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 218-233. In this paper we accept Hutchings idea that «Coriolanus's nature does change, but the situation does, turning triumph into defeat». p. 221. Many of Jan Kott's considerations, although unpleasant, are accurate. He is right when he talks about Coriolanus's «absurd system of values», p. 165. However we must understand why his system is absurd and thus why he is a tragic hero. *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 19...)

¹⁵ Dr. Leech, considers comedy as a text based on conversational pattern which do not conform to linguistic patterns inherent in concepts such as politeness and the like. Comedy uses what he has defined as conversational deformity. At times drama may use the same linguistic device. We believe that deformation is necessary because it reflects the manner in which rôle-playing controls the hero. His dry thanks achieves an affective meaning that remains the same throughout the play. See Geoffrey Leech, *Semantics* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 17-18. Coriolanus's game is primitive; he needs to have very little verbal skill. «Fighting, as a cultural function, always presupposes limiting rules». Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

deformity and rejection of the cooperative principle inherent in language. He is not aware of the linguistic principles that govern society as a group of people interacting according to rules of politeness¹⁶. Menenius, the man who knows how to act according to circumstances, behaves correctly. He hails him and qualifies his name, Martius, with «noble»; he is following the rules inherent in social interaction, he is adhering to the cooperative principle. Menenius is a social man, a crafty player who knows exactly what he has to say and do at the right time. He will follow the rules even if he has to be dishonest, thus going against his own principles. This is not the case with Coriolanus. He is a monolithic player unable to see or understand the elementary rules inherent in social interaction even when he addresses himself to people who love him well.

Coriolanus's brain has been heated by the fact that there is action: by the event that there is something for him to «do»: by his chance to play his rôle, even though he considers the rabble as an unworthy stage-audience. Hence, he cannot waste his time in civilities for he feels he has the right to interrupt Menenius, the rebby breaking the cooperative principle inherent in communication, because of the way he perceives the situation. The idea of playing his rôle is what benumbs Martius's mind and so much so as to being deplorably uncivil towards a man much older than himself and who happens to dote on him.

Coriolanus is a spoiled child: a man who has not been able to move beyond the basic and elementary stage of rôle-playing¹⁷. He has played so often the rôle of soldier, and with so much energy and dexterity that he cannot see any value in any other type of activity. Coriolanus has both the energy and blindness of a child, engaged in his private world of battles:

Who deserves greatness,
Deserves your hate; and your affections are
A sick man's appetite. (I,i,175-7)

¹⁶ In *Coriolanus*, the first thing the audience notices is that the hero is basically alone: as the play progresses this impression is fully confirmed. «Coriolanus's utter isolation is clear even in his first meeting with Aufidius, the only other character who might seem to be his equal in natural nobility and kingliness». James Holstun, «Tragic Superfluity in *Coriolanus*», *E.L.H.*, vol. 50, N. 3 (Fall 1983: 485-507), p. 498. Levin aptly writes, «The world alone is repeated more than in any other Shakespearean work; and from the welter of similes, the most memorable is a lonely dragon», *Art. Cit.*, p. 174.

¹⁷ There are as many ways of looking at Coriolanus as there are critics. Although it may seem inadequate to start with Bradley, because he is considered by some critics dated, we should note his view of him. He sees him as a man who «stands on the edge of a crime beside which, at least, in outward dreadfulness, the slaughter of an individual looks insignificant», A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedies* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1964). For others he is a heartless machine. According to R.M. Frye he is «a selfish creature who makes Rome a tool to feed on his pride». He is sinful and his «temporary denial of his familial ties puts him on the brink of the ultimate destruction of order». *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 122. He has to be selfish because of his child-like nature. However, there are reasonable doubts as to the worth of the order that he might have destroyed. For Ribner «he is straight-forward and honest; the ideal to which he devotes himself, and of which he is a dramatic symbol, is a glorious and heroic one, as consuming patriotism often may be, and as particularly in the Renaissance it might be regarded» p. 185.

Coriolanus's world is idiosyncratic. He takes his idea of rôle-playing to such an extreme that he transforms into an emblem of his «greatness» as soldier the hatred of the ones who do not belong to his world. He cannot distinguish right from wrong. «Greatness» cannot be measured with the rod of «hate». Yet, he assesses the quality of his rôle according to the enormity of the «hate» of the mob, and the healthiness of his activity by calling the «affection» of the common people a syndrome of sickness.

The way that Menenius accepts his rudeness as if it were a virtue rather than a fault, proves that his impoliteness is of no consequence. He ignores his rudeness because Coriolanus is playing the rôle of soldier and that is all that matters. The contrast between Menenius and Coriolanus is provocative. Menenius has presented him to his stage-audience: however Coriolanus is deaf and ignores his greeting. Menenius accepts his lack of consideration, thus giving the impression of acceding to whatever he does as long as it fits in with what he expects of the man-warrior. In Menenius we have an implicit acceptance of Coriolanus's rôle and a lack of preoccupation with the possibility that he may be untrained to act differently if the occasion calls for it.

Shakespeare has created a passionate and lion-like actor: an actor that rants and raves at both his stage-audience and public. A lion that shall roar till death silences him. The quality of his language reflects the manner in which he plays a specific and unique rôle: this attribute has been enhanced already at the very beginning of the play. The rabble are not people but things such «hares», and thus unclean: things that he can play with at his pleasure. People can be polluting creatures, so there are two alternatives for him. One, to hunt and destroy them; the other, to ignore or avoid them because they are not fit subjects to occupy the arena in which he plays his game. They are also witless «geese» and therefore unworthy of a proper hearing.

The roaring lion cannot understand the meaning of words unrelated to war-cries. What he perceives best is the din of drums and trumpets: anything else becomes an irrelevant sound voided of purpose. Words are inconsequential signs if they do not function as signals indicating action. At times he denies people the right to be people. The commoners are fragments; they are the broken spoils, the useless booty of his private «wars». It is not for nothing that Coriolanus thinks only of lions as worthy animals to be fed, and to be fed with good cuts rather than with worthless fragments.

Coriolanus cannot accept the need to employ social solutions to social problems¹⁸. For him it is wrong to appoint tribunes to settle the problems of the common people. We can understand why: the rôle of the tribunes has to be played not with swords but with words and thus by means of a cooperative interaction inherent in language. For Coriolanus neither communication nor socialization offer him any pleasure: it goes against the rules of his game, a game that requires of him a few war-cries and a direct and violent confrontation with others. In addition,

¹⁸ Coriolanus explores the extreme situation of the individual who pits himself against the state; but Shakespeare's portrait was brief and enigmatic, Levin, p. 170.

for Coriolanus there must be parity between himself and his opponent. This parity is not possible between the mob and him and therefore, they can never be subjects with whom to play his game. Owing to the physical parity factor he disregards them as if they had no rights of any kind.

The idea of parity versus non-parity governs Coriolanus's rôle playing. For Coriolanus when there is no parity people are of so little consequence that he is not interested in knowing their names. According to Coriolanus's rôle-playing the same rule must be applied to those who are willing to grant the rabble some sort of parity, the tribunes. Coriolanus's rules do not include the possibility of any kind of interaction with the tribunes. To socialize with them is to become like them. Hence, for Coriolanus the tribunes must be nameless creatures. Any person who is not a fighter is a non-existent thing, so he cannot remember all the names of the tribunes:

Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,
Of their choice. One's Junius Brutus
Sicinius Velutus, and I know not. (I,i,214-15)

For him it is incomprehensible that tribunes should lower themselves to defend what he interprets as «their vulgar wisdoms». Their employment is offensive and consequently his mind cannot recognize them all by their proper names.

In less than 250 lines sufficient has been said about Coriolanus's rôle-playing and about his inability to act differently. All that needs to be remarked about him, has been, consequently the rest of the play must be based on variations of the same behavioural pattern. A pattern that arises from the conduct of a hero who sees life in terms of a unique rôle to play: a hero who cannot perceive that others may like to be useful to their community by playing a different rôle on a dissimilar play-ground: a hero who, if he could, would banish from his world all that which does not fit in with his idea of game and play. It is obvious that if Coriolanus had the required control within his grasp, he would get rid not only of the rabble but of the tribunes, because the rôle they have chosen to play is not to his inclination because the rules inherent in other rôles have nothing in common with his own rules. He does not try to hide this. They know it and so they hate him. Coriolanus, unconsciously, from the very beginning of the play, with his verbal provocations, —which are no more than linguistic manifestations of what he would «do» had he the opportunity to do it—, is already paving the way towards his downfall. The feelings of hatred that he awakens in both the rabble and the tribunes cannot be appeased unless he changes his pattern of behaviour.

Soon after Coriolanus appears on the scene it is easy to detect what is wrong with the manner in which he plays his rôle. So when the messenger arrives both the stage-audience and the public feel relieved; his attention has been focused on something he loves to play, namely war-games.

Coriolanus's felicity, because he will soon be playing his rôle on the field of battle, is so overpowering that in no time he forgets all about the rabble and the tribunes. Now he is confronted with the real issue, not with a travesty of it represented by the mob. As if he were a child, he never hides his feelings. He manifests

his joy openly and expects everybody to rejoice with him, «I am glad on't; then we shall ha'means to vent / Our musty superfluity» (I,i,225). His transport becomes obscene precisely because it is too genuine¹⁹. The idea of playing his game in a authentic arena dominates him and he verbalizes his gladness: war is what will offer him the possibility of playing his rôle.

Both the stage-audience and the public cannot feel the same way as Coriolanus. In any case war is an undesirable event. A person with more tact and sensibility would have tried to conceal his feelings. However he cannot do so because war is what gives him the occasion to exist, to be acknowledged because of his rôle-playing. The time to play his game has come and with it his chance to put to good use his stage properties, thus giving meaning to his costume, that of the soldier. Even when considering war as a game, for Coriolanus it is a very peculiar game, a solitary game. He plays his game as if he had a patent conferring on him the right to be an exclusive player acting with another equally elite player, Aufidius. He does not talk about war but about his «wars», using the emphatic plural, «only my wars with him!». The point can be taken further because Coriolanus does not see war only as a game that is his but also as the factor that permits him to enjoy himself because there is an apt player to play with, Aufidius.

Because of the element of parity Aufidius is not, unlike the rabble, a «polluting hare» but a mighty lion worth opposing and thus hunting, «He is the lion/That I am proud to hunt». Coriolanus is so obsessed with the quality of his game that he is very selective when he defines his enemies. He is evaluating them as fighters, and the fiercer the better. There is in Coriolanus's mind a marked sense of degree based on no other consideration than the capacity to fight. The rabble is placed at the level of hares, or fragments of bodies. When it comes to Aufidius he must be placed at the top. He must be a lion, because Coriolanus is a lion himself and thus willing to fight only another lion. One among the fighters can confer on his rôle-playing glory and power, Aufidius. The audience wonders what Coriolanus would do if this lion were killed, having then only common soldiers to contest with. One has the feeling that unless Coriolanus fights with Aufidius, nothing else would be good enough because he feels he is the best.

The image of hunting, as part of his game playing is used frequently by Coriolanus. The quality of his hunting depends upon the value of his «quarry», and the mightier the better, for his hunting will provoke more admiration in those who watch his game. Coriolanus is obsessed with the idea of producing a show that is worth contemplating by experts in that area.

The idea of being watched by a stage-audience is present in Coriolanus's mind. He is an actor who knows that he has reached the level of perfection when

¹⁹ According to Francis A. Shirley, «Coriolanus is the most frequent user of oaths, even warlike oaths. The result is that in oaths, as in other matters, Coriolanus stands out and his vows are an appropriate part of his intransigence, explosiveness and sense of his own greatness». *Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare's Plays* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 140. We believe that Coriolanus must speak as Shirley comments that he does: it is part of the enactment of his rôle-playing. However, when Coriolanus swears he is less offensive than when he expresses joy for his reasons to be glad are unacceptable.

playing one specific part. His personal encounter with Aufidius becomes for Coriolanus a glorious show that he must rehearse in order to prepare himself to stage a magnificent spectacle watched with wonder and admiration by an elite public:

And I am constant. Titus Lartius, thou
Shalt see me once more strike at Tullus' face
(I,i,237-8)

As a player, Coriolanus is a self-contained person. He is the director, the player and the organizer of his own game²⁰. He is a very demanding player because he is not satisfied with a vulgar audience. He must have a refined public, the type of audience that can appreciate the quality of his acting. Coriolanus works very hard to become the best actor in the battle-field and so, like most perfectionists, he wishes to play with the best. He is a very honest actor or perhaps a very proud player. He is not afraid of being second best because he feels he is the best and even the best fighter is not up to his standard. The element of parity is a self-delusion: it is part of his rôle-playing. He must invent it and believe in it.

When Coriolanus insists that his audience is going to see him once more, playing the same part, he is not aware that there are two audiences, his audience or stage-audience and the external audience or public if you wish. Maybe his stage-audience may like his constancy but the playwright knows that his public will get tired of his game precisely because of his constancy. It is true that he is, as he claims to be, very «constant», however it is equally true that in his constancy lies his incapacity to be different. In this incapacity resides the possibility of invalidating both the quality and the brilliancy of his performance: there is no variety and so he runs the risk of becoming a dull player. For any audience there is little merit in an actor who always offers the same performance: when there is no innovation the actor becomes both mechanical and stale. This is applicable to any activity, including war-tactics. Coriolanus has not reached this point yet and so he stands on the stage as a worthy player arousing the interest of the public.

The occasion for his rôle-playing is not a cheerful one. Coriolanus cannot understand this. Our point of view, as public cannot be his. Watching him replaying his part, a sense of horror is evoked by the realization that Coriolanus can be Coriolanus only if he is within a specific setting, «doing» a distinctive thing, with the same player, and with an select audience.

The comments made by the tribunes about Coriolanus and those of the nameless citizens might have been dismissed as the coarse product of envy if Coriolanus had not behave as he does now. He does not esteem them for several reasons.

²⁰ The very same thing must be said of King Lear when he stages what has been defined by the critics as the opening playlett, or love quest. Lear is everything. However, he fails because he has not rehearsed the other actors because he took for granted that they would play according to his rules. The dichotomy between the rules of Cordelia and those of Lear brings about the dramatic development of the play. Here we have been presented with a similar dichotomy based on the disparity of Coriolanus's rules and those of the tribunes and the rabble, so that, he brings about his downfall. See, «Lear's You Have Some Cause': A Study of *King Lear*», written by the present writer. In print, *Miscelanea*, n. 9.

One of the reasons is that they are people who cannot play his rôle and thus unable to appreciate his: they cannot be under his sway as players because they are engaged in activities which have nothing to do with his rôle-playing. The sentiments are mutual. The tribunes and even the rabble hate Coriolanus not because of the rôle he plays but owing to the manner he plays in it. He is a temperamental actor behaving as if he were an untouchable diva. People must not approach him; they must see him at a distance with reverence and fear.

When hearing Coriolanus talk about his rôle and thus about himself, our concept of him surely cannot be all that different from that of the tribunes. We see the player. We can appreciate the worth of his rôle but we can also recognize that he plays his rôle regardless of time, stage, or audience: he is always in character, and this is the problem. There is no way of denying Coriolanus his ability to play his part with a tremendous skill. The problem is that he cannot distinguish when he is the actor or not, when he is on the stage and when he is not. His world is a huge stage. His rôle-playing is so important that he enlarges the boundaries of his stage beyond the limits of reason. By extending the borders of his stage he cannot see that he is taking from others their area of activity, leaving them with no space to show how other rôles may be played with sufficient skill.

He is living in a world that is full of the sound of his fury. The drums must beat as the necessary orchestration or sound effects that enhance his rôle. The din of the drums please him because it confirms the power inherent in his rôle. The sound becomes the audible verification of the puissance inherent in his orders. He has the voice of a leading actor directing the lesser players to play their rôles. The language that Coriolanus uses while he is on the field of battle is the same that he used when facing the rabble at Rome. The commentator of his rôle is eloquent enough when he claims, thinking that he is dead, that:

Thou wast a soldier
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
Only in strokes, but with they 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,56-61)

The audience apprehends him as sound. Coriolanus is a self-contained actor: he is the drum that heats the blood of the fighters and accelerates the heart-beat of the audience. He emulates, according to his commentator, the god of war. The earth trembles at the unnatural power inherent in his voice.

The remarks of the commentator prepare the public for the approaching spectacle. Coriolanus emerges from Corioles's walls covered in blood²¹. He looks as if «he were flay'd». The observation is important for it fits in with the quality of his rôle-playing. Trying to achieve perfection he contends with the god of war. By «doing» so he will become a flayed man, doomed to die precisely because of

²¹ The recurrent motive of blood has been noted and studied by several critics. However we wish to indicate that the concept of blood as medicinal is an Elizabethan convention.

his obsession to reach the «altitude» of the gods when playing the rôle of soldier. Coriolanus's need to play well places him at odds with everything, including the gods.

He is so meticulous in the exercise of his rôle that he extends his «wars» to anything that falls below his mark. Coriolanus cannot understand the meaning of the word fear. For him anybody who does not fight according to his rules becomes a person who reverses rôles. For example, the Romans who do not perform well become enemies so that he has the right to treat them as such. «He that retires I'll take him for a Volsce».

Coriolanus is a play about a person who plays a very distinctive rôle well. He is the leading actor of the play. Owing to this, the behaviour and the conversation of the other characters, as if they were both players and stage-audience, must unfold around him. The characters in this play never talk about themselves but about Coriolanus and his performance. Coriolanus knows this. As a self-centred leading actor he loves it. He is so inured to be the centre of concern that, unconsciously, he will do almost anything to be all the time under the lime-light performing well. The problem with *Coriolanus* is that he is not informed that any actor, regardless of the quality of his histrionics, cannot hold the public's attention for very long unless he is capable of offering something new, some novelty in his techniques. Because he cannot perceive this he becomes a mechanical performer. Again and again he intimidates repeating the same verbal structures and often the same lines (I,iv,28).

Coriolanus is always in character and his language fits in with his pattern of behaviour. The playwright cannot do much to alleviate the monotony inherent in his rôle-playing. The playwright cannot inflate his scanty verbal structures or obviate the monotony of his language. It has to be so. He has to repeat the same thing for he is «doing» as the nameless citizen implied, always the same thing. He must talk about fire and destruction «by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe/And make my wars on you!» (I,iv-390-40). His language offers similar structures and only one theme because for Coriolanus only one thing is real, destruction and death. Images pertaining to a demonic world become the concrete proof of the attributes of his rôle. He needs to leave behind evidence, visual confirmation, such as blood and death. The cries of misery must replace the clamour of his drum. For Coriolanus the absence of cries of pain would render the sound of his drum ineffective and thus his performance a failure.

The development of the play's theme offers a fallacious pause in Coriolanus's wars thus bringing an equally spurious relief to the public. His family and friends are talking about the merit of his performance. After a brief and indispensable introduction of Valeria and Virginia, Shakespeare forces the public to concentrate again on Coriolanus's wars by means of the comments of his mother. As if she were watching the performance at the back of the stage, upon hearing the sound of the drums, she can both evoke the actor's voice and visualize his performance in order to comment on it:

Methinks I hear you husband's drum
See him pluck Aufidius by the'hair

As children from a bear, the Volces shinning him.
Methinks I hear him stamp thus, and call thus:
Come on you cowards, you were got in fear
Though you were born in Rome. (I,iii,29-34)

Volumnia guiding herself by the sound of the drums becomes an active spectator of Coriolanus's rôle. Her language is like that of Coriolanus's, rather repetitive, «Methinks I hear/Methinks I hear him». Her attitude must not surprise the public; it fits in with Coriolanus's obsession with performing well once he is on the stage. Volumnia, wanting Coriolanus to play his rôle well, surely, has been the one who has taught him the required language of the soldier so that she knows Coriolanus's lines by heart. As director and stage-audience she expects a brilliant exhibition from her child: a performance that she has drilled him in since he was a little boy.

As if she were hearing the public's ovation, she not only visualizes the quality of Coriolanus's acting but the action itself thus giving the impression of having prepared him many times to play this part. By being subjugated by the splendour of the spectacle, she loses contact with ordinary sentiments such as those voiced by Virginia. At this moment she is unable to sympathize with anything unrelated to the glory inherent in the part that her son is playing. Virginia does not feel like her and what she experiences is of no consequence to Volumnia. She is not distressed but thrilled by the envisioned spectacle of her son quartering people. She is so sure that he will perform well that she cannot conceive the possibility of his death. According to her nothing can happen to Coriolanus because not even Aufidius can play the rôle of warrior as well as he. For Volumnia, unlike Virginia, there is nothing to fear; all they have to do is to wait for the ending of the performance to reap the honour of the part that he has played. The relationship between actor and director achieves full force with Volumnia's faculty to visualize Coriolanus's performance repeating out loud what her son is shouting at the field of battle.

The play changes from Volumnia's images of war to the reality of the field of battle. By comparing what Volumnia has been saying with what Coriolanus is shouting, one must conclude that there are hardly any dissimilarities and so Coriolanus is playing according to his mother's expectations. Bearing in mind Volumnia's attitude towards Virginia, we can understand why he has not moved beyond the stage of rôle-playing and thus why he is unable to interact with others. The monolithic hero disregards his soldiers when he thinks that he must do it for the sake of his performance:

Following the fliers at the very heels,
With them he enters; who, upon the sudden,
Clapp'd to their gates; he is himself alone,
To answer all the city. (I,iv,49-52)

What others do or feel is of no consequence to Coriolanus. What he does on the field of battle is the only thing that matters, and now he wants to challenge the whole city by himself.

Coriolanus is not a death seeker. The problem with Coriolanus is that his desire to play his part better than anybody else blinds him to the reality of danger²². Like his mother he cannot conceive a negative outcome to his exploits. Like a child who derives a tremendous joy from his monolithic game he does not have a clear conception of the meaning of death. He has no idea of the essence of the word danger because his rôle does not entail hazard for him, but for his opponents. For an average person, for the adult who takes a rôle, conscious of his acts and of the relationship that exists between his acts and the acts of those interacting with him, the perception of danger would be felt as the natural consequence of his rôle. For the adult there is something unnatural about the way that Coriolanus confronts death. One thing is to be brave and another to be as audacious as to expose himself to death, as if death were a sing voided of significance. Children play solitary war-games and they kill their opponents, however seldom do they kill themselves if they do not wish to bring their game to an end.

The sound of his furious voice deprives Coriolanus of humanity. He behaves towards his opponents with the unconscious cruelty of a child who cannot comprehend the consequences of the rôle he has chosen to play. Coriolanus's apprehension of power is devastating. For him soldiers are instruments to fulfil his rôle. He transforms them into war-utilities. The soldiers are cognizant of this: they know into what Coriolanus wants to transmute them, and they react according to his rules. When he encourages them to fight they do not respond by talking about victory, but by offering themselves as fit subjects to be recast into an extension of Coriolanus, a sword, «O me alone! Make you a sword of me!» (I,vi,76).

When he has the chance to confront Aufidius, he does so in terms of rules, his rules:

I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee
Worse than a promise-breaker» (I,viii,1-2).

The public can perceive why Coriolanus is obsessed with fighting Aufidius: there is parity. We may go as far as to question the significance of the word «hate» when applied to Aufidius. The rules inherent in Coriolanus's rôle-playing demands that he hate, yet the line dividing hate from love is too thin or brittle to decide what Coriolanus means when he uses it. The same thing could be said of his concept of parity. Yet, they are alike in many respects. Aufidius, as if he were governed by Coriolanus's rule speaks like him, «If I fly, Martius,/Holloa me like a hare» (I,viii-7-8). Aufidius, like Coriolanus, uses hunting images when referring to what Coriolanus must do if he runs away like a coward thus breaking the rules of their hunting game.

One constant feature in Coriolanus's rôle-playing is that of making his adversaries feel the full humiliation of their defeat. This behaviour fits in more with what a child might do when subjugating another child. An adult, unless he is

²² The horror of death does not touch Coriolanus. This is not only unnatural but unhealthy in an adult. The theme of sickness or unhealthiness has been studied by C. Spurgeon. See, *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935; rpt, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 347-9, 245.

unnaturally cruel, would not do this. By making Aufidius feel mortified Coriolanus in a child-like manner proves to him his worth while making him feel the need to re-play the game in order to regain self-respect, or as children would say, to play even:

Within these three hours, Tullus,
Alone I fought in your Corioles walls,
And made what work I pleas'd: 'tis not my blood
Wherein thou seest me mask'd. For they revenge,
Wrench up thy power to th' highest» (I,viii,8-10)

Coriolanus, like a perverse child, thrives by provoking others. He can exasperate everybody. A child turns the screw pitilessly and to do so enhances the exhilaration inherent in the rôle he has chosen to play. Fighting Coriolanus is not an easy task. It is the same as fighting a child who plays a rôle with zest if the rôle is no game for the adult. The world of the child is difficult and not always within the reach of the adult. The same must be said of Coriolanus's game.

He needs to shed blood. The shedding of blood is the physical verification of his ability to play his rôle well. His conception of hero demands both the shedding of his own blood and that of his enemies. As he claims, blood is medicinal. Blood is what renders his garments the fitting costume that proves the validity of his rôle. The point of the reddening of his clothing, as part of the ritual inherent in the rôle he plays, achieves full force with the symbol of the mask, «tis not my blood/Wherein thou seests me mask'd». As actor he must wear the correct mask. The mask of blood completes his paraphernalia: he must have his mask as evidence of the rôle that he is playing.

Coriolanus, like his mother, transforms blood and wounds into concrete elements to distinguish him as the player of war games. The more wounds he gets the better to demonstrate that he has played his part many times. Wounds and blood become the elements which imprint upon his costume and body signs indicating the nature of the part he plays. We can stretch the point further and say that for Coriolanus people are substance to be transformed into signs.

Volumnia receives with joy rather than sadness the news about Coriolanus's wounds. When she catalogues his wounds she seems to be counting the medals or trophies of her son. However, a dreadful sense of monotony that goes hand in hand with the monotonous sound of drums marks the rhythm of their counting. What they are doing is irritating. We already know that he plays his part well so that we need not have his managers counting the trophies while wondering how much can be obtained with them. Monotony is a necessary element: the type of medal he receives is always the same. There can be no variety: the prize derives from the same rôle.

While his mother and Menenius were able to count the hero's wounds, all was fine in Coriolanus's life. The problem comes when his mother wants to exchange wounds for something else, a consulship. This is a part for which Coriolanus has never been trained. As a child who enjoys his game tremendously, he cannot conceive of the existence of other games. What Coriolanus did not know is that

his rôle-playing was the prelude to another rôle. Volumnia has worked very hard in the making of Coriolanus. She has been too busy training him, brooding over his victories and thus she does not know that Coriolanus cannot play a rôle unless it is oriented to towards reaffirming that he is Coriolanus.

Bearing in mind the first scene, the public knows that Coriolanus is not the right person to play political games. Hence a tremendous amount of misgivings are aroused in the public when hearing his mother wanting to launch him into the political arena. A political arena is an unsuitable place for a young bear, as his mother calls him, because a bear grunts and attacks: the last thing that is needed in this type of play-ground is to grunt at people attacking them. Coriolanus knows what he wants. As he says to his mother «I had rather be their servant in way/Than sway with them in theirs.» (I,ii,2012) He knows he is a solitary player and he states his case clearly; he needs to play a part, but following his inclinations. The manner in which Coriolanus speaks arouses admiration in the reader. He does not want to be what he is not; he knows sufficiently well that his performance will be a very poor one. However, in the same way that his mother errs evaluating the capacity of her child to adapt himself to a new rôle,

My praises made thee first a soldier, so,
To have my praise for this, perform a part
Thou hast not done before. (III,ii,108-10)»

so does Coriolanus for not being firmer with both his mother and Menenius. The tribunes know him better than his own mother. They perceive that Coriolanus cannot change overnight because they sense that his rôle is what justifies his existence as Coriolanus, and they are right. He cannot change from one activity that entails playing a single and uncomplicated rôle to another that demands of him something as complex as rôle-taking.

Judging the attitude of the tribunes towards Coriolanus is not easy. The evaluation will depend on how we see Coriolanus. In this paper we are considering Coriolanus as a hero who can do only one thing. Thus we are not contemplating the fact that their motives entail personal profit: we start from what Coriolanus can do. By accepting what Coriolanus cannot «do», their reasons for repudiating Coriolanus are not all that fallacious. His words confirm the validity of the tribunes argument. Coriolanus prefers to be on the field of battle than to sit in Rome, solving political problems:

Away my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turn'd,
Which choired with my drum, into a pipe
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lull asleep. (III,ii,111-15).

When it comes to the evaluation of Coriolanus's worth and thus of his rôle, the play offers problems that are difficult to solve. His mother forces him to do «away with (his) disposition». We have a hero refusing to take rôles, refusing to dissemble wearing different masks. Obliquely we have been seduced into condemning Co-

riolanus's rejection of the rôle of civil servant. Yet, we must understand that Coriolanus's concept of himself does not allow him to be a person who can change his mask. He needs to be faithful to himself, always wearing the same costume or mask because as he says «I cannot/Put on the gown, [of humility]» (ii,ii,136-7). With Coriolanus everybody knows where he stands: he has not managed to learn more than one part so that his repertoire cannot be narrower, so, he is a poor actor. But in the insufficiency of his repertoire resides his excellence.

There is no place for Coriolanus in a political arena. He tends to react violently to the most paltry provocation. This is fine when he plays the rôle of soldier, for he must be quick when fighting. He knows how to provoke, but with a very specific language, that of soldier. He can call his enemies cowards because the rules of his game allows him to do so. At Rome the rules are not the same and Coriolanus knows it. When Brutus talks about «disbenching» him to anger him, he is not very far from the actual truth. He does not want to be «benched». For him «benching» entails lack of action, lack of physical activity, confinement and immobility. To be benched means to exchange weapons for words. Coriolanus knows that unless he is talking about war following the coda inherent in war-language he is tongue-tied, hence he does not want to be «benched».

As soon as Coriolanus accepts to be consul and marches towards the market place we know that he is walking towards the wrong arena, and we suspect that he will perform badly. Coriolanus stands in the market place wearing a costume that has nothing to do with his real costume. The costume cannot help Coriolanus play the part well because he has to take on the rôle of the humble servant. Thus before facing the rabble, he pleads to be spared from this ritual or performance imposed by the city's laws. Coriolanus's plea must be understood as his need to break the rules of this game because he does not know how to follow them. He knows his own limitations so he begs permission to break the rules.

Three elements work against Coriolanus. One, that he is wearing the wrong costume; two that he is confronted with the wrong stage-audience and three that he has to «pipe» rather than to «drum». To make matters worse Coriolanus has never rehearsed this rôle. One may consider Coriolanus as merciless, however, this is not the case because we cannot define Coriolanus, at this point, as a willing player. He is pressed to take a rôle he knows nothing and so he asks to be spared from it. Coriolanus is merciless with those who break the rules inherent in his rôle-playing but the people of Rome are equally merciless with Coriolanus when he breaks their rules²³.

The public watching his performance would hardly dare confirm he has not acted arrogantly; it is an expected event. Coriolanus has unconsciously tried to

²³ Although there is some truth to it, we would not go as far as W. Clemen goes regarding the total baseness of the rabble. According to him 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, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 154. If we had to talk about the rabble and Coriolanus in a contrastive manner we must speak of parity. They are identical: equally unreasonable and equally merciless when somebody dares to shatter their world.

impose his rules on the wrong game, and so he fails²⁴. By keeping in mind Coriolanus's fixation we can well understand why Brutus sets the rabble against him. It does not take much for him to achieve this, and not because he is clever, but because of Coriolanus, who can not abide by the rules of the game. Brutus, implicitly, explains to Coriolanus why he has managed to persuade the mob, «you speak o' the' people/As if you were a god to punish, not/ A man of their infirmity!» (II,i,80-2). Brutus is right, Coriolanus cannot be a man of «their infirmity» because he wants to play the rôle of a god of war.

By rejecting Rome's political system Coriolanus condemns himself²⁵. He will never fathom why he is labelled as traitor. His incapacity to understand this arises from his disposition: a disposition moulded by the part that he has played all his life. It is not important for him that he cannot play another rôle: what matters is the fact that his mother expects of him to accept a rôle that he hates, «it is a part/That I shall blush in acting, and might well/Be taken from the people» (II,iii,147-9)²⁶.

When he realizes that Rome is taking his rôle for granted he collapses. He stands as a bereft child and thus, in anger, he shouts at the world that they better take his rôle seriously; that they had better be careful with him, for he plays his part well. Coriolanus does not try to defend himself, but to show his enraged audience that although he has failed in taking one rôle, he has not forgotten how to play the other well. «There some among you have beheld me fighting:/Come, try upon yourselves what you have seen me» (III,i,221-2). His appeal is significant. He is inviting his stage-audience to tell those who have not seen him how he plays his rôle. Yet, they seem to have forgotten the fury inherent in his rôle. Hence a confused and insecure players stands on the stage evoking both pity and fear²⁷.

²⁴ The event is a regrettable one. We have not been presented with a mob bent on destroying Coriolanus. In fact, at this point, the mob seems to be aware that if Coriolanus is not following their rules it is owing to his former role, that of soldier. They are capable of appreciating Coriolanus's worth and they let him deviate from the rules and they grant him their voices.

²⁵ The proposal of Coriolanus is irrational. But, most likely, Coriolanus cannot understand the significance of his motion. His lack of cognizance is the result of the persistence with which he has played the rôle of soldier. This incapacitates him for engaging himself in activities that cannot be confined within the boundaries of his personal game. Once Coriolanus has been rejected by Rome, a dull actor, emphasizing again and again, the merit of the part that he has played, stands on the stage. By accentuating both the merit and the quality of his rôle his speech becomes very monotonous. It has to be so: his rôle is very limited, and thus it can be explained in very few words.

²⁶ He sees himself as a person who has protected his country following one set of legal rules in the eyes of his community. This is what the rabble must take into consideration. Perhaps, deep down, he is right. One performance badly played, which is not his performance, should not invalidate the worth of his other performances; he has been useful to his country, and that is sufficient to abstain from judging him a traitor.

²⁷ Coriolanus is not a typical tragic hero. Yet, the general tendency is to treat him as such. Oscar Mandel, using the classical concept of tragedy, writes about the difficulty of defining Coriolanus as a tragic hero. See *A Definition of Tragedy* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 111. Regarding the theme of tragic hero, the work of Dieter Mehl offers interesting comparative studies between Lear, Othello Hamlet and Coriolanus. See *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), pp. 178-203.

Coriolanus cannot understand why the world is so angry with him because he has played his part badly. It is not for nothing that he cannot understand why his mother is equally exasperated with his show, or what is even worse, why his mother wants him to do well at this type of performance, «I muse my mother/Does not approve me further» (III,ii,2-3). Coriolanus is right in not perceiving why his mother «would have (him)/False to (his) nature». He has mastered the art of war precisely because she wanted him to be good at it and never suspected her ulterior motives. His dependence on his mother's evaluation of his performance is evident: also the fact that he seeks, as if he were a child, his mother's applause. Coriolanus's child-like disposition manifests itself in his language. He constantly uses the personal pronoun «I», its form «me» and the possessive «mine». This is the language of a self-centred child, of the person who has not managed to move beyond the stage of rôle playing.

Volumnia's brief coaching in the art of taking rôles is ineffective²⁸. Her instructions come too late:

Pray be counsell'd;
I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage» (III,ii,29-30)

He will not comprehend what she is trying to say when she shouts at him that: «you might have been enough the man you are/With striving less to be so» (III,ii,19-20).

Trying to prove to Rome that his rôle is indispensable, Coriolanus makes a desperate move: he offers his services to Aufidius. As soon as he enters the city of Antium the expected occurs. Coriolanus is searching for another play-ground to re-enact his rôle as soldier. He needs both an arena and a stage-audience. Coriolanus's craving for self-affirmation as a player attains a pathological dimension revealed in his speech when he approaches Antium:

A goodly city is this Antium. City
it's I made thy widows. Many an heir
Of these fair edifices fore my wars
Have I heard groan and drop» (IV,iv,1-4)

Coriolanus has personalized the city because for him, whether Antium or Rome, it is a living organism since it contains the witness of his performance. The city

²⁸ Volumnia is not a very intelligent woman. Coriolanus's world is dull and colourless because his mother's world is equally dull. For her the world is monochromatic: there is only one colour, red. The imagery used in *Coriolanus* serves to emphasize the lack of colour in Coriolanus's world. Clement comments that «the imagery in *Coriolanus*, compared with that of *Macbeth* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, is less intricate and complex». Wolfgang Clemen, op. cit., p. 154. He is right. According to Harbage, Coriolanus «says too much, too often, until his pride bores and repels». p. 437, and he is right. However the same must be said of his mother. Volumnia takes upon herself the rôle of trainer or coacher. This is an aspect to be considered, as part of Coriolanus's rôle-playing which we cannot touch on here. On the surface she seems to be able to take on rôles, whoever, there is a marked degree of inflexibility in her that is worth exploring in order to understand Coriolanus's tragedy better.

reaffirms him in the reality of what he can «do» and «make». He walks into the city certain of two possibilities, and both are equally pleasing to him: one that he will be killed owing to the rôle that he has played. Other, that he might be welcome as an ally because of that specific rôle.

Towards the end Sicinius recognizes Coriolanus, thus deploring their attitude of wanting him to play a different role:

I would he had continued to his country
As he began, and no to unknit himself
The noble knot he made» (I,iv,21-2)

However it is too late. There is no alternative for Coriolanus. At the end because Coriolanus cannot reject his mother's plea, he faces the same situation at Antium that he faced at Rome²⁹. However this time only death can bring relief to him; and honourable death, since he dies playing the rôle of soldier, all alone³⁰. The mask of war becomes the mask of death; it is his blood. And his costume becomes his shroud; the appropriate shroud reddened with his own blood.



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²⁹ Shakespeare's ability to understand relationships reveals itself in his treatment of the relationships between Volumnia and Coriolanus: the mother when she is a widow and he, her only son. This is Coriolanus's case and we believe that he is unique. However he has been compared to other characters in this respect. E.M. Tillyard wrote, «When we consider how wonderfully Shakespeare pictured the relations between mother and son in *Coriolanus*, we need not hesitate to trace the motives in the relations between Henry IV and Prince Hal». *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 287. The relationship between mother and son is very complex and very unlike that of Hal with his father.

³⁰ For some critics his return to Aufidius is a manifestation of his naive nature. Others feel that he goes back because he considers sparing Rome a sin that must be punished with his death. See. T. Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1974), pp. 187-8.