

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

Narcissism and Militant Asceticism as Defence against 'a Sick Man's Appetite'



Distempers of the Body Politic

And the physical, political, military, and psychological discourses of feeding

William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is a key text for introducing ideas which this module is concerned to explore, because it employs the language of appetite and bodily distemper to signify not only physical bodily meanings, but also psychological and political meanings. In this way the play text exemplifies precisely the fluid ways in which the signification of the language of the body extended to the soul and to the state via the body-politic analogy. The drama occurs in Rome following the expulsion of Tarquin, the formation of an oligarchy of the patrician class, and the election of Tribunes from among the plebeian class. The play opens in a period of dearth and shortage of grain, which relates in interesting ways to the shortage and hoarding of grain that gave rise to the Midlands Riots that took place in England around the time of Shakespeare's composition of *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare is apparently concerned to explore political subjectivity or the psychology of class relations with the discourse of feeding or incorporation. Moreover the play presents such physical hunger, psychological need, and political ambition as the people feel as 'sickly' and immoderate, and therefore in an antipathetic relationship with the ethic that is most directly concerned with the morality of the body and with subjecting its appetites to discipline – temperance. However, the temperance exhibited by the most vociferous opponent of the citizens' political interests, Caius Martius (later 'Coriolanus'), is militant asceticism, a kind of abstinence from physical and emotional sustenance which converts the vulnerability implied by feeding into valour and waging war. This is a tendency that is general among the patrician class but most fully expressed by Coriolanus, and the ethic he embraces is explored both psychologically by the play's representation of his relationship with his mother, Volumnia, and politically in the ideology of the patrician class.

The formation of the Roman tribunate in 494 BC, interpreted by Livy, in his *History of Rome*, constitutes the fictional context of *Coriolanus*. However, in an attempt to negotiate with Jacobean politics and the popular rising (Midlands Rising) of 1607, Shakespeare made certain adjustments to the Roman political events. He condensed two uprisings from

Plutarch and Livy into one.¹ Both the formation of the Roman republic and of the Parliament in England indicate a convergence of class interests and constitutional theory. But the analogy was used both factionally and ideologically.

In the ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and early modern periods, political literature employed the analogy of the body politic to describe the state, and theory could reactivate the anthropomorphic analogy of the state in order to 'prove' some version of the organic theory and justify the action either of the sovereign or the state. This mutual metaphorical definition was especially the case in this period, when the questions that the analogy was designed to answer could be raised with specific reference either to the body or the state.² According to Leonard Barkan: 'The English Renaissance picture of world order was above all a defense of the hierarchical status quo, and the human body was a useful analogy because, like society, it was clearly a strange and arbitrary combination of functions which all seemed to work perfectly together.'³ But Paul Archambault maintains that in political discourse, 'the variation given the analogy provides a fairly accurate idea as to the author's political tendencies'.⁴ 'The political writers of the late mediaeval and Renaissance periods did not consider it as an inert, neutral literary *topos*, but as capable of betraying certain political inclinations.'⁵

The early seventeenth century saw a rise in class factionalism as a combined result of rising food prices, corn scarcity, and enclosures. As the economic divide between the landed classes and the rest of the population deepened, resentment, rioting and levelling occurred.⁶ The protests began in Northamptonshire on May Day, 1607, and following several petitions to the King against enclosures, they extended to Warwickshire (Shakespeare's own county), Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and four other counties.⁷ During the Midlands Rising, James VI/I issued four proclamations, in May, June, July and August of 1607, which deployed the

¹ See A. Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 132.

² Paul Archambault, 'The Analogy of the "Body" in Renaissance Political Thought', *Bibliothèque D'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 29 (1967), 25-53 (p. 32).

³ Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 77.

⁴ Archambault, p. 21.

⁵ Archambault, p. 22.

⁶ See Christopher Hill, *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974), p. 186. On the steadily increasing economic difference between the lower and upper classes during the seventeenth century before 1640, see Hill, p. 188: 'the standard of living of the mass of the population was steadily declining, whilst the wealth of the rich was visibly increasing [...]. This helps to understand the panic fear of disturbance which government and propertied class showed, and the readiness with which the lower orders resorted to violence in famine years'. The rioters of the Midlands Rising of 1607 were identified as 'levellers' on account of their levelling of the fences erected to enclose common land, previously used for tillage, for pasture. See Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Common Voice*, p. 136.

⁷ Patterson, p. 136.

political analogy of the body, to prove the paternal ‘care’ and ‘clemency’ of the sovereign and his ‘desire of the Publike good’.⁸ The exercise of paternal care, as an intrinsic aspect of the body politic, is nonetheless limited by its interpretation. On a more confined discursive scale, the Royal Proclamation of the twenty eighth of June 1607 articulates the need to distinguish which subjects qualify as recipients of such care: ‘We will prefer the saftie, quiet, and protection of our Subjects in generall, and of the body of our State, before the compassion of any such Offenders, bee they more or lesse, and howsoever misled’.⁹ This interpretation empowered James to dismiss the Rising as the insolence of ‘rebellious’ members, guilty of ‘hainous Treasons’ against the ‘politike body of our Realme’.¹⁰ Rioting and levelling had caused the gentry and nobility to fear an encroachment upon their property, a fear which, according to Christopher Hill, was concealed beneath an attitude of contempt.¹¹ This led James to declare that the protesters have forfeited the ‘naturall clemency’ of the sovereign, and hence to justify violent state oppression on the not unprecedented grounds of a medical analogy with venesection (phlebotomy or blood-letting) or even amputation: ‘a sharpe remedy applyed to a small and infected part, to save the whole from dissolution and destruction.’¹²

Venesection was a surgical procedure used by many and intended to evacuate ill humours that had built up in the blood in the veins. The anatomical model that makes sense of this derives from the Roman physician Claudius Galenus (Galen) (130 – 210 AD). It holds that the after food is ‘concocted’ in the stomach, it is ‘digested’ by the liver which sends the nutrients, called ‘chyle’, via the blood in the veins to the parts of the body. From the ‘chyle’ are derived the four humours – blood itself, black bile, yellow bile or choler, and phlegm. Underpinning the ancient theory of humours, which comprise the body’s

⁸ The four Royal Proclamations referred to are: 71 ‘A Proclamation for suppressing of persons riotously assembled for the laying open of Inclosures’ (Westminster 30 May 1607); 72 ‘A Proclamation signifying his Majesties pleasure as well for suppressing of riotous Assemblies about Inclosures, as for reformation of Depopulations’ (Greenwich 28 June 1607); 74 ‘A Proclamation signifying his Majesties gracious parden for the Offendours about Inclosures’ (Windsor Castle 24 July 1607); 75 ‘A Proclamation concerning Starch’ (Salisbury 23 August 1607). J.F. Larkin and P. L. Hughes, eds, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), I. Cited in the text are Proclamations 72, pp. 155, 156, and 75, p. 164.

⁹ Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamation 72, p. 156.

¹⁰ Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamation 72, p. 156.

¹¹ See Christopher Hill, *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974), p. 186. The rioters of the Midlands Rising of 1607 were identified as ‘levellers’ on account of their levelling of the fences erected to enclose common land, previously used for tillage, for pasture. See Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Common Voice*, p. 136.

¹² Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamation 72, p. 156. In the *De ortu et autoritate [sic] imperii Romani* (Basle, 1559), written around 1446, Aeneas Sylvius (1405-1464, later Pope Pius II) justified capital punishment by analogy with amputation to restore the health of the body. For Sylvius the concept of the ‘health’ of the political body is more important than justice, an important departure from Plato, for whom justice in the state and the individual life was paramount, and in contrast to Aristotle’s conception wherein the well-being of all members of the polity is the end and purpose of the political body. See Archambault, pp. 32-34.

consistence, are the theory of Empedocles, that the universe is characterised by the *discordia concors* of elements, and the Hippocratic dogma of qualities. The table below outlines the elements, qualities, and humours, and the psychological types which are associated with them. So, for example, the element of air is wet and hot; it is associated with blood, which is one of the humours. An abundance of blood gives rise to a sanguine (hopeful, optimistic, positive, confident, and cheerful) temperament.

Element	Force / Quality	Humour	Psychological Type
Air	Wet & Hot	Blood	Sanguine
Fire	Dry & Hot	Yellow bile / Choler	Choleric
Water	Wet & Cold	Phlegm	Phlegmatic
Earth	Dry & Cold	Black bile / Melancholy	Melancholic

Psychology, dealing with the activities of soul in body, stood as it were half way between medicine and religion, looking towards both, and resisting the excessive claims of both. From the medical sciences it borrowed basic knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and built upon them a theory of how the body's temperament in health and disease (especially mental disease) may affect the functioning of soul. In return, psychology contributed to medicine a theory of how emotional perturbations conduce to bodily disease. It is due to this psycho-somatic conception of illness that bodily distempers or passions of the mind are capable of unbalancing the humours of the body, producing excess like a sediment that can be found in the blood.¹³

In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, written around 1608-1609, allusions to the lower classes (citizens or plebeians) as diseased bodies or infections within the body politic pepper the invective of Caius Martius: 'What's the matter, you dissentious rogues / That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, / Make yourselves scabs?' (1.1.163-65); and turning exclamation into a curse in an incensed attempt to literalise the metaphor, 'You herd of - boils* and plagues / Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorr'd / Farther than seen, and one infect another / Against the wind a mile!' (1.4.31-34; * editor's modernisation replaces 'biles' with 'boils').¹⁴ Within the logic of the conception of the state as a body, with the patrician

¹³ This theory proved to be tenacious and the practice of venesection survived the discovery of the systemic circulation of the blood by William Harvey, which disproved the Galenic model in which the veins distribute blood produced in the liver from the concoction and digestion of food, rather than carrying blood back to the heart from the extremities of the body where it had been pumped through the arteries.

¹⁴ *Coriolanus* has been related to the Midlands Rising of 1607 by, among others: Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 2nd edn (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 218-30; C.C. Huffman, *Coriolanus in Context* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1971), pp. 147-49 *et passim*; Patterson, pp. 120-45 (pp. 136-41). References in the text are to *The Arden Edition of the Works of William*

class as its head or physician, ‘domestick strife’ (*P.I.* 3.15.6) may become disease, and violent state oppression may translate into ‘sharp remedy’.

Typically versions of the body politic that draw an analogy between the ruler and the physician, in distancing the ruler from the sick or decaying body to which he administers, evince absolutist and authoritarian political sympathies.¹⁵ Contempt of resentful and agitated members which can be seen as resultant upon an innate sense of superior cultivation on the part of the nobility and gentry, from another perspective rests upon a sense of difference dramatized by economic divergence and is produced under the threat of revolt to bolster class identity.¹⁶ It is certainly accentuated thereby in *Coriolanus*, with Caius Martius Coriolanus who, in addressing the gentry and senators, says: ‘You’,

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 (3.1.149-55)¹⁷

Coriolanus’s proposed remedy, communicated by the metonymy of ‘tongue’ for political voice, is the removal, or amputation, of the Tribunes, ‘The tongues o’ th’ common mouth’ (3.1.22).¹⁸ The ‘many-headed multitude’ of the populace, the common people of the city state of Rome, is in need of being ruled rather than encouraged to revolt. Christopher Hill explains the metaphorical attribution:

The idea that to be many-headed is the same as to be headless is easier to conceive metaphorically than literally. It relates to the theory of degree, to the conception of a graded society, in which the feudal household and the family workshop or farm were the basic units. The many-headed monster was composed of masterless men, those for whom nobody responsible answered.¹⁹

Shakespeare: Coriolanus, ed. by Philip Brockbank (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). I have also consulted William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, compact edn, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), in which the second of the references in the text is Act 1, Scene 5, lines 2-5.

¹⁵ The *De ortu et autoritate [sic] imperii Romani* of Aeneas Sylvius is a case in point. Another Renaissance political theorist with absolutist sympathies, and who drew the analogy of the Prince and the physician of a sick body, is Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546), in *The Boke Named the Governour* (London, 1580). In this work, the Prince’s knowledge of the parts of the countries under his governance, and of the customs and manners of the people of those countries, is made analogous to the physician’s knowledge of the diet, concoction, quietness, exercise, and sleep of his patient. See Archambault, ‘The Analogy of the “Body” in Renaissance Political Thought’, pp. 37-39.

¹⁶ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 1st edn (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984), p. 222.

¹⁷ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, 3.1.155-59.

¹⁸ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, 3.1.23.

¹⁹ Hill, pp. 182-83.

Elsewhere (1.1.196-99) Coriolanus expresses a desire for another entailment of the political analogy with a sharp remedy – militant suppression.²⁰ Military and state suppression is precisely what the ‘offenders’ in the Midlands Rising suffered on 8 June 1607 at Newton, Northamptonshire, when fifty of the protesters were killed outright, ‘a great many wounded, and many captured and later hanged and quartered, as exemplary punishment’.²¹

True belief, knowledge and judgement in the interpretation of ‘symptoms’, matters of diagnosis and aetiology, and the determination of a prognosis, in medicine or in politics, are relative to the variable interpretation of the conceptual system of the political analogy of the body. In *Coriolanus*, Menenius Agrippa insists that the Senate’s ‘counsels and [...] cares’ (1.1.149) for ‘the weal o’th’common’ (1.1.150) are evident on analogy with the ‘good belly’ (1.1.147):²² he says to the citizens, ‘digest things rightly’ and ‘you shall find / No public benefit which you receive / But it proceeds or comes from them to you’ (1.1.149-52).²³ His pun on ‘digest’ as also ‘understand’ insinuates that not only the distribution of chyle to the members and their digestion of that nourishment, but also the correct interpretation of analogy, would slake the rage of unruly members who fail to see that although the belly receives the general food at first, it sends it through the ‘rivers’ of the blood (i.e. the veins) ‘Even to the court, the heart, to th’seat o’th’brain’, and is left with ‘but the bran’ (1.1.130-145). This dissemination of ideology makes the interpretation that is in the interests of the dominant class seem natural or inevitable,²⁴ and permits the dismissal of the complaint of ‘th’discontented members, the mutinous parts’ as enviously maligning the senators, ‘for that / They are not [plebeians]’ (1.1.110-13).

Allusions to the fable of the belly by Renaissance anatomical texts do occur, and with reference to Livy’s *History of Rome*. The language they employ is moreover political, or at

²⁰ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, 1.1.195-98.

²¹ Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, p. 155 note 2.

²² In Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, these three references are: 1.1.148; 1.1.149; 1.1.146.

²³ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, 1.1.148-51.

²⁴ This is regarded as an aspect of the operation of ideology, whether one holds a cognitive or materialist view of ideology. See Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd edn, with additional chapters (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996; c. 1994), pp. 6-7, for various meanings of ideology; Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (1989), pp. 9-10, for cognitive and materialist views of ideology in relation to Renaissance culture. Catherine Belsey’s view of ideology, in *Critical Practice*, New Accents Series (London: Routledge, 1980; repr. 1992), p. 57, is both materialist and post-structuralist, and her analysis is directly relevant to the effect which Menenius tries by his relation of the belly fable to achieve in the agitated plebeians: ‘ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world - real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence [a materialist view], but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them [a cognitive view].’

least available for political interpretation. In his chapter on ‘the Fruit in the Womb’, Johann Veslingus says: ‘The Bowels of the Abdomen which are allotted for *publique* digestion, do not *want private digestion*, but manifestly operate *for the common profit* of the Infant’.²⁵ This description of the natural use of the belly is inseparable from its potential for political construction on the basis of an organic model of the state. And de Laguna’s warning that when the stomach’s ‘function is impaired, all other functions of the body are placed in the greatest danger’,²⁶ might easily furnish one with a plausible threat with which to coerce dissident or subversive elements.

Although Karl Marx argued that ‘Agrippa failed to show that you feed the members of one man by filling the belly of another’,²⁷ Shakespeare’s Menenius does at least engage with the plebeians in discourse, whereas the very first words of Caius Martius to the plebeians assert that ‘He that will give words to thee, will flatter / Beneath abhorring’ (1.1.166-67). But on the perspective granted by *Coriolanus*, the privileged, patrician telling of the fable, the story of the body-politic in which both plebeians and patricians are involved, is a communication that is not magnanimous, but a form of condescension and control which implies that grievances arising from a dearth of food may be assuaged by correct interpretation (‘digestion’). Furthermore, by rendering the plebeians as innately fickle and angry, and consequently their envious rage as inevitable, Caius Martius Coriolanus dismisses the possibility of any genuine or rational cause for discontent. But whereas on 24 July 1607, King James had denied the existence of food shortages, and had previously pointed out that ‘we have been careful to prevent such Enclosures, and Depopulations’, later he tacitly admitted that making of starch was irresponsible in a time ‘wherein the plentie of Corne shall not be very abundant’, and had led to rising food prices.²⁸ Patterson indicates that: ‘While enclosures were the immediate cause of the Rising, the documents of its aftermath indicate that food shortages were also a major issue’, and adds that these shortages were caused by making starch, grain hoarding, ‘engrossing’, export of grain, unfair pricing, quality control and unemployment. Moreover: ‘We can [...] infer that when Shakespeare began work on *Coriolanus*, probably in 1609, the issue of the Rising had merged in the public consciousness

²⁵ Johann Veslingus, *The Anatomy of the Body of Man ... Published in Latin by Joh[ann] Veslingus, Reader of the Publick Anatomy in the Most Famous University of Padua [...] and Englished by Nich[olas] Culpeper* (London: Peter Cole, 1653), p. 33 (emphases mine).

²⁶ Andreas de Laguna, *Anatomica methodus, seu de sectione humani corporis contemplatio*, 1535, trans. in L.R. Lind, *Studies in Pre-Vesalian Anatomy: Biography, Translations, Documents* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1975), p. 269.

²⁷ Karl Marx, *Price and Profit*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York, 1985), XX, 104-6, cited in Patterson, p. 135, n. 31.

²⁸ Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamations 74, p. 161; 71, p. 153; 72, p. 155; 75, p. 163. On the point about enclosures of common land, Larkin and Hughes comment: ‘1 James I, c.25, it is true, had re-enacted the last tillage statute of Elizabeth, but 4 James I, c.11 had authorised private enclosure of perhaps one-third of the common fields in Herefordshire.’ (p. 153, note 2)

with the problem of dearth (in both its senses).'²⁹ The falsification on the part of James, combined with his selective application, further politicises the Royal 'care' that assumes his innocence as regards the causes of the Rising.

There can be little doubt that the plebeians in *Coriolanus* are suffering from extreme food shortages at the beginning of the play. But their derogatory nomination by the patrician class the 'many-headed multitude', a 'Hydra' (3.1.92), deprives them of human reason and signifies their perceived inconsistency or waywardness of opinion, a tendency for their wits to fly in different directions but also to sway with the will of their leaders – either the 'big toes' of the assembly or their constitutional representatives, the Tribunes. The patrician view ignores the plebeians' engagement in political analysis and debate in Shakespeare's play, in which 'the popular voice, as [the plebeians] themselves speak it, has genuine grievances to express',³⁰ and the fable of the body finds them unconvinced rather than ungrateful. Realizing the powerful eloquence of accepted analogy and suspecting its cognitive ideological deployment, the First Citizen protests to Menenius, 'you must not think to fob off our disgrace with a tale' (1.1.92-93), and flatly refuses Menenius's paternalistic reiteration of the innateness of the patricians' 'charitable care': 'They ne'er cared for us yet' (1.1.64, 78-79).³¹ The First Citizen thus exposes ideology's concealment of contradictions in Menenius's interpretation of the conventional political analogy of the body.³² As Patterson argues, the plebeians have a 'considerable degree of political self-consciousness'.

Moreover, *Coriolanus* does not appear to suggest that not only grievances arising from a dearth of food, but even constitutional or political grievances may be assuaged by filling the bellies of the discontented. 'Shakespeare, having identified the undeniably physical content of the citizens' motivation, does not leave them [...] clapping their hands spasmodically upon their stomachs. On the contrary, they proceed to discuss the political economy, not without wit, and not without considerable social perspective'.³³ Among their insights is an attempt to redefine the patrician sense of superiority as resting upon nothing innate but rather

²⁹ Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, pp. 137 (and note 48), 138. Jonathan Dollimore alludes to 'a report from Warwickshire during the dearth of 1608 (probably the year of [*Coriolanus*]'s production) which confirmed that the shortage of corn was caused partly by hoarding - something which was widely recognised anyway'. Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (1989), p. 228.

³⁰ Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, p. 11.

³¹ In Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, these two references are: 1.1.91-92; 1.1.77-78.

³² This particular instance exemplifies Catherine Belsey's generalisation: 'Analysis reveals that at any given moment the categories and laws of the symbolic order [including language] are full of contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies which function as a source of possible change. The role of ideology is to suppress these contradictions in the interests of the preservation of the existing social formation, but their presence ensures that it is always possible, with whatever difficulty, to identify them, to recognize ideology for what it is, and to take an active part in transforming it by producing new meanings.' *Critical Practice*, pp. 45-46.

³³ Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, pp. 127, 133.

upon the uneven distribution of wealth, intensified by the present food shortages: 'the leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise their abundance' (1.1.18-20). Citizen discourse resists the ideology that seeks to naturalize differences of wealth and power as reflecting differences in relative worth.³⁴

In some measure, *Coriolanus* participates in a literary tradition of use of the body politic analogy to admonish tyranny and limit monarchical authority.³⁵ In Barkan's view: 'In the late Middle Ages, the characteristically English approach to the organic theory of the State stressed the importance of the whole realm to the government of the commonwealth at least as much as that of the king.'³⁶ John of Salisbury, in *Policraticus*, limits monarchical authority as against sacerdotal powers of the clergy, who are represented in the body politic as analogous with the soul; although in so far as the polity is also the *corpus mysticum*, the human soul is analogous to God. The French theorist Claude de Seyssel, in *La Monarchie de France*, written between 1515 and 1520, similarly argues for tempered, balanced or political monarchy and against absolute monarchy, as does John Fortescue, in his *De laudibus legum Anglie*, which posits the will of the people as like the heart in the body, in that both contain the blood and therefore the source of life respectively of the state and human body. Many sixteenth-century political treatises deploy the body-politic analogy to argue for monarchy while not being apologies for absolutism, and Thomas Starkey, in *Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset*, imputes the cause of decay in the polity to the physician or ruler.³⁷

The giving of voices scene in *Coriolanus* is revealing in its analysis of the interdependence of noble patrician and plebeian members in social relations. While the Second Citizen asserts the possibility of denying Coriolanus, the First Citizen offers an ethico-political analysis which the Third Citizen expands upon: 'We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do. For, if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them. So if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of him.' (2.3.4-9) The *realpolitik* effectiveness of the ritual of giving voices in sealing the Roman social contract lies in its apparent egalitarianism. If the citizens were to withhold their voices, they would be confirming to the patricians their self-evident status as ungrateful monstrous members and the reason they must be kept in economic and political subjection. If conversely the citizens were to show their 'noble acceptance' of

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche identified the process of converting power relations into relations of worth as a strategy employed by the 'herd' in order to avoid fear, '[w]here the difference in power is great and submission necessary': *Will to Power*, trans. by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 279.

³⁵ See Barkan, pp. 72-73; Archambault, 27-28.

³⁶ Barkan, p. 75.

³⁷ Archambault, 'The Analogy of the "Body" in Renaissance Political Thought', pp. 44, 35, 39, 48; Barkan, p. 75, on John Fortescue.

Coriolanus as Consul, suggesting that culture, that is, patrician culture does stick after all, they would be confirming their ideological recognition of themselves within the social formation by their deference to and emulation of their superiors. The Third Citizen's insight must be qualified, however, by the Tribune Sicinius' implication that the citizens have previously denied consulship to one who asked (2.3.203-6).

Shakespeare's play does not represent the plebeians in an unambiguously favourable light. The reservations expressed in the giving of voices scene by the First, Third, and Fourth Citizens about Caius Martius Coriolanus's fitness for Consulship are evidently insufficiently compelling to prevent their 'childish friendliness' from yielding their voices. They feel empowered to deny Coriolanus only when their new 'fathers', the Tribunes, assail them with dismay since they were even 'fore-advis'd' (2.3.189). Brutus had argued that the ritual of giving voices is potentially politically enabling because it situates Coriolanus in a position of social dependence (2.3.174-88), and Sicinius had added that if the demands the plebeians were entitled to make angered Coriolanus, they could justifiably pass him unelected (2.3.197). Perhaps the plebeians were too much in awe of their guardians, the patricians, whose opinion of them is uppermost in their minds when they are obliged to 'represent' themselves.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Sigmund Freud attempts to understand in psychoanalytic terms the characteristics of the group as proposed by Gustave Le Bon, in *Psychologie des Foules*, first published in 1895.³⁸ Freud summarises these as 'weakness of intellectual ability' and incapacity to reason, impulsiveness and 'incapacity for moderation and delay', exaggeration of sentiment and 'lack of emotional restraint', absence of judgement of the critical spirit and 'the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action'.³⁹ Freud understands all these phenomena in terms of the libidinal ties between members, and between each member and the group's leader. In particular Freud identified a complex form of identification that is both heteropathic and centripetal, where group members identify themselves with each other, and idiopathic and centrifugal, where the members identify each other with themselves. The principal means of identification is said to be language, and Freud explains group members' susceptibility to the suggestion of their leaders by characterizing the state of the group as one in which the unconscious predominates and the group ideal embodied in the leader replaces the ego-ideals of the individual members. In *Coriolanus*, the plebeians' object of identification and sublimation had been the patricians, but on their election the Tribunes become, in the words of Menenius,

³⁸ Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des Foules* was translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, and published by Fisher Unwin in 1920.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), p. 684.

‘the herdsmen of the beastly / plebeians’ (2.1.94-95). News of the exiled Coriolanus’ allegiance with the enemies of Rome causes them to renounce their own former action: ‘though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will’ (4.6.146). Suspicion of having been manipulated turns immoderately quickly to certainty, and hostile resentment replaces ties of obedience and identification, as the life of the Tribune Brutus is threatened if the ‘Roman ladies bring not comfort home’ (5.4.39).

The plebeians’ genuine grievance has undeniable causes in material deprivation at the beginning of *Coriolanus*, but resentment of the social elevation of Caius Martius, and the popular esteem in which he is held, informs the Tribune Brutus’s description of the citizens welcoming the victorious hero home from war: ‘The Kitchen malkin pins / Her richest lockran ’bout her reechy neck, / Clamb’ring the walls to eye him’ (2.1.206-8). What particularly grates is that while Menenius publicly embraces the role of people’s guardian, allowing himself to be an object of their deference (1.1.50-54), Caius Martius opposes their values to his own: ‘who desires greatness / Deserves your hate’ (1.1.75-76). According to Jonathan Dollimore, his hatred is a pre-condition of his patrician self-esteem: ‘Coriolanus, as patrician, needs the plebeians, not just in battle and as a class to exploit at home, but as objects of inferiority without which his superiority would be literally meaningless’.⁴⁰

It is not only resentment that makes Caius Martius Coriolanus seem to be an enemy to the people, however. The political question for the city-state of Rome is how to direct his militancy against the community’s enemies, at this time the Volscians, and deflect it from its own members. The internal threat is always present, not least in the mouth of Caius Martius himself: ‘Mend and charge home, / Or by the fires of heaven, I’ll leave the foe / And make my wars on you’ (1.4.38-40). Moreover he abuses the commonalty with words (2.3.15-17) and desires to repeal corn gratis (3.1.124). The danger that Caius Martius Coriolanus presents by his election to consulship is real: ‘now arriving / A place of potency and sway o’ th’state, / If he should still malignantly remain / Fast foe to th’plebeii, [their] voices might / Be curses to [themselves]’ (2.3.179-83). But to eradicate the disposition that poses the danger in a fit of moral idealism would be both unwise, since the city state does not lie free from outside threats, and based on a misdiagnosis, since to attribute a source, a will, a responsible act to every condition may be a gross simplification of politics. Shakespeare’s play arguably represents political subjectivity, or inter-subjectivity, and class relations, as interdependent in ways that suggest not only that persons and factions participate and act in ways that have effects – the legislative, repressive, and deliberately mystifying storytelling measures taken by the patricians to consolidate their power and status, for example. The interdependence

⁴⁰ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (1984), p. 222.

also suggests that persons and factions are complex effects of ideology and the social formation. For this reason, it can be seen as misleading and manipulative of the Tribunes to allocate blame to Caius Martius for all his attitudes, as if he were indeed the 'author of himself' (5.3.36) and the origin of every action were conscious.

What merit, if any, is there in Caius Martius's claim at the beginning of the play, that because of the plebeians' weakness of intellectual ability, absence of judgement, lack of emotional restraint, immoderate impulsiveness and hasty action, they are not only unfit for power in the state, but if they were not kept in awe by the Senate, they 'Would feed on one another' (1.1.187)? However much feeding and starving are interpretable in literal, material ways in *Coriolanus*, their denotations, connotations, and suggested meanings extend metaphorically. Through this figurality, Shakespeare is apparently concerned to explore political subjectivity or the psychology of class relations.

For Caius Martius Coriolanus the plebeians are *fed* a measure of government through the admission of the Tribunes, giving them opportunity to exercise their appetite: 'How shall this bosom multiplied digest / The senate's courtesy?' (3.1.130-1). Less in awe of the patricians, the plebeians will 'Call our cares fears; which will in time / Break ope the locks o' th' senate, and bring in / The crows to peck the eagles' (3.1.136-38). On being informed of the plebeians' repeal of their voices, Coriolanus discursively transforms the plebeians from docile herd animals to predatory beasts, a 'common cry of curs' (3.3.120), ready to be set on by the Tribunes to devour their antagonist:

Are these your herd?
Must these have voices, that can yield them now
And straight disclaim their tongues? What are your offices?
You being their mouths, why rule you not their teeth?
Have you not set them on? (3.1.32-36)

The invective of Coriolanus is in keeping with that of Pierre Charron's *De la Sagesse* (1601), translated into English by Sansen Lenard in 1606, in which the people, the 'strange beast with many heads', are 'a savage beast'.⁴¹ Coriolanus advocates political suppression and the repression by the plebeians of their own hostile feelings and sickly appetites for that which is unsuitable for them: 'at once pluck out / The multitudinous tongue: let them not lick / The sweet which is their poison' (3.1.154-56).

⁴¹ C.A. Patrides, "'The Beast with Many Heads': Renaissance Views on the Multitude', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 16 (1965), 241-46 (p. 246).

In Coriolanus's discursive transformation of the plebeians from herd to predatory beasts, their social, political voices are metonymically changed to repugnant hated breath 'As reek o' th'rotten fens' (3.3.120-21). The figuring of social revolt as the patricians being devoured by the plebeians is an entailment of the metaphor which understands society in terms of a body, the patricians as the belly distributing nourishment through the veins to the extremities which are the plebeians, the feet of the body. But class factionalism and intestine strife revert all social inter-subjectivity and interdependence into a politics of incorporating identification, of introjection of the object by feeding off it, devouring and becoming it. This psychological dimension of politics, in which subjectivity and class relations are construed in terms of the discourse of feeding or incorporation, involves the patrician fear that the plebeians have uprooted their identification with their group ideal embodied by the patricians themselves and exposed its roots in hostility.

There is divergence within the patrician response to the perceived threat of revolt. Whereas Coriolanus argues that in 'soothing' the plebeians, 'we nourish 'gainst our senate / The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition' (3.1.68-69), Menenius is dismayed that 'our renowned Rome, whose gratitude / Towards her deserved children is enrolled / In Jove's own book, like an unnatural dam / Should now eat up her own' (3.1.288-92). The image of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf is a symbol of the city of Rome and suggests the threat that Rome presents to itself.

Menenius: Pray you, who does the wolf love?
 Sicinius: The lamb.
 Menenius: Ay, to devour him, as the hungry plebeians would the noble Martius.
 Brutus: He's a lamb indeed that baas like a bear.
 Menenius: He's a bear indeed that lives like a lamb.

(2.1.7-12)

Coriolanus' banishment is the citizens' assertion that Rome is the people (3.1.197-99); it is a defence of Rome's corporeal integrity and of 'the Publike good' (to borrow the words of King James).⁴² Surgically, it is 'a sharpe remedy applied to a small and infected part, to save the whole from dissolution and destruction.'⁴³

The interdependence of political subjectivities and classes in the Roman city-state entails that when the plebeians recognise that the 'Bowels of the Abdomen which are allotted for publique digestion', have ceased to 'operate for the common profit', but persist only in

⁴² Larkin and Hughes, eds, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamation 75, p. 164.

⁴³ Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Proclamation 72, p. 156.

‘private digestion’,⁴⁴ patrician self-interest is figured as predation: ‘If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there’s all the love they bear us’ (1.1.84-85). The militant identity of Coriolanus, in refusing to acknowledge dependence, refuses to eat, substituting fighting for feeding:

False hound,
If you have writ your annals true, ’tis there
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles.

(5.6.113-16)

This figurative and psychological strategy is not unique to Caius Martius Coriolanus, but is more generally patrician and arguably recognised as such by the plebeians. Reflecting on victory in the battle at Corioli for which Caius Martius was to be given the name ‘Coriolanus’ (‘conqueror of Corioli’), Cominius, speaking to Caius Martius, says ‘Yet cam’st thou to a morsel of this feast, / Having fully dined before’ (1.10.10-11). The discourse is echoed by servants in Antium:

First Servant:

He was too hard for him directly, to say the truth on’t: before Corioles
he scotched him and notched him like a carbonado.

Second Servant:

And he had been cannibally given, he might have broiled and eaten him
to. (4.5.190-94)

The only patrician who visibly enjoys *actual* eating and drinking is Menenius, who publicly embraces the role of people’s guardian.

Janet Adelman posits the original construction of the subjectivity of Caius Martius in the maternal feeding situation.⁴⁵ Although this claim is nowhere directly made in the text of *Coriolanus*, she argues that the disruption of this situation, through deprivation, set in motion Caius Martius’s psychological defence strategies, including his conversion of vulnerability, felt by the child most intensely when hungry, into a means of attack. The argument, which has psychological plausibility, does not contradict the text of the play, and resonates in its language and discourse of feeding, particularly in speeches by Volumnia which suggest how her son’s character was ‘framed’ (5.3.63) and which arguably equate starvation and masculinity:⁴⁶ ‘considering how honour would become such a person’, and

⁴⁴ Veslingus, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, ‘Hamlet’ to ‘The Tempest’* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁶ Adelman, p. 147.

fearing that he may 'picture-like [...] hang by th' wall', she sent her son to 'cruel war' (1.3.10-14). There he is masculinised in ways that consist with his mother's assertion:

The breasts of Hecuba
When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian sword, contemning. (1.3.42-45)

Adelman analyses these lines thus:

Hector is transformed immediately from infantile feeding mouth to bleeding wound. For the unspoken mediator between breast and wound is the infant's mouth; in this imagistic transformation, to feed is to be wounded; the mouth becomes the wound, the breast the sword. [...] But at the same time as Volumnia's image suggests the vulnerability inherent in feeding, it also suggests a way to fend off that vulnerability. In her image, feeding, incorporating, is transformed into spitting out, an aggressive expelling; the wound once again becomes the mouth that spits "forth blood / At Grecian sword contemning". The wound spitting blood thus becomes not a sign of vulnerability but an instrument of attack.⁴⁷

Hector suckling and then spitting forth blood sets up an equation between a mother's milk and blood, which in one sense is unsurprising given that milk was believed to be a derivative of menstrual blood, but which in another sense bestows upon the feeding situation an aggressive ambivalence. According to Stanley Cavell, 'when Hector contemns Grecian swords, he is also thought of as fighting, as wielding a sword, so the mouth is transformed into, or seen as, a cutting weapon: The suckling mother is presented as being slashed by the son-hero, eaten by the one she feeds.'⁴⁸

The satisfaction and denial of a child's needs are the means for the production of the psychological apparatus, and (to build in a limited way upon Adelman's analysis) since the oral stage of child psycho-sexual development accords erotic gratification with feeding and affords a basis in fantasy for the child's identification with its maternal figure at a later stage, subsequent identifications may, in a regressive way, find their prototype in the fantasy of incorporation, of introjection of the object by feeding off it, devouring and becoming it. While fending off hunger as a sign of vulnerability, by substituting fighting, Caius Martius also fends off the psychic-social derivative of feeding, which is his dependence upon the plebeians (for his identity) within the body-politic.

⁴⁷ Adelman, pp. 148-49.

⁴⁸ Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 154.

In exile, Coriolanus says of the plebeians, 'Pent to linger / But with a grain a day, I would not buy / Their mercy at the price of one fair word' (3.3.89-91), words of course being the principal means of identification and social relationship. Perhaps he is ignorant of the utility of language as a means of political persuasion, or he sees dialogue as opening him up to persuasion by the voices of the plebeians to their purposes, but partly to excuse his resistance to 'policy' and diplomacy, Menenius says of Coriolanus, 'he has been bred i'th' wars / Since a could draw a sword, and is ill school'd / In bolted language' (3.1.317-19). Adelman argues that his language resists using 'those linguistic modes that acknowledge dependence'.⁴⁹ The only occasion on which he attempts to speak differently is when he adheres to the custom that requires him to stand in the market place with his battle wounds visible and receive the voices, or votes, of the plebeians, in order to become Consul. Humiliated and uncomfortable, he perseveres with the requirement by adopting the mockingly exaggerated voice of a hawker selling his goods ('wounds two dozen odd') to the plebeians in exchange for their voices, 'As if [he] had received them for the hire / Of their breath only!' (2.3.125-31; 2.2.148-50) The only way he conceives of acknowledging or admitting dependence on the plebeians of Rome for the promotion he deserves is by estranging himself and becoming how he imagines them to be, with an economically dependent oral mode.

Yet despite what Caius Martius Coriolanus may think, or speak, from a purely social-structural perspective patrician identity is an effect of its difference from plebeian identity, as he himself appears to concede when he says to the Senators: 'You are plebeians / If they be senators; and they are no less / When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste / Most palates theirs.' (3.1.100-103)

The denial of dependence entailed by the employment of fighting as 'a poorly concealed substitute for feeding',⁵⁰ is characteristic of the patrician class, and not, as Adelman's reading suggests, specific to the psychology of Volumnia and Caius Martius, and it is recognised as such by the plebeians. One possibility is that it is a mark of the play's complicity or investment in Volumnia and her son's fantasies that war is not seen otherwise; another is that the text of the play tempts the reader into the political mistake of reading war and the city state subjectively, which is of course Caius Martius Coriolanus's tragedy.

⁴⁹ Adelman, p. 151.

⁵⁰ Adelman, p. 150.

These alternatives are not mutually exclusive since the play's investment may be motivated by the Sidneian defence of poetry, that in order to teach more effectively poetry must engage its reader not only intellectually but also imaginatively and move them emotionally, which it may be thought to do more effectively by focalising its perceptions ideologically through the eyes of its protagonist. From the perspective of Caius Martius, the city of Rome is most certainly not the people, as Sicinius and the Citizens claim (3.1.197-99):

I would they were barbarians, as they are,
Though in Rome littered; not Romans, as they are not,
Though calved i'th'porch o'th'Capitol.
(3.1.237-39)

The equation of Volumnia with Rome (5.3.122-25), however, holds persuasive force for her son. Her words to him in the Volscian camp prove decisive in his tragedy:

thou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread –
Trust to't, thou shalt not – on thy mother's womb
That brought thee to this world.
(5.3.123-26)

According to Cavell, the passion in Volumnia's mind is her narcissism, which in *Coriolanus* is identified as cannibalism, a kind of psychological auto-cannibalism: 'Anger's my meat, I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding.' (4.2.53-54)⁵¹ She hereby identifies herself perhaps unintentionally with Rome the unnatural dam which eats up her own. That her son's disposition is resultant upon her refusal to nurture him might be ironically claimed when she says, 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me' (3.2.129). Thenceforward her satisfaction derives from the harsh conditions in which her son strives to emulate her image of him: 'My hazards still have been your solace' (4.1.28).

According to Cavell, Coriolanus and Volumnia are starvers:

They manifest this condition as a name or a definition of the human, like being mortal. And they manifest this as a condition of insatiability (starving by feeding, feeding as deprivation). It is a condition sometimes described as the infiniteness of desire, imposing upon the finiteness of the body [...]. It is as though desire has a structure of endlessness. One picture of this structure is given by Narcissus for whom what is longed for is someone longing, who figures beauty as longing.⁵²

⁵¹ Cavell, p. 152.

⁵² Cavell, pp. 148-49.

The reflexiveness of eating in *Coriolanus* suggests to Cavell the ‘inevitable reflexiveness of action in Rome’.⁵³ Yet his speculations regarding the reflexiveness of action, especially feeding, and Coriolanus’ desire to be without need, desire, or vulnerability, are, he says, ‘an effort to do justice to one’s sense of Coriolanus as responding not primarily to his situation with the plebeians, as if trapped by an uncontrollable disdain; but as responding primarily to his situation with himself, as befits a Narcissus, trapped first by an uncontrollable logic.’⁵⁴ But is the uncontrollable logic of which Cavell speaks primarily psychological, as he argues? Does it not arise from within an identity, a militant subjectivity, which is simultaneously defined by its relationship of opposition to, and interdependence with, the plebeians, and is inscribed ideologically with an image-concept of invulnerability and self-sufficiency, of relation to oneself?

Caius Martius’s characterisation of the plebeians’ desire for political representation as ‘A sick man’s appetite, who desires most that / Which would increase his evil’ (1.1.177-78), distinguishes only their avowal of hunger, appetite, and desire to be nourished, from his own disavowal. Cavell has interpreted Caius Martius’s statement, ‘Better it is to die, better to starve, / Than crave the hire which first we do deserve’ (2.3.112-13), as ‘reaffirming or confessing his settled form of (inner) life’ rather than ‘asserting the rightness of a particular choice for the future’.⁵⁵ If so, his starving as a perpetual condition, his desire not to desire but to be deserving, is surely the privileged desire and distinction of nobility, which rests on the assumption of natural superiority and merit, rather than the absence of a desire most readily expressed by the plebeians only because they are most likely to be deprived and therefore most in need of being nourished.

It is possible to see the militant identity of Caius Martius as involving identification with an ego-ideal rather than a group ideal. The tributes paid to him after his singular assault on Corioli dwell on the solitariness of his ‘rare example’ (2.2.104). Caius Martius is like Nietzsche’s ‘*Übermensch*’ in that he ‘keeps back no drop of spirit for himself, but wants to be the spirit of his virtue entirely’.⁵⁶ Yet this virtue, valour, is not only epitomised by Caius Martius, but held by the patricians in common to be ‘the chiefest virtue’ (2.2.4). It is the ideal of the ruling faction and its attainment ‘needs the opposition of the masses, of the

⁵³ Cavell, p. 152.

⁵⁴ Cavell, p. 149.

⁵⁵ Cavell, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, p. 221.

“levelled”, a feeling of distance from them!’ Like the ‘*Übermensch*’, Coriolanus ‘stands on them, he lives off them’.⁵⁷

While it can be argued that the identity of Caius Martius Coriolanus is defined by his relationship of 'antagonistic dependence' upon the plebeians of Rome,⁵⁸ his feats in battle make him unquestionably deserving of the gratitude and praise of Rome. Yet all praise is apparently superfluous and even grievous to him, partly on account of his identification with his ideal:

Martius: Pray now, no more. My mother,
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me grieves me. I have done
As you have done, that's what I can; induced
As you have been, that's for my country.
He that has effected his good will
Hath overta'en mine act.

(1.10.13-19)

Receiving praise for military prowess is also uncomfortable for Caius Martius because praise is an expression of gratitude for deeds done, a grateful dependence, a feeding upon, which therefore carries for its recipient the risk of being fragmented by alterity, of becoming like the plebeians whom he calls ‘fragments’ (1.1.221), that is, scraps of uneaten food. For Caius Martius, this grateful feeding upon him expresses a vulnerability akin to being wounded, which is a source of shame unless, of course, ‘every gash was an enemy’s grave’ (2.1.151), in which case wounds become an index to victories and (in a kind of vicious cycle) attract praise (2.1.141-51):

Martius: I have some wounds upon me, and they smart
To have themselves remembered.

Cominius: Should they not,
Well might they fester 'gainst ingratitude,
And tent themselves with death.

(1.10.28-31)

Disdaining to receive praise is also to disavow a like dependence, a need, or a desire, to be nurtured by others. For this reason Caius Martius imagines praise as food which he resists in order to perpetuate his starving condition:

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, p. 866.

⁵⁸ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (1989), p. 227.

Martius: May these same instruments which you profane
 Never sound more. When drums and trumpets shall
 I'th' field prove flatterers, let courts and cities be
 Made all of false-faced soothing. When steel grows
 Soft as the parasite's silk, let him be made
 An overture {ovator} for th' wars. No more, I say.
 For that I have not washed my nose that bled,
 Or foiled some debile wretch, which without note
 Here's many else have done, you shout me forth
 In acclamations hyperbolical,
 As if I loved my little should be dieted
 In praises sauced with lies.

(1.10.41-52)

One reason that Volumnia's words to her son in the Volscian camp prove decisive is because they force upon him an awareness of his own desire or appetite by the way they expose war as a derivative of the maternal feeding situation by insisting that to attack Rome would be to tear his 'country's bowels out' (5.3.103), and thus to tread on his mother's womb. Arguably in Volumnia's words expose her son's continued psychological dependence on her and reveals the threat he poses not only to her but to himself.

Another reason that Volumnia's intercession on behalf of Rome is effective is because it exposes his dependence upon her and upon Rome for who he is. He had overlooked this by identifying and confusing himself with the role he is in fact playing – 'Rather say I play / The man I am' (3.2.15-16). Even as Caius Martius tries to elide the difference between self and role, the shift in signification from the I that plays to the I that is, or is played, exposes the difference between the *I* which is perceived and the *I* which does the perceiving. As in Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage, where the infant 'perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to its own perceiving self', Caius Martius's identification with, or misrecognition of himself in, the role framed by his mother necessitates a splitting, which language only reinforces, 'between the *I* of discourse, the subject of the *énoncé*, and the *I* who speaks, the subject of the enunciation', that is, 'between the conscious self, the self which appears in its own discourse, and the self which is only partly represented there, the self which speaks'.⁵⁹ According to Catherine Belsey:

To summarise very briefly what in Lacan is a complex and elusive theory, entry into the symbolic order liberates the child into the possibility of social relationship; it also reduces its helplessness to the extent that it is

⁵⁹ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, New Accents series (London: Methuen, 1980; repr. Routledge, 1992), pp. 64-65.

now able to articulate its needs in the form of demands. But at the same time a division within the self is constructed. In offering the child the possibility of formulating its desires the symbolic order also betrays them, since it cannot by definition formulate those elements of desire which remain unconscious. Demand is always only a metonymy of desire [...]. The subject is thus a site of contradiction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation.⁶⁰

Adelman psychologises Caius Martius's intention to wreak retribution on Rome as the 'rising up of the hungry and mutinous forces within himself'.⁶¹ These we can imagine as having previously been repressed by his firm identification with an ego-ideal, and which now threaten his identity within the symbolic and social order. Perhaps they even include a formerly concealed hostility towards the one who had deprived him of food, a hostility, a desire to feed voraciously, made all too apparent by his intended revenge. This would place upon Caius Martius the intolerable burden of an awareness of being little different from a plebeian. From a political, materialist perspective, in the final intercession scene Volumnia signifies 'not motherhood so much as socialisation', and the demands which Volumnia makes of him 'merely lay bare his contradictory insertion in the prevailing social relations between and within Rome and Antium'.⁶² From either perspective, Coriolanus's capitulation to the demands of Volumnia bears witness to an agonising recognition not only of the risk to his life now posed by the Volscians whom he has betrayed, but of the fragmentation of his own identity: 'Most dangerously you have prevail'd, / If not most mortal to him' (5.3.188-89).

O my mother, mother, O!
 You have won a happy victory to Rome;
 But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
 If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
 (5.3.186-90)

⁶⁰ Belsey, p. 65.

⁶¹ Adelman, p. 160.

⁶² Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (1984), p. 222.