

Banishment and World Elsewhere
in Coriolanus

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The stage direction to the 'unnatural' reconcile scene in V.iii. says Coriolanus 'hold her (Volumnia) by the hand, silent.' His gesture in silence is taken, for example, by M.C. Bradbrook as "the moment when Coriolanus is reborn, when his lust for dominance is killed by love"¹ or by E.A.J.Honigman, as the sign of his gradual development "from action to reflection, from noise to silence."² In each opinion it is taken for granted that Coriolanus did develop from a certain personality to another. The theme of development of the hero is essential to the understanding of the drama, as it is usual in Shakespeare's tragedies. However, the study of Coriolanus in terms of the hero's development proposes a problem: Shakespeare's dramatic representation of the hero's mind situation in this play is so different from the preceding 'great' tragedies that we have only a limited access to the inner self of our hero. It is not saying we have full access in the preceding tragedies; I am proposing that in Coriolanus, and also in Antony and Cleopatra and Timon of Athens, the author is deliberately evading to give us informations what is really happening in the hero's mind.

Coriolanus is a play full of the discussion about its protagonist, as if "nearly incessant discussion of the hero appears rather to be an end itself."³ The quality of discussion, however, is defined by the speaker's social

status. Therefore, we cannot always believe what is said about Coriolanus without checking which class the speaker belongs. The first comment is given by the plebeians who sharply opposes Coriolanus.

1.Cit. First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.

All. We know't, we know't.

1.Cit. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict? (I.i.7-11) ⁴

Thus, Coriolanus is introduced to us in an unfavourable way as a Shakespearean tragic hero. ⁵ The Tribunes of the people also attack Coriolanus for his pride and arrogance. However, the plebeians and the Tribunes' attitude create a certain hypocritical atmosphere around them. The stage direction in I.i. 'Citizens steal away' might explain the author's personal disgust for the citizens.

The patrician class, on the other hand, praises the nobility of Coriolanus. In the patricians, Menenius plays a role of a sort of go-between to make the two classes reconcile. His well known 'fable of belly' is a revision of Ulyses' speech on order in Troilus and Cressida, in which Menenius blames the plebeian's unreasonable gumbling over the shortage of corn, pointing out the mutinous attitude of them. The citizen's, and the soldier's, attitude is depicted as to make a contrast to it of Coriolanus.

Coriolanus himself clearly states the concept of manhood as he should be. He is possessed of the concept of 'the thing I am.' This motivates him to do everything

alone. In the battle scene in I.iv. he enters the gates of Corioles 'himself alone, / To answer all the city.' (51-2) and in viii. he challenges Aufidius saying 'Alone I fought in your Corioles walls.' (8) Later he compares himself to 'a lonely dragon.' (IV.i.30) We might safely say that to do things alone is the only way for Coriolanus to prove his identity and selfhood. His antipathy toward panegyric given by the patricians can be seen in this context. Though the words of praise and reward are duly given to him, accepting them makes him one of the soldiers who 'do prize their hours / At a crack'd dracme.' (I.v.4-5) If the liking for courtesy is the common mentality to the patricians, this proves that Coriolanus does not belong to the class psychologically. Therefore, the tragedy of Coriolanus lies, in the highly political situation of the drama⁶, "in his individuality, not in his status as a representative of his class."⁷

To consider the development of Coriolanus in terms of individuality, 'the thing I am' as he says, we must think about the effect of banishment which takes place in III. iii. All the tragic heroes are, in their own ways, to be called social outcast; banished in one way or another from the society they once belong. Of those tragic heroes, Lear, Timon, and Coriolanus suffer the physical exile. Let us here turn our eyes to Lear and Timon to see how Shakespeare manipulates the effect of banishment on them.

When Lear knows that what he had been believed turned out to be false, he passes the gate of human world and runs into the wilderness with deranged spirit. His curse

on the world and human being sounds through the great confusion.

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage, blow,
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the
cocks!
You sulph'rous and thoughts-executing fires,
Vaunt-coureirs of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th' world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germains spill at once
That makes ingrateful man! (III.ii.1-9)

Lear's journey that follows is a process of maddening. And, more important than that, he goes the way of self-discovery. With Poor Tom, the Fool, and nature itself around him, his discovery of the things that he had never given thought before sharpens his ability to see things as they are. It is a terrifying process, not only for him but for us. He curses the nature itself, but when he meets Poor Tom he realises he still owes nature clothes. The identity crisis Lear felt when he cried 'Does any here know me? This is not Lear'(I.iv.226) comes to a climax as he unbuttons and tears off his clothes. By doing so, he admits that man is but an animal. Through the maddening process, however, he begins to regain nobility, which Timon fails completely.

Transmutation of Timon is so sudden and complete that we are left unsatisfied. We know what pressure makes this change, but all we are shown is a cause and effect and not the process. As Apemantus puts it 'the middle of humanity' Timon 'never knewest, but the extremity of both ends.'(IV.

iii.300-1) On the lack of the process of his suffering Harry Levin comments that Timon "cannot be said to have moved from the one extreme to the other through the medium of introspection."⁸ In fact, it is quite unlikely that Timon is able to make the bitter betrayal into "an opportunity to discover the true quality of humanity"⁹ through introspection. He seems to have jumped to the lesson of the whole drama as soon as he knows the ingrateful nature of man. But he will not change any more. Timon's hate may grow, as he says, but it does not deepen his understanding of himself. Both Lear and Timon point out man's affinity with beast: only Lear regains the noble human nature through the suffering while Timon becomes the beast and evil spirit himself.¹⁰

In Coriolanus we hear different tone in the hero's words.

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek a'th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air — I banish you!
.... Dispising,
For you, the city, thus I turn my back;
There is a world elsewhere. (III.iii.120-35)

Here, he does not mean to retreat into the woods like Timon to curse people, nor does he step into the region of madness like Lear. It is quite probable that he is already thinking of wreaking vengeance. His words to his mother before the gates of Rome give us hint also that he determines not to change his attitude.

scenes. Shakespeare is not dramatising the state of mind of the hero which could have become a climax of the drama, as it was usual in the earlier tragedies. Instead of doing so, Shakespeare invites our imagination making Rome and Antium a contrast and parallel. For example, in II.iii. (Rome) Coriolanus goes to the market place wearing a gown of humility to beg the citizen's voice to be consul, where Coriolanus exchanges rather crude wit combat with them. In Antium, when he enters the house of Aufidius, in mean apparel, the servingmen check him and try to make fun of him. Here, Coriolanus' words and gesture differ from the earlier occasion. The following conversation with Aufidius, with its convincingness, also indicates "new Coriolanus, a man seemingly controlled and wholly integrated."¹²

Some hints are indicating that Coriolanus has changed. However, the same image is used concerning the valor of Coriolanus. In IV.vi. Cominius reports how Coriolanus fights against the Romans.

He is their god; he leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than Nature,
That shapes man better; and they follow him
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies. (90-5)

Here is everything what Coriolanus is said to be throughout the play. His god-like image is recurrent and Valeria tells us that she saw his son who has the father's mood 'run after a gilded butterfly' and finally 'he mammoth'd it.'(I.iii.60-5)

This use of 'acting' is but a temporal hypocrisy for his mother who thinks that Coriolanus can "suspend his honesty to meet the crisis, then return to it later."¹³ But for him, it is a destruction of his identity, 'the thing I am.'

Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turn'd
Which quier'd with my drum, into a pipe
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lull asleep! (III.ii.111-5)

This is an agonised lamentation. But it also has a peculiar effect, because it begins with 'Well, I must do't' (110) and ends with 'I will not do't.' (120) This is a war of Coriolanus against his mother, which he knows he will never win. "To punish the recalcitrant child" Volumentia "withdraws her love,"¹⁴ saying 'At thy choice then.' (123) To this punishment Coriolanus answers, like a child, 'chide me no more.' (132)

When his family visits the Volcian camp in V.iii., a problematic reconcile scene, the acting image is used in the conversation with Virgilia.

Vir. My lord and husband!
Cor. These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.
Vir. The sorrow that delivers us thus chang'd
Makes you think so.
Cor. Like a dull actor now
I have forgot my part, and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace. (37-42)

Virgilia is an exceptional person in the whole drama, who

with her characteristic 'gracious silence', can be the real world elsewhere for Coriolanus. She is, as Honigman says, "a living contradiction of all that her mother-in-law stands for."¹⁵ She rarely speaks; even when Coriolanus comes back from the battlefield, she welcomes him only with eyes full of tears. It is a feeling, not the words, that Virgilia brings into the play.

While Coriolanus is striving to play a role which is apparently against his nature, Volumnia treats him in the same way as we have already seen in III.ii. She prompts Virgilia and a boy to kneel before Coriolanus, like she has urged Coriolanus to do. And again she threatens to withdraw her love saying 'Come, let us go. / This fellow had a Volscian to his mother; / His wife is in Corioles, and his child / Like him by chance.' (V.iii.177-80) To this threat against his identity in the family, Coriolanus can only hold Volumnia's hand in silence. Contrary to Bradbrook's and Honigman's comment that he has gained a new personality, his silence here implies the total destruction of self-identity. It is destroyed when Coriolanus chooses to keep the mother-son relationship as it has ever been. His surrender to Volumnia at the climax of the drama is the same submissive attitude toward her as is the case in the market place.

The ignominious death scene reinforces the impression that Shakespeare does not treat Coriolanus as he does the earlier tragic heroes. The stage direction says 'Draw the conspirators, and kills Martius, who falls; Aufidius stands on him.' The death of Coriolanus and Aufidius' abuse on

his dead body seems to me the final blow of the author to his tragic heroes. Timon dies off-stage, and the soldier who finds his epitaph cannot read them. Both of them are not given noble death. But as a convention requires, Aufidius praises the 'noble memory' of Coriolanus. (V.vi.153) His words sound the more ironical when we come to think of the fact that it is Coriolanus who despised these kind of 'voice' so vehemently throughout the drama.

Shakespeare's last two tragedies, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens, seem to belong to the different tragic world. Unlike the earlier tragedies, he no longer try to exploit the heroes' mind; his interest is not in presenting us the mind situation of Coriolanus and Timon. He describes, in a rather detached way, the lives of Timon and Coriolanus. It is up to us how to interpret their lives and the genre of the plays. O.J. Campbell, who takes the drama is a "stairic representation of a slave of passion designed to teach an important political lesson"¹⁶, says that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were obsessed by the problems of Tudor politics and this determines the play's mood.¹⁷ Private matters such as the burial of Shakespeare's mother may have something to do with the play's mother-son relationship.¹⁸ These facts, both social and private, help us. But the secret that makes the two plays ambiguous lies in the change of Shakespeare's dramatic representation.

NOTES

1. M.C. Bradbrook, The Living Monument (Cambridge U.P. 1976), -p.173.
2. E.A.J. Honigman, Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies (London,1980), p.187.
3. Bertrand Evans, Shakespeare's Tragic Practice (Oxford,1979), p.308.
4. All the quotations of Shakespeare's plays are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston,1974).
5. O.J. Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire (New York, 1971), p.206.
6. On the political side of the play, see O.J. Campbell, op. cit., and Brian Vickers, Shakespeare: Coriolanus (Edward Arnold,1976).
7. John Bayley, Shakespeare and Tragedy (London,1981) p.159
8. Harry Levin, 'Shakespeare's Misanthrope' in Shakespeare Survey 26, p.92.
9. G.K. Hunter, 'The Last Tragic Heroes' in Later Shakespeare, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 8 (Edward Arnold,1973),p.26.
10. Willard Farnham, 'Timon of Athens' in Shakespeare: The Tragedies. ed. by Clifford Leech (Univ.of Chicago Press,1965),pp.125-6.
11. Una Ellis-Fermor, Shakespeare's Drama ed. by Kenneth Muir (London,1980), p.137.
12. Una Ellis-Fermor, op. cit.,p.147.
13. Maurice Charney makes a splendid research on 'acting' in Coriolanus in his Shakespeare's Roman Plays (Cambridge,1961), p.169ff.
14. Vickers, op. cit., p.35.
15. Honigman, op. cit., p.174
16. Campbell, op. cit., p.215.

17. Campbell, op. cit., p.202.
18. Bradbrook, Shakespeare: The Poet in his World (London,1978), p.213.

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