



## Coriolanus

*William Shakespeare*

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# Coriolanus

William Shakespeare

**Coriolanus** William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's last tragedy explores the career and death of a brilliant and arrogant Roman general. This is an ambitious and intriguing story of heroism.

## Coriolanus Details

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# From Reader Review Coriolanus for online ebook

## David Sarkies says

### Generals do not make good politicians

7 November 2013

This is a story about a General who is thrust into the world of politics, namely because he was such a good general. However, while he happens to be a great general, as a politician he positively sucks. Basically, Gaius Marcius' main flaw (despite the fact that I don't believe in fatal flaws) is that he simply speaks his mind, which is a noble characteristic in most professions, but not in politics. To put it bluntly, Marcius (aka Coriolanus, a name he receives after capturing the city of Coriolai) has absolutely no time for the *hoi poloi* (namely the great unwashed, the peasantry, the plebeians, or whatever other name you can come up with that describes those of us who are not members of the ruling class) and he does not mince any words regarding this dislike. This is clear right from the beginning for when the people are rioting over the price of grain he basically tells them to bugger off, and no amount of whining and whining was going to make him release any more grain, because, well, there is not all that much grain to go around, and if they didn't put up and shut up, then he was going to start busting some heads – and this is from the guy that later in the play is being positioned to become consul of Rome, a position equivalent to president.

The thing I like about Coriolanus is that it gives us an idea into the way politics worked in Republican Rome. Okay, it is Shakespeare, and if we want a better understanding we need to go to the ancient sources, however Coriolanus still gives us a pretty good idea of what the system was like. Basically, in Republican Rome, (as in other ancient democracies) the military and the government were intertwined, so it was not uncommon for the members of the senate and the rulers to have been soldiers and generals. This was the case with Julius Ceaser. However, to be a great ruler one generally had to be a great general, be loved by the patricians, and also be loved by the plebeians (or at least tolerated). Now for Coriolanus: he met two of the three conditions, namely he was not loved by the people (and there was a similar situation with Ceaser, but it was the opposite in that he was loved by the people but hated by the patricians).

These days the idea of a general being a president in an advanced democracy generally does not happen, (though it has happened in the United States with George Washington, Ulysses S Grant, and Eisenhower as examples, but generally the military to not go into politics). However, Rome was quite different, namely because the military was so intertwined with civilian life. Civilians would have participated in the military - especially in times of war. In fact many of the middle class citizens had gained their status after stints in the Roman army (it was common for soldiers who had served in the army to be given plots of land to farm after retiring from the army). As such, one of the rewards for being an outstanding soldier (such as Coriolanus) was a nice plump position in government, and the better the soldier you were, the higher up the chain you could get.

However, Coriolanus' problem was that to become Consul, he needed the consent of the people, and while his political allies could sway the people, his political enemies could also sway them the other way, which is what happened. Basically, the tribunes, who represented the people, and could veto rulings on behalf of the people, swayed them away from Coriolanus, and to such an extent that he was forced to go into exile. In doing so, however, he ends up defecting over to his enemy forces, and fuming in anger over being kicked out of his homeland, he leads his new found allies (the Volscians) against Rome and besieges the city.

The problem was that Coriolanus' as at heart a Roman, and while he was angry at his treatment, he could

not stay angry at his people for too long, which turns out bad for him because when he signs the peace treaty with Rome on behalf of the Volsces, and withdrawls his forces, he ends up angering the Volsces, who then proceed to kill him.

There was a movie recently released based on this play, starring Ralph Finness. This is actually set in a modern setting, and it is a pretty good movie. For a play that is not performed all that much, if you want to actually see a version of this play, I would highly recommend getting your hands on that movie.

I also saw a production of the play by the Donmar Theatre, which I have written up a post on my blog (where I delve into the play in greater depth).

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## **Darwin8u says**

*"Let it be virtuous to be obstinate."*

- William Shakespeare, Coriolanus

I'm a sucker for a revenge play, so this one floats easily just on the heat generated by Coriolanus' anger. I remember being exposed to the Coriolanus story last year when I was reading Plutarch's Lives, Vol 1\* and again earlier this year when I was reading Livy I: History of Rome, Books 1-2. So, going into the play I was fairly comfortable with the basic story, but completely unprepared for Shakespeare's vicious tongue. Coriolanus, his mother Volumnia, and his friend Menenius all come packed with amazing lines. I don't think I'd go as far as T.S. Eliot and say it is superior to Hamlet:

*"Coriolanus may be not as "interesting" as Hamlet, but it is, with Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare's most assured artistic success. And probably more people have thought Hamlet a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the Mona Lisa of literature."*

Again, I still don't think it is superior to Hamlet, or as my wife would say: "be a wee bit skeptical of the judgement of a man who published Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats".

Still, there is something fierce and yet very human about Coriolanus. Having personally been raised among military men, the martial attitude that combines sacrifice with a large, sharp edge of condescension is still something one sees in high ranking soldiers. The play swims in raging waters of hyper-masculinity and militarism. I have yet to see either the Ralph Fiennes' adaption or the Tom Hiddleston version. I'm sure I'll be able to talk my wife into watching either with me.

## **Favorite Quotes:**

*"I have some wounds upon me, and they smart  
To hear themselves remembered."*

- Act 1, Scene 9

*"These are the ushers of Martius, Before him  
He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.*

*Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie;  
Wich, being advanced, declines, and then men die."*  
- Act 2, Scene 1

*"I find the ass in compound with the major part of your syllables."*  
- Act 2, Scene 1

*"They lie deadly that tell you have good faces."*  
- Act 2, Scene 1

*"Faith, there hath been many great men  
that have flattered the people who ne'er loved them;  
and there be many that they have loved they know not  
wherefore; so that, if they love they know not why, they  
hate upon no better a ground."*  
- Act 2, Scene 2

*"He covets less  
Than misery itself would give; rewards  
His deeds with doing them; and is content  
To spend the time to end it."*  
- Act 2, Scene 2

*"From face to foot,  
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion  
Was timed with dying cries."*  
- Act 2, Scene 2

*"Most sweet voices!  
Better it is to die, better to starve,  
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve."*  
- Act 2, Scene 3

*"Why did you wish me milder? would you have me  
False to my nature? Rather say I play  
The man I am."*  
- Act 3, Scene 2

*"I think he'll be to Rome  
As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it  
By sovereignty of nature."*  
- Act 4, Scene 7

*"There is differency between a grub and a  
butterfly; yet your butterfly was a grub. This Martius is  
grown from man to dragon. He has wings; he's more  
than a creeping thing."*  
- Act 5, Scene 4

\* Plutarch's Lives is fascinating to read before jumping into Shakespeare's Roman plays (Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, and Titus Andronicus).

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## Brian says

There are many gods, and when we organize and rank them we go too far, we ask too much of them.

- "Women and Men", Joseph McElroy

I am certain that had this play been written by anyone other than Shakespeare it would be venerated as a major work; performed and discussed perhaps in the way *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *Macbeth* are. Written late in The Bard's career (it is the last of the Tragedies and the Histories), *Coriolanus* is his work that might be the most relevant and relatable to our modern world.

Caius Martius is a Roman general long on military brilliance but short on patience, diplomatic ability and charm. He is bestowed the agnomen *Coriolanus* after his courageous leadership in the siege of the enemy city Corioles. Upon his return to Rome he is raised up to god-like status - all but given the consulship on a silver platter - and viewed by the fickle populace as the savior of the nation. *But Martius never sought these accolades, this power.* Once Rome placed him on the pedestal it made him the target of power hungry men bent on his destruction.

This is the only play penned by Shakespeare completely driven by a single character. When Coriolanus isn't on stage steering the action the other players are discussing him directly - they are in his orbit, whether he wishes it or not. I love that Shakespeare chose to title the play after the agnomen of the lead character - a title Martius never sought and clearly didn't care if he had. But it wasn't his place nor decision to choose; the bestowal of the honor becomes the tragic undoing. If you've never read / seen this work performed, you must. The denouement is fascinating.

The UK's National Theater recently staged a performance of this play featuring Tom Hiddleston as Coriolanus. Many movie theaters around the country are showing the performance via NT Live - if you are fortunate enough to be in a city hosting it, please don't miss it! (And if you do see it, please let me know - I tried to see it here in San Francisco and every performance was sold out!)

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## Wiebke (1book1review) says

This play took me by surprise, I had not heard of it before and only read it because I wanted to watch the adaptation with Tom Hiddleston. And lucky me, this was such an interesting play and this edition was just the right one to give me enough background information and interpretation ways that I could make the most out of the play.

Being thus prepared I could appreciate the adaptation a lot better and enjoyed it tremendously.

I can only recommend it, if you get the chance to watch it.

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### **Alp Turgut says**

Gurur temas?n? odak noktas?na ta??yan "Coriolanus'un Tragedyas? / The Tragedy of Coriolanus", oldukça karma?k ve antipatik ana karakteriyle di?er tragedyalardan ayr?l?yor. Di?erlerine nazaran daha so?uk bir tavr? olan oyunda halktan nefret etmesine ra?men vatan için yan?p tutu?an Coriolanus'un gururu sebebiyle çökü?ü anlat?l?yor. Coriolanus öyle bir karakter ki sava?taki ba?ar?lar?ndan dolay? övünmekten nefret ediyor ve övülmekten de tiksiniyor. Bu yap?s?yla alçakgönüllü bir tav?r sergilese de Coriolanus'un as?l olay? annesi d???ndaki tüm insanlar? kendinden küçük gördü?ü için onlar?n övgülerinden a?a??lanmas?. Zaman zaman yapt?klar?yla okuyucuya kendini affettirmeye yakla?sa da ne yaz?k ki çok da ba?ar?l? olam?yor. Öte yandan, Coriolanus'un en büyük dü?man? Aufidius'u pek fazla okuma ?ans? bulam?yoruz; o yüzden çok da ak?lda kal?c? bir kötü karakter oldu?unu söyleyemeyiz. Yine de Shakespeare'in söz konusu politika olunca gurur ve sevgi kavramlar?n? bir yana b?rakmak gerekti?ini etkili bir hikayeyle anlatt???n? söyleyebiliriz. Eseri okuduktan sonra Ralph Fiennes taraf?ndan 2011 y?l?nda modernle?irilerek uyarlanan filmini mutlaka izleyin.

22.07.2017

İstanbul, Türkiye

Alp Turgut

<http://www.filmdoktoru.com/kitap-labo...>

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### **Mario says**

Going into this drama, I did not think that I would like it, because I was never really that much into dramas. I read *The Tempest* by Shakespeare last year, and I did not enjoy it. Now, when I finished it, it surprises me to say that I actually loved reading it. The story grabbed me at the beginning, and held me 'till the end. I do think that the drama could have been a couple of dozen pages shorter (that's why the 4 stars), but apart from that, I completely loved it. Hopefully my next drama by Shakespeare will be just as enjoyable.

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### **Carrie says**

This play made me realize how good Shakespeare really is. I had honestly never heard of "Coriolanus", and I picked it up to read because the National Theatre Live is broadcasting it live on January 30, 2014.

I have read a few of the basic Shakespeare plays - "Hamlet", "Macbeth", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "Julius Caesar" - the usual suspects. The problem is that I already knew how they would end, more or less. I don't remember a time in my life when I didn't know the plot and ending of "Romeo and Juliet". It has always been a part of my knowledge base, for as long as I can remember.

Of course, you know that the tragedies will end with chaos and death - that's just how it goes. But I came to this play without knowing anything about the plot or the outcome. It made some very interesting points.

There was a plot twist in Act III that I didn't see coming. Even though I knew there would be a sad ending, it managed to be extremely surprising and moving because I didn't already know what would happen.

I have never read any critical literature on Shakespeare. If you judge based on popularity, "Coriolanus" is not his best play. It took me a while to get hooked, but, once I hit the half-way point, it was a page turner. The experience of reading this play made me incredibly sad that I will never be introduced to "Romeo and Juliet" or "Hamlet" and be on the edge of my seat wondering how they will end.

I suppose that most great stories - the ones that endure - become such a part of our cultural knowledge that we never truly get to experience them.

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### **Bill Kerwin says**

I not only really like Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: I also like the man Coriolanus as he is revealed in the play. Sure, he may be a hothead, an arrogant bully, an immature mama's boy with a proto-fascist personality, but he is also a man of extraordinary physical courage and sincere personal modesty who would like nothing better than to do his warrior's duty and be left alone.

Unfortunately, though, his mother--whose values are also those of the Roman republic--sees her son's patrician duty as including a consulship, and the populist politicking it requires--which a proud and simple man like Coriolanus can only experience as self-abasement--inevitably leads to his shame and eventually to his destruction. He cannot be true both to his mother and his republic and to himself--and that is his tragedy.

The verse of this play is often harsh and crabbed, but it is a monumental crabbedness, an imposing harshness--very much like the personality of its hero.

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### **Cemre says**

Shakespeare ya?asa iddia ediyorum bugünden sonra Cemre'nin Tragedyas? diye bir oyun yazard?. Çok kötü bir gün geçirdim ve fazla ?ey yazmaya mecalim yok. Bu sebeple oyunla ilgili k?saca birkaç ?ey söylemek istiyorum.

Pek çok sefer belirttim bunu, biliyorum; ama yine söylemek istiyorum ki ben Shakespeare'i izlemeyi de?il okumay? seviyorum. Sahnede baz? ?eyler olmuyor gibi hissediyorum ya da belki de ben ba?ar?l? bir Shakespeare uyarlamas?na hiç denk gelmedim. Buna kar??n dedi?im gibi Shakespeare'i okumay? çok çok seviyorum, ba?ka bir büyüsü var. Coriolanus'un Tragedyas?n? da çok sevdim. Yönetenlere, yönetme hevesinde olanlara ve yönetilenlere dair, üzerinde dü?ünülmesi ve de konu?ulmas? gereken bir oyun. Her dönem için güncelli?ini koruyacak bir oyun; çünkü teknoloji ne kadar geli?se bilim ne kadar ilerlese de insan hâlâ ayn? insan. Asl?nda de?i?en ?ey çevresi, kendisi de?il. Hatalar? ayn?, zaaflar? ayn?, arzular? ayn?, h?rslar? ayn?. Bu oyunda bunu çok net bir ?ekilde görmek mümkün.

Çeviri de pek çok Shakespeare oyunu gibi Özdemir Nutku'ya ait. Kendisine denecek söz yok zaten.

Okunmal?.

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### Nicole~ says

*Let the first budger die the other's slave,  
And the gods doom him after.* - Caius Marcius Coriolanus

Shakespeare turns to 5th century BC Roman history for a deeply serious drama depicted in combat scenes between fierce enemies, conflicts between patricians and the plebeians, and contrasting perspectives within family. His treatment of war, statesmen, citizens and family life is surprisingly unusual in that the common denominator in all, the hero, is motivated by a powerful mother-son dynamic.

Caius Marcius, a hot-tempered young man of unbridled brute strength, a militant idealist incapable of acting beneath his idea of honor or integrity, who rigidly believes "*brave death outweighs bad life, And that his country's dearer than himself,*" who has shown no fear but only insensitivity to battle wounds, returns from the Volscian war as the valiant hero in the siege of Corioles, to the only two women of his affection, his mother and his wife. Whereas other men find glory in their unswerving valor, he finds the thrill of glory through his mother's joy, that she should hear him praised and see him crowned: "*To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned his brows bound with oak.*"

Volumnia, his mother, part of the feminine - though not the sentimental - strand in the play, stands out as a formidable character: a military mother whose patriotism and pride in the bravery of the family's great soldier reign supreme over the shedding of his blood, even if it would have cost his life, for "*then his good report should have been my son. I therein would have found issue. Hear me profess sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Martius', I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeited out of action.*" The honor of this hero reflects greatly on dreams of her own glory.

Newly surnamed 'Coriolanus,' superior as a warrior for that is his nature, he is contemptuous of any life other than on the field or of any occupation but that of battle, who neither fully understands himself nor anyone else for that matter, such that leadership of the populace and compromise are beyond his skill, has not the temperament for a consul position, despising and distrusting of the political role his mother entreats him:

*The smiles of knaves  
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up  
The glasses of my sight! A beggar's tongue  
Make motion through my lips, and my armed knees,  
Who bowed but in my stirrup, bend like his  
That hath received an alms! I will not do't,  
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,  
And by my body's action teach my mind  
A most inherent baseness.*

Against his own judgment, he acquiesces to her wishes but in so doing, reveals how much he hates these people who revolt against the laws, the 'plebs' from whom he must beg for votes; his arrogant lack of understanding for their plight in turn fuels their contempt of him, resulting in a trial and the call for his exile. In his most venomous rebuke in the play, Coriolanus spews:

*You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate  
As reek o'th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize  
As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
That do corrupt my air: I banish you.  
And here remain with your uncertainty.  
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts;  
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,  
Fan you into despair! Have the power still  
To banish your defenders, till at length  
Your ignorance—which finds not till it feels—  
Making but reservation of yourselves,  
Still your own foes, deliver you  
As most abated captives to some nation  
That won you without blows! Despising  
For you the city, thus I turn my back.  
There is a world elsewhere.*

Coriolanus's downfall is borne by vengeful wrath as he leaves Rome a turncoat to fight for the opposition alongside his Volscian foil, Aufidius. Alas, the once defender of Rome is eventually betrayed very much in Roman style (when one thinks of Julius Caesar); betrayed by many in Shakespeare's version, but most tragically and *unwittingly* by one in particular, whom he calls 'mother,' for it is in the midst of Aufidius's camp she beseeches her son to spare their city. His response shows a wilting resolve:

*Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,  
I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,  
Were you in my stead would you have heard  
A mother less, or granted less, Aufidius?*

Shakespeare takes imaginative license in bringing the female influence to the foreground laying blame in part at *her* feet! Softened by the pleas of the mother he could not deny, blinded so by uncontrolled fury he could not foresee the total effect of his action, Coriolanus is called 'traitor' by Aufidius, is ambushed and stood no chance at all. ***Thou hast done a deed whereat Valour will weep.*** A volatile yet sympathetic creature of boyish recklessness lacking perhaps the self-awareness and insight of an adult, falls victim in the end to his tempestuous nature.

Coriolanus actually is not a difficult play to read even with the hero's sharply vituperative dialogue. Shakespeare's theatrical plotting around a piece of Roman history was fairly straight forward, lacking the complexity or twisted scenarios in his more notable plays and therein, not too hard to interpret. Oddly, for that very reason it may be one pick in the canon to read for those initially apprehensive of the great bard.

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## Brian says

“There hath been many great men that have flattered the people who ne’er loved them.”

“Coriolanus” is a Shakespeare that I feel is underappreciated. Like in his “Julius Caesar”, the Bard has captured the momentum and the irony of political life in a manner that is celebratory and derisive at the same time.

I gave “Coriolanus” a 4 star rating compared to other Shakespeare, not to literature as a whole. The Bard is in

a class of his own.

In this edition the Introduction by Jonathan Crewe includes intriguing ideas about homoerotic hyper masculine warrior culture and also speaks of the play's significance in a Roman and contemporary (Shakespeare's contemporary-early 1600s England) context. However, it is a long intro and a little heady at times and not a particularly enjoyable read. But, it was a valuable read.

The plot of this text (in short) is that Coriolanus is a warrior hero of Rome and is in line for the Consulship (leader) of Rome, but tradition has it that he must go to the common folk and ask their permission. This is a task he is loath to do, and the Tribunes of the people use this against him in stirring up the rabble. And the story takes off from there. As I read this play I kept vacillating between being irritated and admiring of Coriolanus's blunt honesty and his ridiculous unwillingness to temper his words and thoughts for those he considers social inferiors. Shakespeare is asking us in this play what we prefer from our leaders. Do we want their flattering, their disdain (if they have the skills to lead), etc. It is a very relevant question, especially today. Look at the American election of 2016, or the critics of Canada's Prime Minister who find his policy lacking but his personality thriving. There are many examples all around the world today. Coriolanus is uncompromising. Is that a virtue or vice we are left to decide. Shakespeare gives this character no soliloquies, so we never get in his head. This choice blocks the reader from Coriolanus' private thoughts and we have to accept (or reject) him for what he is.

The text boasts some interesting characters besides the titular Coriolanus. The two Tribunes of the people are manipulative, but their motives could be pure, the Roman senator Menenius Agrippa is a role a skilled actor could leave a mark on, and Coriolanus's relationship with his archenemy Aufidius is homoerotic in its language. Then there is Volumnia, the mother of Coriolanus who when she is on stage dominates the play. The recent professional production I saw recognized this fact, and Volumnia was clearly an audience favorite. She is another ambiguous, larger than life character in the Shakespeare canon.

The Pelican editions of Shakespeare contain some simple yet informative essays, "Theatrical World" & "The Texts of Shakespeare" that preface every play in this Pelican series. They are worth a read.

As for the Pelican Shakespeare series, they are one of my two favorite editions since the scholarly research is usually top notch and the editions themselves look good as an aesthetic unit. It looks and feels like a play and this compliments the text's contents admirably. The Pelican series was recently reedited and has the latest scholarship on Shakespeare and his time period. Well priced and well worth it.

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## Kirstine says

*"From face to foot,  
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion  
Was timed with dying cries."*

I recently went to see the Donmar Warehouse production of this play, so of course I read it beforehand. The production was excellent and only heightened my appreciation of it.

Reading this I started out a little weary. It's one of the lesser known Shakespeare plays, and I'd never heard of it until I found out about the Donmar Warehouse show, so I had no idea even what it was really about. But as I read I kept getting more and more intrigued.

The plot is somewhat straightforward. Despite saving the city from an old enemy, Coriolanus manages to piss off Rome's political elite as well as the people and is exiled from the city. In his exile he seeks out his former enemy and they plot to bring down the city that so disgraced him.

I ended up loving the play, actually, even before I saw it. None of the characters are very likeable, most of them – especially the major parts – are downright detestable. They're proud, they're arrogant, they're greedy, they're liars. I love that we're not supposed to root for these characters, we're not supposed to pray that they all live and find happy endings. Instead Shakespeare forces the audience to constantly shift their loyalties. The only character actually worth our good opinion is Aufidius, Coriolanus sworn enemy.

However, I love this play because of its dynamics. It's running wild with tension, whether it be between Coriolanus and the two senators, Coriolanus and the people, Coriolanus and his own family and friends. Wherever Coriolanus goes tension and drama (and possibly bloodshed) follows. He's a military prodigy, he's brutal and fearless in battle, and is hailed as a hero by the aristocracy of Rome on his return from defending the city. He *knows* he's good, and it makes him arrogant. He's dismissive of civilians, thinking his success in battle makes him superior to those who have not taken up the sword.

*"I talk of you:  
Why did you wish me milder? would you have me  
False to my nature? Rather say I play  
The man I am."*

He's a douchebag. An honest douchebag, but still. The only time we see a touch of a gentler, better man is when he's faced with his mother, who's the only one capable of reaching beyond his proud exterior. When faced with her he isn't the arrogant soldier, but the son and the husband.

Two important roles are the two tribunes – the only ones selected by the people – meant to voice the opinion of the people. Aufidius might be presented as the classic antagonist, but in reality it's these two. You'd think democratically chosen politicians would actually work for the people, instead of plotting and scheming to protect their own power, but it's never so.

However, the inherent badness of the characters means they can talk about some pretty serious shit and there being no obvious character to agree with, you find yourself considering everyone's opinion. They're all right and they're all wrong at various times. They're all too much of one thing, and there's no mediator that can compete with the ego of youth or the allure of power.

Tom Hiddleston was brilliant as Coriolanus, coming off as completely oblivious to his own elitism and arrogance, and utterly uncaring in the face of cowardice, showing no understanding for any viewpoint that didn't align with his own. To his credit, he does none of it for adoration, he does it for honor, because he truly believes going into battle is the only worthy duty of a man, and Hiddleston conveys this single-mindedness perfectly, this terrible focus on the task at hand and nothing else. His co-stars were equally stunning in their roles and the sparse stage set-up allowed for greater focus on the lines and, most importantly, the character dynamics.

On a lighter note, it's also a surprisingly funny play – especially the production I saw. Filled with snark and sarcasm, delivered with perfect timing.

Another, perhaps one of the most, interesting aspects of the play, is the relationship between Coriolanus and Aufidius. Their animosity toward and grudging respect for one another is a fluid line, that at times seems to turn into something else,

*"Let me twine  
Mine arms about that body, where against*

*My grained ash an hundred times hath broke  
And scarr'd the moon with splinters: here I clip  
The anvil of my sword, and do contest  
As hotly and as nobly with thy love  
As ever in ambitious strength I did  
Contend against thy valour. Know thou first,  
I loved the maid I married; never man  
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,  
Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart  
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw  
Bestride my threshold."*

Aufidius admits his heart beats faster seeing Coriolanus at his door than when he saw his wife on his wedding night. It's a very interesting dynamic. Coriolanus and Aufidius are singularly obsessed with each other, their regard for one another perhaps even eclipsing the love they have for their own families, showing exactly where their priorities lie, and how their minds unfailingly falls to combat. Only those who best them there are worthy of consideration. It's this constant circling back to the pursuit of honor and power that disrupts any attempt at a peaceful resolution.

There is real character development for Coriolanus, but, as with all tragedies, it comes in the end, when it's too late.

The Donmar Warehouse production is up for download, so if you have any interest in it I suggest you find it. It's well worth the watch.

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### **Jeannette Nikolova says**

I don't have much to say about Shakespeare that hasn't already been said, and I don't feel worthy of even trying, but essentially, I think Coriolanus has a lot to offer in terms of psychology, especially psychology of the masses. It is hard trying to analyze something that has already been written about in many textbooks, but for me, at least, Coriolanus's leitmotif is the **herd behavior**. Of course, there are many other sub ideas, but the most interesting thing to read about was the way society accepts and then shuns Coriolanus. The other thing which interested me was his mother and her mania that her son physically bears the mark of war, in order to prove that he is a proper warrior.

Also, I would like to give a strong recommendation to you: **Donmar's Coriolanus**, starring Tom Hiddleston and Mark Gatiss. Great representation of the story, great performances by the entire cast. **Coriolanus** was probably the only Shakespeare that I hadn't heard of, but the Donmar's play brought it to my attention, for which I am very grateful. I'm pretty sure it can be found online, since I've talked to many people who saw it on the net. If you can get your hands on it, watch it! That's the role that sold Hiddleston to me as an actor, he is absolutely fantastic and he presents to the public an entire palette of colors and emotions.

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### Bryn Hammond says

I'm told Coriolanus, the person, is unlikeable, but I happen to like him. I don't even think he's a right-wing bastard, just shy, awkward and misunderstood. It's his severe self-effacement that makes him hate publicity. Who wants to stand in the market and exhibit your wounds in a stupid political stunt? And his thickheadedness, the fact he has no idea when to use that soldierly bluntness and when to keep his trap shut, is a naivety I like against the politics of Rome. He's a soldier, yes, but at least he isn't a politician.

He always was more at home with his enemy. It's a scream how Coriolanus and Aufidius are so wrapped up in each other: they pant for the next instalment of the insult/flattery exchange, 'So what did Aufidius say about me?' 'And Coriolanus mentioned me?' They belong together.

If only he'd stuck to his guns and not called off the march on Rome. The end works as tragedy for me, no question: Coriolanus is destroyed by that which he serves. With a mother like his he never stood a chance. They made him the perfect soldier, and he is, but then they reject him for what he is. There's certainly satire of militarism (the warmonger women of Rome, the infamous butterfly speech), and I think the play says a lot about soldiers and the military, and about civilians' use and abuse of soldiers. I notice that, more than the politics. I'd call it a soldier's tragedy.

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### Eric says

Caius Marcius Coriolanus on the public he would rule:

*He that will give good words to thee will flatter  
Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs,  
That like nor peace nor war? the one affrights you,  
The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,  
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;  
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,  
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,  
Or hailstone in the sun.*

...

*The fires i' th' lowest hell fold in the people!*

His opponents the demagogic tribunes, though usually scheming privately, can also work up a good harangue:

*Did you perceive  
He did solicit you in free contempt  
When he did need your loves, and do you think  
That his contempt shall not be bruising to you,  
When he hath power to crush? Why, had your bodies  
No heart among you?*

I sought out *Coriolanus* because I was in the mood for choler and tirade, for troubles, faction, strife and doom. But as the pages passed I began to regret the scarcity of Shakespeare's comic prose—his low jokes, his bawdy bonhomie and good-humored stink; “those spicy sentences,” Emerson called them. *Coriolanus* is harsh and dry, the principals loud and pissed-off (in the 1930s, the play sparked brawls at the Comédie-Française; and for years it was banned in West Germany). The extreme, brazen and thus kindred styles of Coriolanus (ill-educated *virtus*<sup>†</sup>) and of his enemies (specious, leveling *modestia*) dominate both the starveling wit (soon mob fury) of individual plebes

Care for us! True, indeed! They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their store-houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily, to chain up and restrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

and the prose repartee (soon partisan cursing) of Menenius, a louche raconteur still essentially guided by republican virtue (the best kind of social critic, really):

I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't...one that converses more with the buttock of the night than with the forehead of the morning: what I think I utter, and spend my malice in my breath. Meeting two such wealsmen as you are--I cannot call you Lycurguses--if the drink you give me touch my palate adversely, I make a crooked face at it...and though I must be content to bear with those that say you are reverend grave men, yet they lie deadly that tell you you have good faces.

This portioning of voices, I imagine, reflects an observation: the sufferers and the witty spectators are alike whelmed, dwarfed or duped by the passionate intensity of contending powers. Shakespeare's last tragedy is another of his insuperable meditations on the humanities of statecraft. The other day in a bookstore I was thumbing through a copy of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, and found his reflections on the historical Coriolanus thin stuff next to Old Will.

†

*Away, my disposition, and possess me  
Some harlot's spirit! my throat of war be turn'd,  
Which quired with my drum, into a pipe  
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice  
That babies lulls asleep! the smiles of knaves  
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up  
The glasses of my sight! a beggar's tongue  
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees,  
Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his  
That hath received an alms! I will not do't,*

*Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth  
And by my body's action teach my mind  
A most inherent baseness.*

And his mom, Volumnia, wins the Dam of Sparta award for this line: *Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me...*

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