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“Do we have a say in who we become?": Post-
structuralist Identity Crisis in William Shakespeare's
Coriolanus

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1. Introduction

Democracy has struggled to justify itself to millions of Europeans in recent years, and it has been a prevailing topic in national and international news media. People feel disenfranchised, trapped in systems they have no control over; undone by global interests. Although some will claim this is a problem of our modern times, the struggle of the individual against systems of authority is not a recent invention. During times of ancient democracy, it was written about, and in later times of monarchy it was theorised about in what might be William Shakespeare's most political play from the early 17th century: *Coriolanus*. As one of the English bard's Roman plays, it is the only one taking on the issue of democracy, and its protagonist is continuously crushed between the forces of aristocracy and the people. The play and its themes remain relevant as yet another testament to the enduring nature of Shakespeare's works.

In this thesis I am going to examine the political destruction of subjectivity in *Coriolanus* through the lens of post-structuralism. Specifically, the thesis will aim to identify characters and institutions and how they struggle against each other in terms of subjectivity and political beliefs. Michel Foucault's theory of the subject as well as his notions of discourse and authority are major contributors to this thesis, and from the field of post-structuralism I will also make use of Jacques Lacan to establish an idea of how the subject is formed and what forces counteract its formation. These theories will then be applied through close reading of key scenes and passages in the play, focusing on the authority of the Roman state on the one hand and the characters subjected to it on the other. While the field of New Historicism was considered for this thesis, its construction of the individual stands in too stark opposition to the destabilised subjectivity I want to examine.

I will begin this examination with a literary review of *Coriolanus* focused primarily on politics and subjectivity. Different political interpretations and their impact on the field will be discussed, but this thesis will not take a political stance since it is primarily concerned with the individual impacted by political strife. A thorough presentation of my post-structuralist approach will follow, laying out my approach to my most prominent secondary sources: Foucault and Lacan. It is imperative for the purposes of this thesis that the discourse of the individual laid out by Foucault is put into the perspective of being in conflict with the state apparatus. His works will be the lens through which I examine these interactions.

Lacan's theories about the mirror stage and the faulty perceptions of individuality will be used to show the cracks that are exploited by the exercised state power.

The close reading, with this theoretical background, will first focus on the characters of the play. I will examine those who play prominent roles on both sides of the political divide making itself known in the Roman republic, before ending the section with an investigation of Coriolanus' self-destructive journey. Another aspect of the close reading will be the state apparatus as well, and how it appears in the play through norms, language and through the actions of subjected characters. Works by theorists like Louis Althusser and Niccolò Machiavelli will be consulted in order to better understand the importance of leadership and the state, including its impact on the individual. Finding out what importance Rome has as a symbol of the state will prove to be important as it, too, is a main character in this tragedy.

2. Literature Review

Many Shakespeare scholars precede their own analyses of *Coriolanus* by noting that it is Shakespeare's "most political play" (Doh 595). It is one of Shakespeare's less discussed plays even after decades of Shakespeare scholarship. In this section I will be reviewing previous scholarship on *Coriolanus* with a focus on one frequently discussed aspect of the play, namely that of how it invites different interpretations from both sides of the political spectrum. This will turn out to be important in terms of how individuals are impacted by ideology. It has been praised by Nazi Germany (Heinrich), Marxist dramatists (Scofield) and members of the 'Occupy' movement (Wilkinson). Crucially, there is also an individual element to the play (Langis, McCutcheon, Roberts, Shanker) just as there is to politics, and this element will also be covered briefly to bring the two sides together. The first act of the play is concerned with public discontent about grain shortages (1.1.6-7), which is forcefully broken up by Martius—later Coriolanus—on behalf of the elite.

The plight of those who rise up is handled by scholars in two ways in order to prove the virtue—or lack thereof—of their cause. On the one hand, scholars take the words of Martius as fact, agreeing that those who disrupt public order are "dissentious rogues" (1.1.164). In one case, the vilification of the masses is attributed to a reflection of matters closer to Shakespeare's own home: "Shakespeare's choice to re-cast Plutarch's much-abused people of Rome as killers recalls historical and dramatic narratives of rebellion in England" (Steible). They are also cast as gullible fools, following every word spoken by Sicinius and

Brutus: “as a crowd, the people in this play are quite under the thumbs of these creatures” (Goddard 235). On the other hand, the two tribunes and their followers are made into heroes by some scholars, and in Bertolt Brecht's rewriting of the play it is meaningful how “Brecht adds to their dignity and integrity” (Scofield 327). Likewise, Kate Wilkinson argues that the tribulations of the plebeians are reflected in our own times via movements like 'Occupy Wall Street' where the people rise up—justly—against injustice (9). However, she seems to overlook the manipulative language of the tribunes. Yet the most powerful, most recent contribution is by Stephen Greenblatt, as he comments on the necessity of rising up against would be tyrants. To him, that makes the tribunes into “the city's real saviors” (188). These academic arguments shine a light on biases and political beliefs that remain prevalent to this day, making them highly relevant to both reflections on politics and Shakespeare scholarship in general.

Upon the political scales of Rome one side rises while the other descends; if the plebeians are just, the patricians must be unjust, and vice versa. The same can be said of academic texts written about it. When viewing the patricians, just as with the plebeians, there are two sides to take. On the one hand, *Coriolanus* was one of the plays frequently staged in Nazi Germany (Heinrich), where hero worship and strong leadership were appreciated. Indeed, the Nazis were eager to claim this play as their own (Heinrich). However, less extreme examples of taking the side of the elites exist. Menenius's speech about the belly (1.1.94-103) is often defended as “the political heart of the play” (Goddard 225). On the other hand, most scholars can be found disagreeing with the hypocrisy of the patricians, including Goddard, who turns on Menenius to call the man a “well-meaning weakling” (226). Greenblatt writes that, after the banishment of Coriolanus—a victory for the plebeians—the city is at peace and the patricians must be ashamed, their suggested measures proven to be unnecessary (177). He writes that “it is a perverse but familiar pattern: the party of privilege argues that it needs authoritarian power so that it can preserve order in the state” (178). Kaouk writes that “the Shakespearean Menenius's vision of the Roman state proceeding on a predetermined, inexorable 'course' participates in a recurrent ideology that claims the status quo as necessity” (425-426). The next step in his argument brings it all back to Nazi Germany (426). Ultimately, most scholars tend to agree with the plebeians despite the methods of the two tribunes. But what about the would-be tyrant?

It is with tyrannical intention that the exiled Coriolanus moves to “burn and cleanse Rome” (Langis 17). However, scholars agree that it was not originally in his intention to do so. Instead, he is moved by the two ideological forces of the play to where he finally ends up.

It is convincingly argued by McCutcheon that Coriolanus is a “vulnerable” man (358). Likewise, is he alone (Roberts 38). Langis does see Coriolanus as a virtuous man despite his faults (6), and the literature reviewed tends to look to outside forces when analysing what, in the end, turns Coriolanus into an enemy of Rome. Stephen Greenblatt looks to the “perversity” of his upbringing (163) and the conflict between patricians and plebeians where Coriolanus finds both sides without merit (170). Having used both sides to affirm his identity (Roberts 40), he breaks down. The tribunes provoke Coriolanus to exhibit the traits of a Tyrant (Langis 12) and the patricians urge him to lie (Greenblatt 175) which he simply cannot do. Some scholars (Hazlitt, Anderson) take the view that Coriolanus is simply doomed from the beginning, seemingly ignoring the evidence found by other scholars in regard to the character's complexity. Shanker provides the following, quite useful, insight:

For Coriolanus is, in addition, a play about the politics of power. The two do not mesh. Coriolanus' problem with pride and/or naivete is not only not convincingly connected to the politics of class conflict and incipient civil war - it conflicts with it! The question of Coriolanus' honor or nobility leads directly into the heart of this confusion. (178)

He argues that a reader can view the complete “failure of ideology to hold a nation together” (Shanker 194) in *Coriolanus*—and chiefly through the perspective of its conflicted protagonist. This insight is both interesting and disturbing, leaving the issue of political leadership unresolved. For who saves Rome in the end but Coriolanus—paying for it with his own life (5.6.131).

Thus, the only conclusion I can draw is that, while the play *Coriolanus* swings both to the left and to the right in terms of all too familiar politics, ideology becomes futile in the individual. Convincing arguments exist in favour of the people and against the fascist tendencies displayed by Coriolanus and his peers, but both sides can claim to have saved Rome by the end of the play. With so many examples of attempted political leadership, it appears difficult to grasp the specifics in terms of statecraft considering the special circumstances of war, populism and class division. It is my intention to investigate this unresolved issue further in order to extract something more from Coriolanus' confused and disrupted nature. This literature review made me choose Michel Foucault's theories regarding power relations and identity as a lens through which to learn what governs us when it comes to politics and our selves. In many ways this play reflects the minds, in one way or another, of

those living in republics and democracies today. As proven by the fact that Stephen Greenblatt published a book about Shakespeare's tyrants only last year, *Coriolanus* and plays like it can still play a part on the stage of contemporary discourse.

3. Theory

Entering the post-structuralist arena, there are some concepts that must be laid out in order to proceed without confusion. Therefore, this chapter will be dedicated to the theoretical framework of this thesis. I will briefly explain the role of Michel Foucault in elaborating the function of the subject in relation to the state and the world, and how his thoughts on subjectivity align with those of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan. The latter also plays a major part in my theoretical framework, especially in terms of subject formation and development through language—a topic both he and Foucault view as imperative. Finally, since *Coriolanus* is a play all about the body, politics and republicanism I will make use of analyses of Livy and leadership by Niccolò Machiavelli, into whose own framework one can fit both Foucault and the idea of victory in the play.

3.1. Michel Foucault – Self vs. State

One of the most intriguing aspects of Shakespeare scholarship is the focus on issues that affect us today—and themes that would not be elaborated on until centuries after the bard's death. In this section I will be elaborating on the major contributor to my theoretical framework: Michel Foucault. His theories on human subjectivity and how it is formed, reformed and ultimately undone by political forces bridge the gap between *Coriolanus* and present day. These theories will be laid out here and applied to the play in subsequent chapters. I am primarily using *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, *Discipline and Punish* and the article “The Subject and Power” in order to perform my analysis.

In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault elaborates on some of his theories in numerous interviews. It is during these interviews that he explains in detail his thinking on the individual and the state; with a focus on how the individual is subjected to the state apparatus. An important note to start with, however, is that the state is not the ultimate source of power:

“I don’t want to say that the State isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State” (Foucault, *P/K* 122). Regardless, in terms of interactions between the state and the individual, Foucault claims the state has the upper hand by means of institutionalised discipline. Discussing a soldier during the time of the Enlightenment, he states:

By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of a soldier’... (Foucault, *Discipline* 146)

Due to the research question of this thesis, the example of the soldier is especially relevant, but this is not the only application. Foucault is ambitiously expanding this objectification to society as a whole: “In discipline, the elements are interchangeable, since each is defined by the place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from the others” (*Discipline* 157). He believes that people wish for such objectification owing to the circumstance that: “The procedures of every form of power are suspected of being fascist, just as the masses are in their desires. There lies beneath the affirmation of the desire of the masses for fascism a historical problem which we have yet to secure the means of resolving” (Foucault, *P/K* 139). Thus, we walk willingly into the prison of our own objectification. Later on in his career, he returns to the topic of state power: “power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions” (Foucault, “Subject” 793). It is a journey for Foucault, and it is necessary to document it briefly since it is this empowered state that takes centre stage in my reading of *Coriolanus*.

There is the argument, highlighted by Amy Allen, that the journey Foucault makes from the death of the subject to a notion of autonomy, makes the use of his theory flawed (47). However, I share her view that the dying subject can struggle for autonomy in the end (Allen 55); in fact, my reading relies on that struggle. Combining the strong state with a struggle for autonomy that ultimately falls short makes for a good tragedy. Foucault stresses that “the fact that the state’s power (and that’s one of the reasons for its strength) is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power” (782) in his article “The Subject and Power”. In other words, human beings are made by their interactions with the state apparatus; for no matter whether they fight against it or submit to it, the state becomes central to who they are—exemplified by institutions such as the modern carceral system (Foucault, *Discipline*

313). It is possible to question this order, as Allen writes: “For Foucault, autonomy consists not in freely binding oneself to a necessity in the form of the moral law but in freely calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary” (50). In fact, Foucault describes the notion of a ‘delinquent’ in *Discipline and Punish*:

The delinquent is also to be distinguished from the offender in that he is not only the author of his acts (the author responsible in terms of certain criteria of free, conscious will), but is linked to his offence by a whole bundle of complex threads (instincts, drives, tendencies, character). (273)

This notion will be thoroughly examined in later chapters, since the wish to be ‘author’ of one’s own life is a red thread throughout Shakespeare’s play. This clash is elaborated on at length in Foucault’s article, where he makes clear that the struggle itself is incorporated into the web of power relations that make up a society: “they manifest in a massive and universalizing form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction” (795). This goes back to *Power and Knowledge*, where Foucault points out the overall lack of control humans have over their systems despite their strategy: “you get a coherent, rational strategy, but one for which it is no longer possible to identify a person who conceived it” (203).

With the state apparatus being a runaway train in Foucauldian theory, it might be useful to briefly explain how this thesis will treat it. Besides Foucault’s theories, I am drawing on the theories of his contemporary—Louis Althusser. He coined the concept of “Ideological State Apparatuses” (Mansfield 65), describing in Marxist terms how institutions affect the individual through interpellation: “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (Althusser 1356). Interpellation is the process through which a person becomes a subject in the eyes of the state, which happens when, for example, a police officer calls out to us to stop (Mansfield 63). The norms of our society take us over. We become a subject that “does not develop according to its own wants, talents and desires, but exists for the system that needs it” (Mansfield 65). Althusser saw this system as capitalism, although it does not have to be: “These institutions endlessly reinforce capitalist values—or, at least, the right degree of docility and fatalism in us, making us useful to the dominant order” (Mansfield 65). While the similarities with Foucault’s theories are clear, Nick Mansfield does draw a line at the “need to derive a final and complete understanding of the nature of the subject” (6)—which Foucault avoids. Even so, Mansfield’s effort to compare and contrast these theories with one

another and also with the thoughts of Lacan is fruitful, fitting into the frame of this thesis perfectly.

3.2. Lacan – The Divided Subject

Where Althusser and Foucault intersect in the realm of politics, Jacques Lacan stands out all the more not only as a psychoanalyst examining the subject, but also as someone who notes how language and self-perception turn us into who we are. Due to the importance of interiority, language and self-perception to *Coriolanus* this section elucidates Lacan's theories to facilitate ease of analysis in later chapters. The divided subject, its construction and interaction with itself and the outside world will be briefly discussed, and the similarities to Foucault elaborated on.

It is the notion of a divided subject that made Lacan's theories invaluable for this thesis. How we are not only a subject divided, but a subject "divided against itself" (Belsey 57). This is not only done to us by language, but even before that through identifying ourselves at a point in our childhood that Lacan calls the 'mirror stage': "we only have to understand *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan, "Mirror" 1164). We identify ourselves even though our self can hardly be said to reside in the exterior we view in the mirror. Lionel Bailly explains it as follows:

At the Mirror Stage, one may think of the Subject as the part that 'invents' the stories about its image-self or ego, affixing to it signifiers as it acquires language: girl, blonde, pretty, likes chocolate, hates pink, good at drawing, etc.; but it also represses as many signifiers as it selects, and in doing so, tries to hide something of itself. Indeed, the Subject can only come into being when it is not thinking, because the very act of any thinking that involves its ego creates a smokescreen behind which it disappears. (Bailly 29)

Through this method, the subject establishes a connection "between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*" (Lacan, "Mirror" 1166), without that connection necessarily being accurate. This creates the "fragmented body" (Lacan, "Mirror" 1167) in the psychoanalyst's writings. He claims that this failure to assemble oneself can return from the repressed through dreams in which "disjointed limbs" present themselves (Lacan, "Mirror" 1167). The subject will face a situation where it is...

... in a state of contradiction. It sees itself as unified and whole, as autonomous and complete, but this very imaginary identity subverts that wholeness. Your selfhood—your subjective centre of gravity—is grounded outside of you, in the

very field of images from which you first gained a sense of separation (Mansfield 55).

Therefore, the subject can look at itself and produce a lie about itself with Lacan's help. It can wish to be whole but never truly achieve it. As previously mentioned, this process is not only problematised by the 'mirror stage', but also by language itself—which might get the self into even more trouble.

In "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious", Lacan writes that "language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it" (1169). With language 'possessing' us during our lifetime, we "must locate ourselves in the field of language in order to take up a place in the human world" (Mansfield 51). Again, the society in which we live comes back to haunt its subjects. It is a society where we are named and categorised through language, which is, according to Mansfield, "an unstable and obscure system, offering us identities and simultaneously drawing them away from us. It seems to offer us imaginary individual completion, while entangling us in a shared symbolic order" (59). If we are to find ourselves it must be in the unconscious, states Lacan in a manner not entirely without its own eccentricity: "What one ought to say is: I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think" (Lacan, "Agency" 1180). It is the issue of language that also brings Foucault and Lacan together, since their approaches both rely on the fact that we, as subjects, "are 'discursively constituted', which is a succinct way to say that human identity is structured by language in the sense of discourse" (Olivier 294). As a result of this, the notion that "both Lacan and Foucault work with the assumption that there is a limited amount of freedom to be had for the split subject" (Sjöholm 153) is correct, and situates the thesis where it needs to be in terms of later critical readings.

3.3. Machiavelli – Political Theory

Navigating interiority in relation to the state, especially in a play like *Coriolanus*, would be difficult without the help of some sort of political theory. To suit the play, I have chosen a Machiavellian view on politics, since it often regulates how one should behave in order to be an effective ruler. In this section I will briefly introduce some key beliefs of Niccolò Machiavelli before moving on to Livy's notion of the body politic. For in the play characters do not only position themselves ideologically, but physically as well.

Machiavelli is a famous political theorist of the Renaissance, writing at length on how

to manage the state in *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. He has inspired theorists both in Shakespeare's time and our own—most notably Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, who both write about the “functioning and reproduction” (Bargu 425) of the state in a manner directly influenced by Machiavelli. Althusser has been elaborated on already, but Gramsci's idea of the theatrical in relation to the state deserves to be mentioned in a thesis of this nature. Peter D. Thomas writes this in his paper on the Italian theorist:

It is precisely this element of Gramsci's Machiavellian technique of the dramatic enactment of the ‘qualities, characteristics, duties and needs’ of the people itself that makes the *Prison Notebook* also a sort of ‘political manifesto’, a concrete fantasy whose ‘impassioned, urgent cry’ continues to rouse us today. (453)

For Machiavelli, the ruler's behaviour is closely connected to the well-being of the state. He writes that “men judge more by appearances than by deeds” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 97), and that “it is needful for a Prince to be prudent and know how to escape the infamy of those vices that would upset the state and those which he can avoid” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 88). The theatrical is central to Machiavelli's view on how the individual ruler should act, but the performance is always at risk of interfering with one's autonomy since the rules and power relations tend to be restrictive. Even in a republic that ought to challenge the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, this conflict gives rise to new challenges.

Republicanism is favoured by Machiavelli, his view being that “it is the well-being, not of individuals, but of the community which makes a State great; and, without question, this universal well-being is nowhere secured save in a republic” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 210). That is not to say that there are no issues in a republic, but as stated above these issues can help elevate this form of government. The battle between the rulers and the people is very present in *Coriolanus*, and it is notable that Machiavelli brings this up as a benefit—since it provides a chance for the people to express their dissatisfaction: “how useful and necessary it is for republics to provide by their laws a channel by which the displeasure of the multitude against a single citizen may find a vent” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 48). This “radical proposition that Roman dissensions and popular disorder proved beneficial to the Republic” (Brudney 515) tells us not only about Machiavelli's views, but also according to which rules the norms of this Roman play operate. There is a greater good, and that greater good is Rome. There are forces that protect it in *Coriolanus*, and whose strategies are very similar to Machiavelli's. When faced with an existential threat, for example, Machiavelli claims that glory is not the primary issue:

...the very existence of Rome depended on the preservation of her army, that army must be saved at any sacrifice, for whether the means be honourable or ignominious, all is well done that is done for the defence of our country. And he said that were her army preserved, Rome, in course of time, might wipe out the disgrace; but if her army were destroyed, however gloriously it might perish, Rome and her freedom would perish with it.” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 471)

This historically controversial position might be what Machiavelli is most known for—and he holds it because the world, he claims, is not perfect: “Because men are imperfect and don’t keep faith with you, neither must you keep it with them” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 96). There is no fair play in an unfair world.

Finally, there is one crucial aspect of leadership that must be considered: namely that of the body politic. It is central to *Coriolanus* and many of Shakespeare’s other works (Dobsiki and Gish 184). Like Machiavelli, Andrew Feldherr has read Livy—and extracted the following insight:

... the relationship between body and state serves as more than an intellectualized schema of similarities employed for solely didactic purposes. The impact of the state on the body can be thought of less as a series of causes and effects projected inward than as a kind of quasi-magical sympathy by which the body receives influences from the whole. Livy’s description of the interaction between the individual soldier and the crowd highlights a mutual exchange of energy affecting both the spectators and the object of their gaze (Feldherr 122)

Evading the issue of New Historicist “*personation*” (Montrose 93), I will focus on the aspect that must be familiar to one reading the earlier sections of this chapter. The “effects projected inward” and “the body receiv[ing] influences from the whole” (Feldherr 122) are notions that Foucault with his emphasis on the circular flow of power would not necessarily frown at, and thus I take the view that the many references to the body in *Coriolanus* stand for the imperilled subject, lost in a world that is itself lost to a system where no-one is really in charge (Foucault, *P/K* 203). As Bernard J. Dobsiki and Dustin A. Gish point out: “the Roman Republic is a body politic without a king; that is, it lacks a single authoritative ‘head’ to govern it. Even Menenius’ fable leaves Rome with no head” (184).

These are the three cornerstones of my theoretical framework for this thesis. For the close readings to follow I will make use of the delineated political and psychoanalytical theories, bringing them together through a Foucauldian, post-structuralist point of view. In the end, I hope to show how the subject is formed, reformed and destroyed through the personal and political struggles presented to audiences in William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*.

4. Close Reading

The argument that I want to make requires extensive close reading of the primary source text—particularly of the characters of the play, all of whom display aspects of the crisis of subjectivity I am interrogating in this thesis. Some have been combined into groups such as social class—like the tribunes and the patricians—for analysis, while others are looked at on their own. The goal is to expose what roles these groups and characters play on the stage conjured by the Roman state, and how they respond to the seemingly aimless nature of a state apparatus that seems only preoccupied with maintaining the status quo. There will be clear defenders, even in the camp that should wish for change, and only one character that stands out through his fatal rebellion.

4.1. Close Reading: Tribunes

The tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, are possessed by the political and the language connected to it—which they use to great effect in the play. Even though the results of language do not always manifest as desired in the real world of *Coriolanus*. Through a close reading of the two tribunes I present the argument that those who oppose tyranny can be just as wrapped up in the rhetoric of power as the tyrants themselves—or more so. The tribunes seem to be all aboard the runaway train without an operator as described by Foucault, championing their own cause without a single thought of getting off before it crashes. They survive the play by chance and not as a result of their own cunning.

The tribunes are divisive figures: hailed as the saviours of democracy by some (Greenblatt 169) and “as pretty a pair of demagogues and rascals as will be encountered in all political literature” (Goddard 234) on the other hand. I will argue that they are products of the society they have been born into; with the desires of any Roman and in possession of some—but, crucially, not all—skills needed to achieve them. They are possessed by the society and the political language of that society, knowing no true master (Foucault, *P/K* 203) and expressing themselves the only way they know how. In Lacanian terms: “we think like we speak, we speak as we think” (Bailly 31). This way, the tribunes reveal themselves through their schemes and not through their ultimate lack of success. Harold Goddard writes that “these two are scarcely more distinguished than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern” (235), but through a post-structural lens they are as defined by what they lack as by what they possess.

Through the interpellation discussed in the theory chapter (Althusser 1356), the tribunes are made to believe their own twisted view of the world. They do not want to be ‘free’ but to manoeuvre entirely within that enclosure. They are either unaware of their own hypocrisies or they have simply chosen to ignore such inconsistencies in order to achieve their own ends:

SICINIUS. You see how he intends to use the people.

BRUTUS. May they perceive's intent! He will require them,
As if he did condemn what he requested
Should be in them to give. (2.2.156-158)

These words are spoken in private once the other characters have left, seemingly making them blind to the political machine that has them in its grasp. In the very next scene, they engage in the very thing they condemned.

BRUTUS. Lay

A fault on us, your tribunes; that we laboured,
No impediment between, but that you must
Cast your election on him.

SICINIUS. Say, you chose him

More after our commandment than as guided
By your own true affections, and that your minds,
Pre-occupied with what you rather must do
Than what you should, made you against the grain
To voice him consul. Lay the fault on us. (2.3.226-233)

To Coriolanus this behaviour makes the tribunes into villains, but their deception is—at first—fruitful, and it is carried out in the name of the state. This makes them villains, but not “delinquents” (Foucault, *Discipline* 273) who would rather rise against the power of the state. Criticisms of these characters might have their basis in this representation of one side of this coin, but the fact that they are “base-hearted spin-masters” (George 57) in a play like *Coriolanus* makes them stand out considerably. Even more so when it turns out they are, in fact, not the perfect tool of the state. For while they “come to power through villainy” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 59), they make the mistakes of believing their own fairy-tales and causing political chaos with their reckless manoeuvring.

Invoking Niccolò Machiavelli above is not a coincidence, of course. The powers in opposition to Coriolanus make repeated use of the Florentine secretary’s strategies, but in the case of the tribunes they also run into one thing that he warns against—namely calumny:

Some, indeed, have made use of calumny as a means for raising themselves to power, and have found their advantage in traducing eminent citizens who withstood their designs; for by taking the part of the people, and confirming

them in their ill-opinion of these great men, they made them their friends.
(Machiavelli, *Discourses* 54)

They believe this method to be politically expedient but fail to divine its long-term consequences. It is not a mistake made as a result of ignorance, since they are aware of precisely what they are doing, but it might be a matter of arrogance:

BRUTUS. Let them go on.
This mutiny were better put in hazard,
Than stay, past doubt, for greater.
If, as his nature is, he fall in rage
With their refusal, both observe and answer
The vantage of his anger.

SICINIUS. To th'Capitol, come.
We will be there before the stream o'th'people;
And this shall seem, as partly 'tis, their own,
Which we have goaded onward. (2.3.256-262)

By setting into motion events that will lead to the downfall of Coriolanus, the tribunes also ignite the brewing class conflict in Rome which will inevitably lead “to bloodshed, to civil war” (Shanker 184). When the citizens are on the fence, the tribunes set out to use them (2.1.155-160), but they will not keep their favour for very long. They set “off the chain of events that opens all Romans to extrajudicial killing [...]. Banishing Coriolanus, using law to put him outside law, allows him to join with Aufidius and unleash a violence on Rome” (Kuzner 186). Coriolanus, more a soldier than a leader, might not make for the best consul, but “it was these two, Brutus and Sicinius, who believed, or rather gave it out that they believed, that Coriolanus wanted to be dictator” (Goddard 235).

Strangely but fittingly, the Rome the tribunes fight for is not that dissimilar from the Rome of the patricians. But while Menenius is capable of maintaining the status quo, the tribunes have different means at their disposal. They fear a dictatorship, and since the tribunate is new in the Rome of *Coriolanus* (1.1.214-216) they overplay their hand. Perhaps the status quo is better served in the end as a result of their mistakes since, as is pointed out by Machiavelli: “he who looks well to the results of these tumults will find that they did not lead to banishments, nor to violence hurtful to the common good, but to laws and ordinances beneficial to the public liberty” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 37). While the state of the republic is unknown at the end of the play and “one would not know, from reading *Coriolanus*, that the republic ever became stable” (Kuzner 186)—this point made by Machiavelli allows one to see the *state* ultimately served as a result of the conflict.

While the tribunes mostly express a worry about their own station in the event of Coriolanus' ascension (2.1.216-217), Brutus does see a legitimate breach of the status quo as the war hero returns to Rome: "The danger the tribunes feel after the victory is not just political but also personal. They feel their roles jeopardized by the ascendancy of Coriolanus" (McCutcheon 363). As James Kuzner points out: "Brutus sees this inhuman, sodomitical world unfolding in front of him. He refers to people astride roof ledges as 'ridges horsed' (1. 206); what he claims to witness, to his horror, are people using Rome's buildings as they would animals" (Kuzner 195). The sexual approach alludes to a chaos that is more fittingly described as "the partitions which separate Romans from one another start to crumble" (Kuzner 194). Whether Brutus is simply believing his own fairy-tale at this point or not does not matter, since the internalised state speaks through him in much the same way as it does through the patricians. The society described by Menenius is, ultimately, worthy of reproducing on account of the necessary clash of classes described by Machiavelli (*Discourses* 36):

The tribunes assert that it is constituted solely by the plebeians: 'What is the city but the people?' they query rhetorically (1. 199). The patricians, on the other hand, distinguish 'renowned Rome' (1. 292)—an ideal founded on tales of individual heroic exploits—from the plebeian 'rats' who inhabit the urban fabric (1.1.151). This disjunction in viewpoints, and opposing understandings of the new vocabulary of participation, are captured in Menenius's plea that the limbs ('members' [1. 85]) of Rome 'mutually participate' (1. 92). Menenius is requesting that they adhere to their station. (Shrank 415)

Reproducing this clash between patricians and plebeians ultimately reproduces the republic—or rather, the republic's values. It will take a little more than what both they and Menenius have to offer in order to save the republic from physical destruction. This becomes a unique threat to the new tribunate—one that will only be effectively handled in the future.

Through their own hypocrisy, the tribunes endanger their own state. How can they be subjected to that apparatus and reproduce it if they do it so poorly? To begin with, they represent a true problem in Rome:

Although the plebeians begin the play as adjunct citizens with a biological need to speak 'in hunger for bread' (1.1.23), their sublimation of this bodily need into political demand transforms their hungry mouths into organs for speaking in public, resulting in the establishment of the tribunate. (Kaouk 430)

This is an issue that would destroy the republic if not addressed, and as tribunes they exist to shine a light on it. They have become a centralised aspect of the state (Foucault, "Subject" 793), exposing a problem that will ultimately be solved by another cog in the machinery. According to Machiavelli, a republic survives (and thus it is reproduced, after all), through

the “right to accuse” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 48) which the tribunes makes use of. He even allows for some trickery (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 471), but this is where the tribunes take it too far:

SICINIUS. You are at point to lose your liberties.
 Marcius would have all from you; Marcius,
 Whom late you have named for consul.
MENENIUS. Fie, fie, fie!
 This is the way to kindle, not to quench.
FIRST SENATOR. To unbuild the city and to lay all flat.
SICINIUS. What is the city but the people?
CITIZENS. True,
 The people are the city.
BRUTUS. By the consent of all, we were established
 The people's magistrates. (3.1.193-201)

Menenius can see that they are going too far, but the tribunes are drunk on power. They invoke gladly the will of the people—the very same people they chided earlier in the play:

SICINIUS. Why either were you ignorant to see't,
 Or, seeing it, of such childish friendliness
 To yield your voices? (2.3.173-175)

They have reached a dangerous level of arrogance, but they cannot seem to see it. Just like Coriolanus, another would-be tool of the state, they struggle with the power they are given, but unlike Coriolanus they lack introspection. They plough on, using and abusing the tools of the state to—at one point—exceed the powers of their supposed betters: “Sicinius silences Cominius during the marketplace proceedings: ‘We know your drift. Speak what?’ And Brutus adds, ‘There is no more to be said’ (III.iii.110-117)” (Sinclair 34). In fact, Margaret Sinclair’s article on the tribunes and their use of language is very fruitful in pointing out just how they use grammar to achieve their ends:

To be politically dominant, the tribunes must kill or banish Coriolanus (II.i.243-259, III.i.284-88). Since Coriolanus is the aristocrat who most represents the old aristocracy, his destruction requires deep changes within the body politic, changes which the tribunes imagine in terms of a social and political upheaval and which the imperative ‘shall’ (III.i.87-89) suggests. (Sinclair 34)

It is also through their use of language that proof can be found for their possession by the state. Mansfield stresses the Lacanian perspective: how we “must locate ourselves in the field of language in order to take up a place in the human world” (Mansfield 51), and this is

precisely what the tribunes do. They have taken up their place as a cog in the state machinery. Yet when another cog rebels, their plans are thrown into chaos.

After all the risks the tribunes have taken to save Rome and—more importantly to such political creatures—elevate themselves, they must face the backlash. Coriolanus possesses traits the two could not imagine, and so “in their success [...] they are oblivious to the danger that Coriolanus presents” (Wudel 218). Indeed, when they hear of Coriolanus’ return at the head of a Volscian army, Brutus immediately orders the Aedile bringing the news to “Go see this rumourer whipped” (4.6.47)—a statement that relays both arrogance and denial. The tribunes never truly come to terms with their mistakes, even when they are laid bare in front of them:

COMINIUS. You have brought
A trembling upon Rome, such as was never
So incapable of help.
BOTH TRIBUNES. Say not we brought it.
MENENIUS. How! Was’t we? we loved him but, like beasts
And cowardly nobles, gave way unto your clusters,
Who did hoot him out o’th’city. (4.6.121-130)

Still trapped in their own, constructed world, the tribunes cannot comprehend their faults. And only one of them will know some small consequence of their incessant scheming as Rome desperately looks to Volumnia—the one Machiavelli would praise—for help. As the citizens change their minds, claiming that “though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will” (4.6.146-147), Sicinius tells them to “get you home” (4.6.152). For once he has no words to sway them, and Brutus later pays the (too small) price for their deception.

MESSENGER. Sir, if you’d save your life, fly to your house.
The plebeians have got your fellow Tribune
And hale him up and down, all swearing, if
The Roman ladies bring not comfort home
They’ll give him death by inches. (5.4.34-38)

The state apparatus of Rome—and the tribunes with it—is saved by Volumnia, at which point Sicinius simply says: “We’ll meet them, and help the joy” (5.4.62). Despite all their mistakes, they take part in the celebration of the woman representing their state more effectively than they ever did.

The tribunes show audiences the lacklustre efforts of dead subjects serving only the system they were born into. They are the “soldiers” of the state, “made; out of a formless clay” (Foucault, *Discipline* 146) and imbued with the language that befits their station. It

should be the language of the people (Kaouk 430), but it is only the subconscious language of their own desire—the language they were born into (Lacan, “Agency” 1169). The only Rome they care about is the one they imagine all by themselves, and by their actions they help save Rome from both tyranny and freedom.

4.2. Close Reading: Patricians

Much like the tribunes of the plebeians, the patricians of Rome also stand for the maintenance of the status quo. Their rhetoric might be more practiced and flexible, but it is not potent enough to change the course of Coriolanus; who is prepared to set aside friendship and familial ties to pursue his revenge. Over the course of the play, however, the patricians have at least some influence over Coriolanus, and their struggle with him allows audiences to see a different kind of approach to power and how to keep hold of it. The virtues of Rome are laid out for audiences and the plebeians very early in the play by Menenius—through the use of an infamous metaphor. These virtues, the ultimately insufficient coercions of the patricians and their helpless acceptance of Rome’s downfall will all be interrogated in this section.

Firstly, the issue of rhetoric is slightly more advanced on the side of the patricians, although their faltering resolve makes it invalid in the end. They are also steeped in hypocrisy—not unlike the tribunes. It begins with Menenius’ body metaphor: a lengthy comparison of Rome to its people and class divisions (1.1.94-161). It has a mixed reception, although Menenius arrogantly believes the rebelling plebeians to be “almost thoroughly persuaded” (1.1.199). The truth of the reception, and Menenius’s conclusion, tells another story:

FIRST CITIZEN. It was an answer. How apply you this?

MENENIUS. The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members; for examine
Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
Touching the weal o’th’common, you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you
And no way from yourselves. What do you think,
You, the great toe of this assembly? (1.1.146-153)

The first citizen is clearly not persuaded, and when asked for clarification it is revealed that “Menenius’s vision of the Roman state proceeding on a predetermined, inexorable ‘course’ participates in a recurrent ideology that claims the status quo as necessity” (Kaouk 425-426). Not only that, but the small insults that follow clearly show audiences what Menenius really

thinks of the lower orders: “toe” (1.1.153), “lowest, basest, poorest” (1.1.155), “rascal” (1.1.157) and “rats” (1.1.160). West and Silberstein argue that the fact that “Menenius turns the citizens’ empty bellies to a rhetorical purpose they had not anticipated is not so much hypocrisy as testimony to the belief that exempla can be inverted” (310), but I believe it can be both. He is turning their bellies against them in an effort to show how the caring senate delivers all to them while showing the lack of care hidden beneath his veneer of civility. It is meant to confuse and delay; the lengthy tale clearly “causing them [the plebeians] to halt momentarily, to turn aside from their more practical or pressing concerns in order to listen” (Cavell 15). In the Machiavellian world of *Coriolanus* this is all well and good since the purpose ultimately serves the ruling classes: “Menenius’ tools are words and ideological manipulation in the service of the ruling order” (Roberts 45). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes the viability of this strategy: “men judge more by appearances than by deeds. Everyone can see, few people can actually perceive and judge. Everybody can see what you seem to be; few can judge what you actually are” (97). The patricians of Rome operate gladly in this way, but once Coriolanus enters the picture it is clear for all to see—especially with the aid of the tribunes—that something really is rotten in the way that Rome is governed. Coriolanus brings the true face of the heartless patricians with him wherever he goes, which ends up causing the crisis: “What’s the matter, you dissentious rogues, / That rubbing the poor itch of your opinion / Make yourselves scabs?” (1.1.163-165) How that plays out has been described in previous sections, so here I will primarily investigate the patricians and their attempts at crisis management.

With their attempts at controlling Coriolanus, the patricians lay their true intentions bare—at least in private. And, while Volumnia’s part will be elaborated on in a later section, she describes the patricians’ strategy better than both Menenius and Cominius—who can only cheer her on. In the following lines she will invoke Machiavelli’s thoughts from *The Prince* (97), the greater good of the city, the family and their social class:

CORIOLANUS. Why force you this?

VOLUMNIA. Because that now it lies you on to speak

To th’people, not by your own instruction,
Nor by the matter which your heart prompts you,
But with such words that are but rooted in
Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
Of no allowance to your bosom’s truth.
Now, this no more dishonours you at all
Than to take in a town with gentle words,
Which else would put you to your fortune and

The hazard of much blood.
 I would dissemble with my nature where
 My fortunes and my friends at stake required
 I should do so in honour: I am in this,
 Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles;
 And you will rather show our general louts
 How you can frown than spend a fawn upon 'em
 For the inheritance of their loves and safeguard
 Of what that want might ruin.
 MENENIUS. Noble lady!
 Come, go with us; speak fair: you may salve so,
 Not what is dangerous present, but the loss
 Of what is past. (3.2.52-72)

Volumnia's speech is highly valuable in terms of the beliefs laid out. Good patricians should not speak according to their "own instruction" (3.2.54), nor should they be prompted by their heart (3.2.55). They should lie without a tainted conscience since their actions serve the greater good, avoiding the "hazard of much blood" (3.2.61). It is an honourable action that serves their class, keeping them in power when the plebeians are endangering it (3.2.63-69). Menenius agrees and is ready to take Coriolanus'—or rather Volumnia's message—into the public sphere (3.2.70). There, the would-be consul shall not be prompted by his heart, but by the friends from his own class: Cominius and Menenius. The former even says "Come, come, we'll prompt you" (3.2.107). Coriolanus sees the fault in this, reluctant to speak with a "beggar's tongue" (3.2.117), but it is a selfish fault he sees. Menenius and the patricians want to rule with manipulated consent, feigning generosity by being the providing belly while at the same time withholding food. This is the right approach in the Machiavellian view, but again Coriolanus spoils it: Machiavelli weighs different views against one another to learn whether, when governing "a large body of men, it is better to be humane than haughty, and kindly rather than severe" (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 407). He concludes that this statement is correct; that it is better to be merciful (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 408). This is what the patricians want to achieve through their prompting, which is unsuccessful and only serves to destabilise Coriolanus more: "Attributions of the voice, distributions of the voice, and the beginnings and endings of the voice are repeatedly refined, re-found, and refocused" (Lunberry 229). They dismiss the will of the plebeians, which becomes the other part of their crisis as described in the previous section, by "calling them 'hungry plebeians' (2.1.8) and likening them to a 'wolf' (l. 6) who would 'devour . . . the noble Martius' (ll. 8–9), Menenius bestializes them throughout much of the play" (Kaouk 427). Cavell points out that fear might be the ultimate source of this scheming, even beneath such a confident mask, and I agree:

“Menenius, whose sense of justice is constricted, among other things by his fear of civil disorder, is accurate in his fears, in the consequences they prophesy for Rome” (6). By constructing Coriolanus—even giving him that name (1.9.62-64)—the patricians reveal their plans. Even on this runaway train of state, plans are possible: “For a class to become a dominant class, for it to ensure its domination and for that domination to reproduce itself is certainly the effect of a number of actual pre-meditated tactics operating within the grand strategies that ensure this domination” (Foucault, *P/K* 203). Overall, they subscribe to a discourse of power that disarms subjects and makes them slaves to the status quo.

Coriolanus’ struggle for autonomy endangers this.

More real, though still confused, relationships are revealed once Coriolanus rebels. The famed warrior ceases to hear the pleas of the state—personified by Menenius and Cominius—even as they begin to despair. Due to their rigid values they still see the people as the enemy: “to Cominius, the problem is less with Coriolanus and his kin than with those who singled him out and who now face his wrath” (Kuzner 187). And certainly, it is with a “paternalistic disdain” (Kaouk 409) that the patricians view the plebeians, but their relations might be similar even with those of their own class that they want to control. Cominius and Menenius seem to be Coriolanus’ only friends, with Menenius even being considered as inhabiting a “certain kind of fatherly role” (Cavell 11)—but how much does friendship truly mean during times of political strife? Thomas Anderson suggests that:

The play imbricates friendship and politics in its first scene in which Menenius hears grievances from Rome’s hungry citizens. First Citizen describes Caius Martius as ‘chief enemy to the people’ (1.1.6–7), and the friend-enemy distinction is reinforced when Menenius confronts the crowd. He calls the citizens ‘my good friends, mine honest neighbors’ (55). Four more times before Caius Martius arrives, Menenius addresses either the group of citizens or an individual citizen as ‘friends’ (58, 121, 132) or ‘friend’ (118). (47)

He goes on to examine the subversive qualities of the friendship between Coriolanus and Aufidius—which will be looked at in this thesis in a coming section—but I want to stress the idea of the political friendship between these patricians. It must be said that the confusion caused by these relations contribute further to the discourse of power that disarms its subjects, where Coriolanus rebels because of his ‘pure’ virtues and is both feared and praised by the patricians:

Throughout Act 3, when Coriolanus’s bid for the consulship threatens to ignite civil war, the patricians repeatedly praise his fearless contempt for the people even as they repeatedly deplore its perilous, and possibly fatal, political consequences. Menenius is exemplary in this regard. As he contemplates the

looming chaos, he is simultaneously exasperated by Coriolanus's behavior—
'What the vengeance, / Could he not speak 'em fair?'—and admiring of it—
'His nature is too noble for the world' (III.253 – 60). (Holloway 369-370)

Does friendship hinder them from saving Rome? Have they been shamed into finally embracing the fact that "valour is the chiefest virtue" (2.2.82)? It is clear that Coriolanus' "actions cannot be understood merely as a kind of insanely selfish vanity [which] is indicated by the fact that in the play decent and serious people such as Menenius and Cominius frankly concede the justice of Coriolanus's revenge (IV.vi.109– 18)" (Holloway 367). Friendship, class and rebellion hint at the runaway train that I keep coming back to and that Foucault describes more eloquently. When asked about "who co-ordinates the activities of agents of the political body", Foucault answers that it is an "extremely complex system of power relations" that "no one person can have conceived of it in its entirety" (Foucault, *P/K* 62). The two former friends describe this contradictory position in act 4:

MENENIUS. We are all undone, unless
The noble man have mercy.
COMINIUS. Who shall ask it?
The tribunes cannot do't for shame; the people
Deserve such pity of him as the wolf
Does of the shepherds. For his best friends, if they
Should say 'Be good to Rome', they charged him even
As those should do that had deserved his hate,
And therein showed like enemies.
MENENIUS. 'Tis true.
If he were putting to my house the brand
That should consume it, I have not the face
To say 'Beseech you, cease.' You have made fair hands,
You and your crafts! You have crafted fair! (4.6.110-120)

Coriolanus is too noble, and they are too noble to ask him to stop his insurrection. Now they have become "brats" (4.6.94), as deserving of doom as the people they once looked down on. If virtue were successful, there would be no more Rome. Like helpless slaves they would have gone down with the state, just like the plebeians: "plebeians and patricians alike are unable to learn from their political experience or to nurture their capacity" (Kaouk 411). Perhaps this society deserves to fail as a result of its injustices, but it does not. In the end, it takes the best of the patricians to save Rome: "What Cominius and Menenius cannot accomplish, Coriolanus's mother, wife, and child finally do" (Lunberry 239). Perhaps Volumnia wants to make up for the fact that the body of Rome described by Menenius (and Foucault) lacks a head.

In the patricians we see a failed system propped up by flowery, deceptive rhetoric. Their true disdain for the people is revealed by Coriolanus, and Menenius and Cominius cannot negotiate their relationship with Coriolanus and the state at the same time; praising him even as he is coming to kill them all. In the end, their failure is similar to that of the tribunes—but the chief ideologue of the patricians, who outlines their views on deception and the greater good better than anyone, becomes the ultimate Machiavel as she sacrifices her son's life to save Rome.

4.3. Close Reading: Volumnia

The fact that Volumnia's presence has been hinted at in previous sections is proof of her impact. She stands up to plebeians and lays out the patrician ideology better than any consul. Coriolanus might be stubborn, but the woman he learned it from wins out in the end by giving him both virtues and faults. In this section I will present how she shapes Coriolanus as a subject, and what possible theories could lie behind her teachings. This is where, finally, the subject will be interrogated in some more detail—from the perspective of the one who shaped it in *Coriolanus*. Volumnia's relationship to her family will be examined alongside the Machiavellian and post-structuralist elements of reasoning and subject construction.

It is in her role as a mother that Volumnia both creates and destroys Caius Martius Coriolanus. The creation is evident the very moment she arrives on stage, at once revealing that she was “pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to / find fame” (1.3.12-13) and that she “sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man- / child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a / man” (1.3.15-17). It is clear that she desires great things from her son, but these laurels must be gained through Roman, patrician and martial virtues. Indeed, she sees her son approach the pinnacle of those virtues early in the play as he returns from war: “I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes / And the buildings of my fancy. Only / There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but / Our Rome will cast upon thee” (2.1.190-194). Coriolanus is not truly the focus here, but the “buildings” of *her* “fancy” (2.1.193) and the judgement of “Our Rome” (2.1.194). In his chapter on Coriolanus, Robert McCutcheon notes that “by stressing the shaping influence of Roman culture and especially Volumnia's role, Shakespeare's play makes his preeminence seem learned, a matter of upbringing and social conditioning rather than unique heroic transcendence” (328). Obviously, it is this construction of identity I am after in this thesis, and since “subjectivity is always everywhere a fiction” (Mansfield 77) in Foucault, it is Volumnia who makes up that

fiction in *Coriolanus*. Foucault also sees this connection between the family and the state, explaining that “the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations” such as “the body, sexuality, the family” (Foucault, *P/K* 122). The suggestion that “power is first and foremost about guidance and ‘*Führung*,’ i.e., structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects” (Lemke 17) is therefore a vital piece of the puzzle when Volumnia assembles her son through her motherly guidance.

To further examine her methods, I must return briefly to the crucial argument about whether Coriolanus should lie to the plebeians or not in order to save himself in act 3. The son asks “Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me / False to my nature? Rather say I play / The man I am” (3.2.15-17). He is the man she made him, of course—even if he is on a quest to break free—and she knows just how to respond in order to appeal to that war-like nature. She equates deception in warfare with the deception she wishes him to go through with: “If it be honour in your wars to seem / The same you are not, which for your best ends / You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse / That it shall hold companionship in peace / With honour in war” (3.2.46-50). I see this as an example of how she moulds her son into what she desires him to be, since “the displacement of interiority can be seen in Volumnia’s advocacy of expediency over authenticity” (Marshall 456), and by destabilising the subject she can make it what she wants it to be. She hammers home the point about not displaying one’s weakness in public (Machiavelli, *Prince* 88), still wanting the best for her son. At this point Coriolanus is imprisoned within himself, and Volumnia is his warden: “Volumnia and then Cominius add that Coriolanus should thus ‘frame his spirit.’ Coriolanus reluctantly agrees to play (to frame) a part that he has never played before” (Polka 184). Her effect on her son’s subjectivity is not only to make him fit into the Foucauldian society, but it is also an effect of psychoanalysis: “Lacan [...] describes the development of subjectivity as the result of the intrusion of something external into the ideal space of the pre-Oedipal subject” (Mansfield 53). This is the very scene where she also points out that “action is eloquence” (3.2.78), leading to the fair conclusion that “Volumnia unquestionably regards glory as the end of courageous action” (Holloway 360). At this point, her views and morals should be clear; like the methods she uses to instil them in her son. It is one of the multiple tragedies of the play that her Machiavellian advice is not truly heeded—by Coriolanus *or* by the patricians. This forces her to make use of them herself, which shall be a triumph for her and for Rome, but the doom of her son.

Coriolanus loathes this Machiavellian approach, but it is not his agency that has the most power in this play. His friends and family all “relish the work of political manipulation

rather than eschew it” (Kaouk 434). In the case of the patricians this manipulation ended less than favourably, but when the city—and the state—is at stake Volumnia is prepared to step up and sacrifice her son for that greater good. Machiavelli writes in *Discourses on Livy* that:

...the very existence of Rome depended on the preservation of her army, that army must be saved at any sacrifice, for whether the means be honourable or ignominious, all is well done that is done for the defence of our country. And he said that were her army preserved, Rome, in course of time, might wipe out the disgrace; but if her army were destroyed, however gloriously it might perish, Rome and her freedom would perish with it. (471)

In *Coriolanus*, the Romans are beyond losing their army, and so the preservation of the state is up to Volumnia, who has tried in vain to convince the patricians and Coriolanus that “all is well done that is done for the defence of our country” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 471). In act 5, she uses all of her tricks to sway Coriolanus. She insists that the burden in its entirety is his to bear: “For we have nothing else to ask but that / Which you deny already. Yet we will ask, / That, if you fail in our request, the blame / May hang upon your hardness. Therefore hear us” (5.3.88-91). While he is a victim of the tribunes and their schemes, none of that is recognised here. Likewise, while she is performing the action that will see her son torn to pieces, she claims that he is “Making the mother, wife, and child to see / The son, the husband, and the father tearing / His country’s bowels out” (5.3.101-103). The use of family to save the state echoes the aforementioned connection between the two (Foucault, *P/K* 122). She also appeals to his own virtues—which she would know, since she guided him to them: “The end of war’s uncertain; but this certain, / That, if thou conquer Rome, the benefit / Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name / Whose repetition will be dogged with curses” (5.3.141-144). This not only turns those virtues against him, but it also shows audiences how difficult it is to assemble a consistent self capable of following its own path. She shames his future name and his present name as she alongside her family “shame him with” their “knees” (5.3.168): “To his surname Coriolanus ‘longs more pride / Than pity to our prayers. Down!” (5.3.170-171). Through her many appeals she will break through, but that might also be predictable since she is the most convincing character in the play. What matters is that she is turning the deceptive language of political manipulation against her own family; even embracing bare-faced lies: “There’s no man in the world / More bound to’s mother, yet here he lets me prate / Like one i’t’h’stocks. Thou hast never in thy life / Showed thy dear mother any courtesy” (5.3.158-161). As her speech comes to an end, “Volumnia strips her son of both nobility and morality when she denounces him as ‘not honest’ for dishonoring his mother (5.3.166)” (Jones 159)—and by doing so dealing a mortal blow to his self as well. She “has bitten off

and devoured the very essence that makes her son Coriolanus” (Yoshioka 158). Is she the prince Rome really needs?

Peace comes to Rome as a result of her efforts. Volumnia is celebrated as “the life of Rome” (5.5.1) even as she has assured the death of her son. Thus, it is simple to see that her claim from act 3—that “action is eloquence” (3.2.78)—is correct when used so ruthlessly. “Volumnia’s insistence on the notion of language as a tool, as a medium that may be manipulated in the service of a larger goal” (Clarke 141) has been proven to serve her and Rome well. She has mastered the Machiavellian language that the patricians mostly pay simple lip-service to and succeeded in safeguarding the state. Indeed, she is the one who receives a stately and happy ending: “Volumnia finishes her dramatic role by passing reticently across the stage in a stately procession: basking in as much glory and encomium as she could wish, she needs no speech to glamorize herself further” (Yoshioka 160). This is a part of what makes the tragedy of *Coriolanus* so fascinating: our hero perishes and the ‘villains’ are victorious. Richard III could only dream of being as consistently Machiavellian as Volumnia; that “oxymoronic symbol of maternal lover of war” (Shanker 190).

The relationship between Volumnia and her son is possibly the most important relationship in the play. It can only compete with Aufidius, whose relationship with Coriolanus will be examined in the next section. I wrote in the previous section that the patricians fall victim to a discourse of power that disarms its subjects, but where they are merely disarmed Volumnia might have been completely assimilated. As I mentioned in my theory chapter, Amy Allen writes about interactions with the Foucauldian state, concluding that “autonomy consists not in freely binding oneself to a necessity in the form of the moral law but in freely calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary” (50). On this spectrum we can place the “delinquent” (Foucault, *Discipline* 273) Coriolanus on one end and his mother on the other. Felicity Dunworth writes that:

...children are in danger of paying a price for their mother’s public function, however carefully the mothers fulfil that role: a danger [...] realised in Coriolanus. The tragic outcomes [...] are presaged by a sense of imbalance, of things ‘out of joint’, that is generated by the mother’s position: a tension between public and private; between political and domestic, between the demands of state and the needs of family. (192)

While this will be further investigated in the section on Coriolanus, this “imbalance” (Dunworth 192) is clearly present in what has been discussed here as well. I argue that it is brought about by the power relation described by Allen above. By committing herself fully to Rome she becomes the opposite of autonomy, and while she is impressive in all her

Machiavellian glory—even more impressive as a powerful woman in republican Rome written in the 17th century—she brings about the tragedy of the play and becomes a tragedy herself in the Foucauldian view of political discourse.

Concluding this section, I will reiterate the role Volumnia plays with the help of language and by being a symbol of state power. She builds up her son's heroic but fictive identity, guiding him through language as a tool for the state. By persuasion she lays out the Machiavellian values she believes will serve Rome best, even if her son does not care for them. She outdoes the male patricians in this regard. Ultimately, when her son rebels, she decides to use her methods herself—without the flailing displayed by Cominius and Menenius. She takes apart her son, who submits to her one final time before he goes to his death and she goes to her triumph as a victorious servant of the state.

4.4. Close Reading: Aufidius

After focusing so much on Rome and its political players, the character of Aufidius is somewhat of an anomaly. But through his role as a mortal enemy, close friend and betrayer he, too, can shine a light on the Roman political system and Coriolanus' journey as a subject. As an enemy he is inadequate, as a friend he is deceptive, and finally he makes use of the same rhetoric as Sicinius, Brutus and Volumnia to defeat Coriolanus with words after having been beaten so many times with swords. In this section I will look at the relationship between Aufidius, Antium and Coriolanus; how it is influenced by political forces, admiration and jealousy.

Coriolanus and Aufidius share an unusual enmity bound up with their very senses of self. When the Volscian leader is first mentioned by Coriolanus in act 1, it is clear that he is not just any enemy: "I sin in envying his nobility, / And were I anything but what I am, / I would wish me only he" (1.1.227-229). The same can be said of Aufidius' own thoughts about Rome: "I would I were a Roman, for I cannot, / Being a Volsce, be that I am" (1.10.4-5). Both of these statements are made very early in the play, thus setting up their tumultuous relationship that is always ruled by changing power relations. While I intend to commit fully to a close reading of Coriolanus' journey of subjectivity in the next section, there are some parts of it that only Aufidius can provide—making his part in the play worthy of an examination of its own. This will lead to some slight overlap, but it should also work to set up the following section about Coriolanus himself.

The first aspect of their relationship that I want to interrogate is the mutual admiration and seeing themselves in one another. I argue that especially Coriolanus—who is the one on an actual quest for selfhood—finds himself through Aufidius in a manner reminiscent of Lacanian “*identification*” (Lacan, “Mirror” 1164). Burton Hatlen points out that “Coriolanus needs a mirror in which he can see reflected back to him his imagined heroic self, and he has created a fictional Aufidius to meet that need” (408). I find this approach to be very productive and translates the idea of the subject being “divided against itself” (Belsey, *PS* 57) on stage. Coriolanus will learn too late that this identification is lacking, and that the mirror has given him a “fragmented body” (Lacan, “Mirror” 1167) internally and—ultimately—externally. Hatlen concludes that “... in the final scene Aufidius, the mirror in which Coriolanus has hoped to find a true image of his identity, abruptly turns against him. There is a moral here: mirrors often turn out to have agendas of their own” (Hatlen 417), and how true it is that the imagined image of the self turns out to be inaccurate. This interpretation goes hand in hand with the Lacanian approach, since he “sees human beings as the uneasy conjunction of a vulnerable organism and a subjectivity brought into being from outside itself, composed of meanings that, while they remain irretrievably Other, are all we have to live by (Belsey, “Divided” 84). In the end, Coriolanus and Aufidius see many of the same, imagined virtues of martial prowess and “nobility” (1.1.227), but where Coriolanus wants to break free, Aufidius only ends up using the Machiavellian techniques of other characters to defeat him, ending up as a slave to them: “Where Coriolanus is concerned with the real quality of his character, Aufidius is preoccupied with glory or honor, with the mere appearance of virtue” (Holloway 360). Whereas, as I discussed in the last section, Volumnia is the one who dooms Coriolanus, Aufidius plays his part in the downfall as well. The play shows that it is a web of relationships that affect, construct and destroy subjects through political and social power—again marrying the Lacanian approach with the Foucauldian one: “In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations” (Foucault, *P/K* 198). Had Aufidius not drawn Coriolanus in, the outcome would undoubtedly have been different.

Despite the nightmare of mirrors and deception, there is an attempt at a unique friendship in the play—and it is not made unstable by Aufidius alone. Coriolanus, convinced that he will find brotherhood with Aufidius, seeks him out in Antium—where he is initially well received. At first it would be perfectly reasonable for them to be fast friends in a society that is “a world without mothers, where all the power – martial, social and domestic – is in the hands of men” (Dunworth 189). Having been exiled from Rome by the tribunes,

Coriolanus finds a willing receiver of his plea: “Since I have ever followed thee with hate, / Drawn tuns of blood out of thy country’s breast, / And cannot live but by thy shame, unless / It be to do thee service” (4.5.101-104). He wants death by Aufidius’ hand or the chance to fight Rome. It can be safely assumed that he is earnest, him being who he is, and while the same cannot be said of Aufidius it is difficult to imagine why he would keep Coriolanus alive if he did not truly admire him. Responding to Coriolanus’ speech, he says: “Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart / A root of ancient envy” (4.5.106-107), suggesting both a brief respite in their enmity and that Aufidius does not quite consider himself the equal Coriolanus sees in him. He introduces the Roman general to the Volscies—which will turn out to be a mistake: “Let me commend thee first to those that shall / Say yea to thy desires. A thousand welcomes! / And more a friend than e’er an enemy” (4.5.147-149). Having read so many other characters through Machiavelli’s writings, it might be easy to imagine that Aufidius is simply using Coriolanus from the beginning. However, I believe that—just as their admiration for one another—this initial greeting is genuine just because of these powerful words of friendship and the fact that they have both expressed the desire to be like one another. Thomas P. Anderson, reading their friendship through Derrida’s ideas of friendship, writes that: “Aufidius’s passionate reaction to his rival’s offer reconfigures the proposed strategic alliance into a bond of friendship” (54). Yet as mentioned above, it is a friendship that cannot last due to the overwhelming personal qualities Coriolanus possesses.

As a great warrior and general, Coriolanus quickly gains the love of the Volscians. Aufidius quickly regains the jealousy he discarded, instead falling back to another notion of act 1: “I’ll potch at him some way / Or wrath or craft may get him” (1.10.14-15). While Coriolanus might consider Aufidius an equal, “the action of the play does not support Coriolanus’ initial picture of Aufidius as his sole worthy opponent, for every time the two fight, Coriolanus wins” (Hatlen 407). This is also the case in terms of leadership. Aufidius muses to his lieutenant that: “One fire drives out one fire; one nail one nail; / Rights by rights fuller, strengths by strengths do fail. / [...] When, Caius, Rome is thine, / Thou art poor’st of all; then shortly art thou mine” (4.7.54-57). It is at this moment that he falls back into enmity despite his admiration, and he chooses the same strategy as the Romans in order to destroy Coriolanus—by using his closely held beliefs against him: “strengths by strengths do fail” (4.7.55). During the closing acts of the play, the two want radically different things: “For Aufidius custom is an impediment to winning, while for Coriolanus it is an impediment to truth” (Holloway 361). Thus, one sticks to his beliefs while the other betrays them in order to

win. It is worth returning to Anderson's post-structuralist reading of their friendship to detect once again the imbalance that keeps haunting the action of the play:

Aufidius's form of friendship – embodying the political ideology of dissensus and not those attributes most associated with early modern friendship theory such as consensus, agreement, unity or accord – is the productive force that drives the polity. His actions after his allegiance with Coriolanus suggest that he accepts, indeed even demands as a necessity, the incommensurability of competing political claims. (57)

Considering this, it seems only natural for their friendship to be doomed from the start. It must end “only in self and mutual destruction” (Hatlen 409). Indeed, Aufidius does not have to wait for the seizure of Rome: Volumnia and the rest of Coriolanus' family provide him with his opportunity instead. He is set on his path: “I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour / At difference in thee. Out of that I'll work / Myself a former fortune” (5.3.201-203). Seeking power instead of truth, Aufidius forces the final confrontation.

Audiences are shown a scene similar to the one where Sicinius and Brutus tell the people how to react during Coriolanus' hearing, where Aufidius speaks to the conspirators about what should be done. They, too, want to sway the people. They are, it is said “uncertain whilst / 'Twixt you there's a difference. But the fall of either / Makes the survivor heir of all” (5.6.16-18). They resolve to kill Coriolanus, with Aufidius' jealousy the clear cause: “I raised him, and I pawned / Mine honour for his truth; who being so heightened, / He watered his new plants with dews of flattery, / Seducing so my friends” (5.6.21-24). Here we return to the idea of honour contrasted against truth, which is certainly an imbalance that Coriolanus will experience. Aufidius addresses the people and the nobility of the Volscians, knowing—like the tribunes—just the word to use in order to enrage Coriolanus: “traitor” (5.6.86). To the people he says that Coriolanus “whined and roared away your victory, / That pages blushed at him and men of heart / Looked wondering each at others” (5.6.98-100). To this common deception, Coriolanus “responds both insultingly and with truth, thereby reasserting his position of superiority, although at the cost of his life” (Holloway 364). For Aufidius encourages the people to “tear him [Coriolanus] to pieces!” (5.6.121) and without tribunes to direct the people's anger Coriolanus dies at their hands.

The death of Coriolanus concludes both of their journeys in poetic fashion. Hatlen writes:

Aufidius, in what must surely be Shakespeare's strangest stage direction, ‘stands on’ the body of Coriolanus to deliver his final speech. Clearly, Aufidius is still grounding-in the most literal sense-his own identity on Coriolanus. This stage tableau graphically emblemizes the relationship of Aufidius and

Coriolanus throughout the play, for each has been ‘standing on’ the other all along; and if you can create a self only by standing on someone else, sooner or later somebody-and someone necessary to your sense of self-will get crushed. (Hatlen 409)

This is the ultimate result of the mirror-image relationship between Coriolanus and Aufidius; yet another tragedy for the Roman general. He achieves some small sense of self by dying, and Aufidius—basing his own self on Coriolanus as well—seems to be on a path to the same fate, albeit without finding that truth: “Aufidius’ conduct is far from praiseworthy or, as a Volscian lord condemns, something ‘whereat valour will weep’ (s.6.i32). Aufidius is not allowed to aspire to the level of personal virtue and integrity which Coriolanus was naturally in command of” (Yoshioka 163). Since Coriolanus must die to achieve some manner of success, “there must be a slayer. And in this sense Aufidius is ‘derived from’ the character of Coriolanus” (Burke 190). In this situation, there is tragedy no matter on which side of the mirror you are. Coriolanus, unlike Aufidius, “shall have a noble memory” (5.6.155).

The fascinating role played by Aufidius in *Coriolanus* definitely ends up standing out by the end. As the unworthy reflection of the play’s protagonist, he causes many of the imbalances of power and personhood, ending the play by praising the man he caused the death of. In this section I have examined how the two identify themselves in the Lacanian sense; by being two sides of an always imperfect mirror that only aid the Foucauldian notion of a fictional self. The rivals form a friendship that is doomed to fail but that is nevertheless a crucial aspect of the imbalances of the play. It is a friendship that ends as Aufidius takes up the rhetoric that is sure to soil one’s honour but sure to bring down Coriolanus at the same time. Like the tribunes before him, jealousy is his motivation. The two characters ‘create’ fictions of one another and, as Coriolanus dies, they are both destroyed.

4.5. Close reading: Caius Martius Coriolanus

Finally, then, I will examine the eponymous protagonist of the play that “everyone” (Belsey, “Divided” 90) in it is constantly trying to affect. In the previous sections I have noted how the tribunes scheme to bring down Coriolanus by turning the people against him, how the patricians flail in the wind as they hear of his betrayal, how Volumnia sacrifices him for Rome and how Aufidius finally causes his death at the hands of a Volscian mob. Catherine Belsey, as quoted above, writes that everyone is always talking about the protagonist of the play, and so I thought it best to let them have their say before reaching the final section of this chapter. Here, I intend to interrogate Coriolanus’ journey as a subject through the political

landscape of *Coriolanus*, highlighting his struggle against the system that wants to restrain him by close reading. This journey will take him from a place of contentment as an objectified soldier to the tyrannical virtues that emerge as he is encouraged to become consul. I will examine the many crises of self that he experiences in the play, paying special attention to subjection through language and by interactions with the state.

As demonstrated in the previous sections, Coriolanus struggles for autonomy in a landscape that does much to stand against his wishes. From the high offices of state down to his own familial ties, established power constantly attempts to bring him into line. It must be noted that he plays his first given role—that of a soldier—without complaint. Indeed, he even seems to stick to it when all else fails. So even though he strives for more, he is, in the Lacanian and Foucauldian senses “‘discursively constituted’, which is a succinct way to say that human identity is structured by language in the sense of discourse” (Olivier 294). Patrician soldiery is the language he was born into: “language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it” (Lacan, “Agency” 1169). Indeed, Mansfield writes that this Lacanian view suggests that “*the unconscious is structured like a language*” (50). My section on Volumnia and her own lines should clarify the constructed identity of Coriolanus: “My praises made thee first a soldier” (3.2.107). Likewise, it is a moment of triumph when Coriolanus is objectified as a soldier: “O’me alone, make you a sword of me” (1.6.76). However, the fact that the word “alone” (1.6.76) is present here also hints at his pride in standing alone—achieving self-sufficiency. So even though he is what his mother made him in that moment, a closer look can reveal that his desire for “self-generation” (Blits 141) is always present. His extreme competence as a soldier brings him beyond the field, he is comfortable with, and while he is willing to follow his mother’s dreams in this regard his discomfort will bring about his demise. As he returns from Corioles, he is barely welcomed home before his mother sets this new task before him: “I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes / And the buildings of my fancy. Only / There’s one thing wanting, which I doubt not but / Our Rome will cast upon thee” (2.1.190-194). In the Volumnia reading I already pointed out the connection to the construction of an individual in relation to these lines, but they also demonstrate just how closely to *her* desires her son adheres. He replies that “I had rather be their servant in my way / Than sway with them in theirs” (2.1.196-197), hinting again at his desire for autonomy. But, as was laid out in the section on the tribunes, it is not to be. Coriolanus is set on a collision course with institutional power.

Following the advice of his mother and his patrician friends, Coriolanus sets out to gain the people's voices in order to be consul. He clearly dislikes the idea—and the thought of showing them his wounds is also one that he is opposed to: “Let me o’erleap that custom, for I cannot / Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them / For my wounds’ sake to give their suffrage” (2.2.135-137). He is convinced by Menenius but tells the people that they may only see his wounds “in private” (2.3.75). The following performance is not convincing and involves Coriolanus questioning tradition and being, as usual, rather too frank with the populace: “Custom calls me to’t. / What custom wills, in all things should we do’t” (2.3.16-17). The people accept him as consul, but as noted in previous sections the tribunes easily manipulate the people to change their minds based on the technicalities so disliked by Coriolanus. The people already doubt him, with one citizen saying that “He should have showed us / His marks of merit, wounds received for’s country” (2.3.62-63) and another citizen chiming in with the detail that Coriolanus mocked the idea of having the citizenry give him their voices (2.3.165-172). As established earlier, the tribunes make use of previously existing norms of observation to enforce their will; the will of the state, just as Foucault explains it: “in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (Foucault, *Discipline* 205). This is natural to the tribunes, the patricians and the people beneath their heels, and as Coriolanus opposes this status quo it is inevitable that the power of the state shall respond. It responds with a method of discipline that “presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power” (Foucault, *Discipline* 190). I find the examination of the warrior’s wounds and virtues to be very Foucauldian in nature, and even though Rome is not ruled through Panopticism it does seem that its rulers are exposed to this examination. This turns Volumnia and the patricians to Machiavels, but Coriolanus believes himself to be above reproach.

The different political ideals brought to the table by this Roman general are bound up with both the patrician and soldier-like ideals taught to him by his mother. When he voices them, going against the current order, he commits himself to exile through his tragic struggle. He questions—rightly—the changeability and manipulability of the people’s voices: “Must these have voices, that can yield them now / And straight disclaim their tongues?” (3.1.36-37). It seems he prefers the structure of an army, with one clear authority—perhaps himself? He describes it thusly: “And my soul aches / To know, when two authorities are up, / Neither supreme, how soon confusion / May enter ‘twixt the gap of both and take / The one by

th'other" (3.1.108-112). These issues of democracy existed in Rome, were known by Shakespeare in his time and exist in the modern day. It is almost a just cause, but, like with everything Coriolanus does, he takes it too far: "we debase / The nature of our seats, and make the rabble / Call our cares fears; which will in time / Break ope the locks o'th'Senate and bring in / The crows to peck the eagles" (3.1.135-138). Unless, of course, his identity is so bound up with the state that the authority he desires is mainly for himself? He also says of those who oppose him in this scene that "Your dishonour / Mangles true judgement, and bereaves the state / Of that integrity which should become't" (3.1.157-159). What could be seen as bid for tyrannical authority, when viewed through the lens of subjectivity, could also be heroic resistance; one of the "anti-authority struggles" (Foucault, "Subject" 780) discussed by Foucault. Looking closer at "The Subject and Power" by Foucault for a moment, he describes such struggles like...

...struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. (780)

It is not a great leap of imagination to see that Coriolanus' identity is being limited in that way after reading the lines from the play above. While tyranny is not justified, his struggle for identity might very well be. Just as the quote from Foucault brings back the idea of imbalance of identity in relation to the state, Cynthia Marshall points out that "debate over the character of the hero – seen at one extreme as a man of valor and integrity, at the other as a selfish and dimensionless boy – is necessarily inflected by politics" (453). Politics will change perceptions of others as well as of oneself. In the end, these perceptions see Coriolanus exiled—perhaps because he is "too absolute" (3.2.39) or perhaps because "men judge more by appearances than by deeds" (Machiavelli, *Prince* 97). Either way, he believes that "there is a world elsewhere" (3.3.135)—perhaps suggesting that the world of war suits him better, or perhaps he wants to show that he does not have to rely on the state apparatus. Defiantly, he lets the people of Rome know that they have no power over him: "I banish you" (3.3.123).

Coriolanus will not abandon the image he has of himself, preferring exile: "I go alone, / Like to a lonely dragon" (4.1.29-30). Since he sees some of himself in Aufidius, he seeks out his nemesis while sticking to his absolutist beliefs: "If he slay me, / He does fair justice. If he give me way, / I'll do his country service" (4.4.24-26). With most of their interactions

covered in a previous section, I will not get into them too much here. Instead, I want to examine the notion of this ‘image’ that Coriolanus has of himself. There is heroism in sticking to it and turning one’s back on a manipulative state, but does this mean Coriolanus really is achieving self-sufficiency? Returning to Lacan’s mirror stage, he writes that it is “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan, “Mirror” 1164). Crucially, this subject “also represses as many signifiers as it selects, and in doing so, tries to hide something of itself” (Bailly 29). It is during the concluding acts of the play that the tragedy of this divided subject becomes clear:

Of course, it is not really uncanny at all that there should be a resemblance between Shakespeare’s tragic heroes and Lacanian human beings. We read from the present, and on the basis of the knowledges we take for granted. How else can we make sense of texts, especially texts as complex and subtle as Shakespearean tragedy? (Belsey, “Divided” 84)

Thus, if he has gained some freedom by leaving the state, he must have lost something as well. Perhaps he wishes to know his baser self, having “grown from man to dragon” (5.4.13) according to Menenius. It is in this situation that his virtues continue to work against him: “Aristotle states, ‘he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.’ [...] the virtuous Coriolanus, through his holocaustic aims toward Rome, inclines here more toward beast” (Langis 17). And so, while he views himself like a mythical creature, “wants nothing of a god but / eternity and a heaven to throne in” (5.3.23-24), he cannot reach such heights due to his status as a divided subject. As “politics at once moulds and manifests the mind” (Yoshioka 146), Coriolanus cannot quite break free; for he has made himself into a subject just as much as his surroundings—particularly his mother—have. As discussed at length in a previous section, the imbalances of this divided subject cannot stand against the combined forces of family and state that Volumnia brings to bear against her son.

Using the theoretical framework of this thesis, I want to interrogate where Coriolanus succeeds and where he fails in his endeavour. This is the endeavour being tested in act 5, during the confrontation with his family. By using the idea of the “delinquent” from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment* (273), it can be argued that Coriolanus gains more autonomy than any other character in this play. As I have noted in every other section of this chapter, the characters examined are all tied to the state in one way or another—unable to break free. Coriolanus, on the other hand, fits into the type of person presented by Foucault: “The delinquent is also to be distinguished from the offender in that he is not only the author of his acts (the author responsible in terms of certain criteria of free, conscious will), but is

linked to his offence by a whole bundle of complex threads (instincts, drives, tendencies, character)” (Foucault, *Discipline* 273). The fact that he has even begun such a journey has taken him further than other characters in terms of autonomy, and it is his uttered wish to continue on it: “I’ll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin” (5.3.34-37). While he denies the instinct mentioned by Foucault, he certainly possesses it anyway, alongside the other traits. He is allowed some brief exploration of freedom according to some, as well: “in belonging to Rome, Coriolanus himself is often used as its sword; he is a killer, and he is himself killed. But in seeking to exist outside Rome’s fictions, as I believe Coriolanus does, he also stands for other, more habitable forms of unprotected existence” (Kuzner 175). Ultimately, however, the forces stacked up against him will destroy him even as he rails against them—the one mercy being that he is, at least, aware of where his actions will bring him. For while he says: “All bond and privilege of nature, break! / Let it be virtuous to be obstinate” (5.3.25-26), it is a futile prayer in the face of his mother. She is the catalyst for his life, and “throughout the play, Coriolanus’ actions (and refusals of action) are locked into a relationship of aggression and dependency with his mother” (Clarke 129) that she will eventually win. Like language and politics, she existed before him and will stand triumphant as he dies. Catherine Belsey writes:

Coriolanus moves knowingly into the zone of death, alone and dispossessed. The ‘bond’ represents an imperative that cannot be resisted. It stands for nothing nameable, the contract and the link that binds living human beings, as organisms-in-culture, to the real from which, at the same time, as signifying subjects, they must also remain forever divided. (Belsey, “Divided” 92)

It is clear that a part of him knows that he has been defeated by “Rome’s mechanics” (5.3.83). Worse than that is the realisation that it is a machine he is a part of whether he wants it or not: “Like a dull actor now / I have forgot my part and I am out, / Even to a full disgrace” (5.3.41-43). Fumio Yoshioka writes of this final disgrace that it:

completes the process of humanization that has engulfed him. Coriolanus is neither a god nor a beast any longer: he is now exposed helplessly in his human vulnerability. Nor is he a Roman or a son, having been disowned by Mother Rome and Volumnia. Absolute alienation is the consequence of his pursuit of absolute autonomy.” (159)

Coriolanus is returned to the object he used to be as a soldier. He states as much upon his return to Aufidius: “I am returned your soldier” (5.6.71). Foucault writes in “The Subject and Power” that “the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him” (778). It could also be said that he is being disciplined by his mother one

final time: “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, *Discipline* 190). Coriolanus is divided both inside and out, and instead of learning of some greater truth he finds only death.

The final scene of *Coriolanus* shows audiences that the protagonist has changed *and* stayed the same. It is known that he has realised his place as an object, but as history repeats itself with the betrayer Aufidius and a populace that despises Coriolanus, he also shows audiences that he is still the same as he was: “Behind the mask of constancy, Coriolanus’ dramatic identity undergoes incessant modification and renewal” (Yoshioka 151). Just like in Rome, he taunts the populace: “Cut me to pieces, Volsces. Men and lads, / Stain all your edges on me. ‘Boy’! False hound! [...] like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Fluttered your Volsians in Corioles. / Alone I did it. ‘Boy’!” (5.6.112-117), reminding Aufidius and the Volsians that he has a claim to self-sufficiency, after all. “Alone I did it” (5.6.117) he says, proving that he still is proud of that which took place in the very beginning of the play. He will always be a soldier. And he will not return to Rome, sticking with his virtues and his new loyalties despite knowing where the path will lead: “Coriolanus’s decision to surrender to Aufidius, eventually offering his throat to his enemy as a gesture of his abjection, implies his renewed commitment to his rejection of the type of friendship offered by the state” (Anderson 54). He is not so much “a man by his own alms poisoned” (5.6.11) as he is as true to his self as he can be, despite the tragedy of it all. Hatlen states: “Selfhood, the creation of an autonomous subjectivity—this is the project of modernity itself. But this project is, Shakespeare coolly demonstrates, impossible (420). As a final nail in his coffin, “*Aufidius stands on him*” (5.6.135) as a final reminder that “nothing is more material, physical, corporeal than the exercise of power” (Foucault, *P/K* 57-58). Aufidius, the man who embraced the same means as the Roman and thus represents the powerful status quo, has crushed the delinquent that wanted to be “author of himself” (5.3.35).

The tragic aspects of the play all come together in its eponymous protagonist. His struggle for autonomy against a state that has very specific needs for him—as presented by his own mother—and against whose demands of examination he cannot stand. He takes everything to the extreme: as a soldier he takes a whole city on his own; as the people doubt him, he wishes for tyranny. He fights against the language that made him—unsuccessfully. And when he fights successfully against the city that made him, his own mother comes to unmake him. The steps toward freedom that he takes are reclaimed by the internalised virtues that he cannot escape. Standing as a Lacanian and Foucauldian subject, Coriolanus presents

audiences with more tragedy than an ancient hero who was obstinate in life and valued only in death. Even as he knows he is doomed, Coriolanus rails against injustice, rather inviting his own death than hear another lie.

5. Political Subjectivity in *Coriolanus*

In the previous chapter I wrote about the characters of *Coriolanus* and what they represent in terms of state power and subjectivity. In several cases I made reference to this institutional power that somehow compels characters—plebeians and patricians alike—to serve the cause of the state. In this chapter I would like to develop this concept of the state based on my previous analysis and theoretical framework. The issue of republicanism will be covered alongside an analysis of how the politics of the play can be read through a contemporary, post-structuralist lens. *Coriolanus* especially suffered from this system wherein other characters thrive, but what over-arching system can be found through a post-structuralist reading of the play?

5.1. The Republican Apparatus

The republic in *Coriolanus* is not the old and dying republic of *Julius Caesar*, but even so it seems to exert major influence over the play's characters. Coriolanus is even said to have been a part of the ousting of the old Roman kings (2.1.143). Thus, as a soldier he is a foundational part of the republic; through willing submission to the state apparatus as a soldier as discussed in the previous chapter. It is generally believed that the aspects of republicanism and democracy in Shakespeare's play are quite accurate. For example, Andrew Hadfield writes in his book *Shakespeare and Republicanism* that the portrayal of democracy in *Coriolanus* displays the bard's "particular interest in the history and meaning of republican Rome" (58). This opens the door for Machiavelli and later philosophers to chime in regarding the system itself and how it affects the individual.

First, I want to apply those Machiavellian thoughts to the idea of this Roman republic. In *Discourses on Livy*, he wrote extensively about Rome—and quite a bit about the republic as well, as has been noted in previous chapters. *Coriolanus* exposes audiences to two aspects that I believe are especially important, and that Machiavelli wrote about as well, namely impeachment and calumny. He stresses "how useful and necessary it is for republics to provide by their laws a channel by which the displeasure of the multitude against a single

citizen may find a vent” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 49). This is attempted in the play, and in the tribunes’ section of the close reading chapter I argued that this feature is endangered by the second: calumny. Machiavelli writes about “how hateful a thing” (*Discourses* 53) it is, and how it “is most rife in that State wherein impeachment is least practised, and the laws least favour it” (*Discourses* 53). Clearly the patricians are not used to being removed, since Coriolanus acts outraged when the people turn against him and his friends do not seem to have any solutions. Perhaps the whole affair would have had a happy ending, had the tribunes not decided to lie and fire up the populace in addition to their other concerns. It is this untested republic that is on display in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*. Audiences can see it severely imperilled by the human element in its struggle for self-sufficiency against the state and its agents.

Michelle T. Clarke writes about Machiavelli’s views on republicanism, noting that “Machiavelli understands republicanism to be a politics of limits or a form of collective life in which power is always bounded and contained” (328), but that it “is a fraught enterprise by its very nature, plagued by the incongruity of human nature itself” (326). Certainly, an attempt is made to limit the power of Coriolanus in the play, but as this initially fails there is a moment where the tribunes’ calumny could bring the republic down. For Coriolanus it might be a hunt for autonomy, but as ever he chooses the most extreme path to it. As Sicinius puts it, Coriolanus is a “viper / That would depopulate the city and / Be every man himself?” (3.1.263-265). As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Coriolanus rebels against the ruling order, and here I will take some time to elaborate on this. Having noticed the state’s part in his subjection, Coriolanus wants to eliminate it and “be every man himself” (3.1.265)—echoing the focus he himself puts on being and doing things alone. I argue that the destruction of the state that Coriolanus engages in reflects the struggle against authority of the Foucauldian subject, since he sees an enemy in every Roman. Foucault writes about the trickling down of power, which might explain the need for mass murder to achieve greater autonomy:

Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between every one who knows and every one who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign’s great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign’s power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function.
(Foucault, *P/K* 187)

As I will elaborate on in the next section, this over-arching order clearly exists in the play and is explained as something intangible—just as the subject described by post-structuralist authors. Menenius says about the current order that “The gods, not the patricians, make it, and / Your knees to them, not arms, must help” (1.1.71-72). In other words, he is telling the plebeians to submit to an intangible system that they understand to be ‘divine’; a system that makes them who they are, since “Romans are made, not born” (Feldherr 114). Is there more to be learned about Coriolanus’ subjection beneath this republican system?

As a matter of politics and psychology, there are a few more aspects of the play that can be seen as ruling over its characters. Coriolanus is named twice, and both times it seems the name belongs more to the state than to himself. ‘Martius’ after the Roman deity of war—a god that, as stated earlier, makes up the intangible system of power in Rome. The name ‘Coriolanus’ is given to him for audiences to see, and since it is given to him as a result of his virtues, he does not seem to mind it. He does not care that “even his name is not his own, but derives from the sacking of a city” (Burke 197). Even when Coriolanus rebels, he remains touched by this state. As Foucault writes: “Domination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society” (Foucault, “Subject” 795). It is not so strange that, from “a psychological perspective (in practice this has in recent years been psychoanalytic) the play directs us to an interest in the development of Coriolanus’s character” (Cavell 2). The doomed nature of this character is not always clear as “Shakespeare dramatises ways in which the role of leader constrains individual subjectivities even as individual drives attempt to redefine what that role of leader might be and who it might serve” (Roberts 29), but as I have already argued it is impossible for the subject to achieve autonomy in the republican Rome of *Coriolanus*. And, as I am arguing in this chapter, the political is thoroughly bound up with the personal. As Cavell writes about the play:

It is about the formation of the political, the founding of the city, about what it is that makes a rational animal fit for conversation, for civility. This play seems to think of this creation of the political, call it the public, as the overcoming of narcissism, incestuousness, and cannibalism; as if it perceives an identity among these relations. (Cavell 16)

While I believe there is an identity to be found in this reproduction of the state, it is not at all the identity of Coriolanus and it is not an autonomous one either. Rather, it is the savour of Rome—Volumnia—who can shape and reproduce the state. Coriolanus cares only for his own virtues, wants to consume the city to “be every man himself” (3.1.265). But even as the

last man standing, he would still be Caius Martius Coriolanus as a Lacanian subject: “Lacan, too, sees human beings as the uneasy conjunction of a vulnerable organism and a subjectivity brought into being from outside itself, composed of meanings that, while they remain irretrievably Other, are all we have to live by” (Belsey, “Divided” 84). But as I suggested in the section of Coriolanus and his death, he does not accept this even at the very end. There might be a “world elsewhere” (3.3.135) in theory, but it is not found in this play. This is why I consider Allen’s reading of Foucault so fruitful, since it recognises both the difficulty of autonomy while admitting that seeing one’s circumstances is not enough in order to gain autonomy:

As Foucault conceives it, the subject is constituted by forces that can be analysed empirically in the sense that the discursive and socio-cultural conditions of possibility for subjectivity in a given historically and culturally specific location can be uncovered through an analysis of power-knowledge regimes. But the subject has always to take up those conditions and it is in the taking-up of them that they can (potentially) be transformed. (48)

Complete determinism in our journey as subjects through controlling forces and state apparatuses would not allow for the same tragedy to be experienced. While not reproducing a capitalist system like, for example, Althusser suggests, this state apparatus still “endlessly reinforce[s] [...] the right degree of docility and fatalism in us, making us useful to the dominant order” (Mansfield 65). Time and again that seems to be the true tragedy of *Coriolanus*.

Having paid especially close attention to the theories that infringe on personhood in the societal and political context, I have found a failed attempt to overcome the Machiavellian, republican limitations by Coriolanus and the successful attempt to reproduce them by his mother. This political system is closely tied to the psychology of the play, reflecting Foucault’s ideas of power as saturating each part of society. Again, I have reflected on the tragedy of lost subjectivity in the face of overbearing state apparatuses, here paying specific attention to the faint chance subjects have to gain autonomy to shine a light on the tragedies of the play. It might be argued that the characters of Coriolanus are not aware of this tragedy, but I believe they are. In the next section, I will be interrogating references to the gods of the play, and how they are always tied to maintaining the status quo.

5.2. 'Divine' Order of Things

The republic might be new, but the established order in *Coriolanus* cannot be questioned with impunity. I have written extensively in this thesis about Coriolanus and his struggle against the order he once served, but the fact is that everyone suffers beneath it—even if some are more fortunate than others. In this section, I will examine the references to the driverless train of the state apparatus by the characters of the play—in its godly disguise.

In the very first scene, as audiences are introduced to Caius Martius, the general speaks of his disgust for the plebeians and how they unjustly criticise “the noble Senate, who, / Under the gods, keep you in awe, which else / Would feed on one another?” (1.1.84-86). In the section about the tribunes as well as in the previous section, I discussed how the patricians, particularly Menenius, ‘bestialize’ the plebeians. In this world order they are animals and the patricians are made to rule over them. “You may as well / Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them / Against the Roman state” (1.1.65-67), he tells them before telling them about the body metaphor—which is also made to make them seem lesser. Theodore F. Kaouk writes: “As Menenius represents it to the plebeians, the state’s sovereign power, once established, is itself not only irresistible but also mechanistic” (421). I think this is true, but I will also argue that the patricians do not have as much control over this state as they think they do.

In their paper, Dobski and Gish mention—in relation to the confrontation between Coriolanus (who stands for himself) and Volumnia (who stands for Rome)—that “even the greatest part of Rome must acknowledge that there is a greater whole that incorporates and binds it—that political community which not only defines us as citizens but also makes us distinctively human, and thus not beasts or gods” (184). This is in relation to the Aristotelian view discussed briefly earlier in this thesis. It clearly references the over-arching power structure which Menenius tells the plebeians that “the gods, not the patricians, make” (1.1.71). I will return to Coriolanus’ own godly aspirations shortly, but before once again examining his character I want to ground the idea of this over-arching framework. He does refer to it in the patrician manner in the beginning of the play as he lectures the plebeians, advising them not to rise up against “the noble Senate, who, / Under the gods, keep you in awe” (1.1.84-85), and again during his hearing when he has been forced to speak more kindly: “Th’ honoured / gods / Keep Rome in safety and the chairs of justice / Supplied with worthy men!” (3.3.34-37). Godhood in *Coriolanus* seems to be remarkably focused on the

governmental status quo. At this point it might be unsurprising to learn that this is also the Machiavellian approach:

And as the observance of the ordinances of religion is the cause of the greatness of a State, so their neglect is the occasion of its decline; since a kingdom without the fear of God must either fall to pieces, or must be maintained by the fear of some prince who supplies that influence not supplied by religion. (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 65)

As a system of control and government, religion persists after the death of a prince. Or, if put another way: it is a language that precedes us and will continue to exist once we are gone (Lacan, “Agency” 1169). I stated in my reading of the tribunes and the patricians that they are the ones holding up this order even if they stand on opposite sides of the class divide—since they all hold privileged positions. This religion—or general order of things—is inherited by them as subjects: “the subject, at its very birth, only gets a sense of its own definition from the outside, specifically from an image of itself returned to it from the world” (Mansfield 55). Tell a child that he will be a great soldier, and he might well become one. Tell a child that they are privileged, and they probably will be—all in the order they were born into. Certainly, there is some flexibility here, which gives these subjects some room to act: “in order for a certain relation of forces not only to maintain itself, but to accentuate, stabilise and broaden itself, a certain kind of manoeuvre is necessary. The psychiatrist had to manoeuvre in order to make himself recognised as part of the public hygiene system” (Foucault, *P/K* 206). While the current order is dependant on its subjects in the manner imagined by Althusser, where they exist “for the system that needs” (Mansfield 65) them, it definitely has the upper hand. It will outlive its subjects—and princes—after all (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 66). Having already established the role of the state in *Coriolanus* as looming above its subjects, it can now be seen clearly that the subjects are aware of this—although they know it as something divine. Breaking free from this system, as has been explored already, is nearly impossible to do alone—and it is very costly. The heavy penalty might result from the importance of submission to this state of things: “the safety of a commonwealth or kingdom lies, not in its having a ruler who governs it prudently while he lives, but in having one who so orders things, that when he dies, the State may still maintain itself” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 65). Being aware of a state that has this amount of control over its subjects must be tragic, and this idea of puppetry and acting is also present in the play—and will be discussed in a later chapter. Before that, however, I want to look at how Coriolanus himself is depicted as a god during his time in exile—and how even as he struggles against such recognition, he, again, does not have a choice.

Finally, I want to examine one more aspect of Coriolanus himself. Namely the references to him as a god and why he cannot seem to escape being labelled. Returning to Sarah Roberts' idea that "Shakespeare dramatises ways in which the role of leader constrains individual subjectivities" (29), it can be seen as natural that Coriolanus would like to achieve this god-like or beast-like status that lies outside the limits of the state that raised him. Honest in all things, he does possess some humility early in the play. And while he will gladly tell the senators that "I had rather have one scratch my head i'the'sun / When the alarum were struck than idly sit / To hear my nothings monstered" (2.2.74-76), audiences learn of the pride he takes in being as good as he is from his repeated claims to self-sufficiency. It is not difficult to see his own connection to Rome in that humility, but since he will always seek valour as a Lacanian "demand" to satisfy a distant "desire" (Mansfield 57), it is inevitable that he turns his back on that community—and the humility in turn. As he is being exiled, he points out that this community would be nothing without him, since the hunger-driven plebeians "Have the power still / To banish your defenders, till at length / Your ignorance – which finds not till it feels, / [...] deliver you / As most abated captives to some nation / That won you without blows!" (3.3.129-133). Clearly, he sees himself as a saviour, but his humility, I argue, is not a lie. When he says of the plebeians that "I would they would forget me" (2.3.58), I believe that is the truth of it. But because of his position, it becomes impossible for them to see past such a striking figure: "on more than one occasion Coriolanus is accorded the status of something like a god. His glamour is not dissimilar from that of the icons of contemporary celebrity culture" (Roberts 42). And so, while Coriolanus himself sees a "lonely dragon" (4.1.30) in the mirror, his peers want to impose another image entirely. Menenius says of the exiled Coriolanus that "He is their god. He leads them like a thing / Made by some other deity than Nature" (4.6.91-92). Roberts writes:

If the tension at the heart of the play lies in heightening the interactions between a fractious community and wilful leader, between a lone individual and the collective, then Coriolanus is a cogent study in political relations, teasing out the Aristotelian principle: 'He that is incapable of living in society is a god or a beast', both templates for something other than an ideal leader.
(43)

I will agree with the statement that Coriolanus is not a good leader. Not only because he seems intent to do everything alone, but due to his status as a subject with divided desires. He wants to serve Rome, but if he cannot do it on his own terms then Rome must burn. If he becomes a god, it is only in the eyes of those around him—and his divinity does not last long. For divinity in *Coriolanus* is reserved for even greater forces.

In this chapter I have written about the republic as a state apparatus allowing for influence to seep into every fissure of the human society living within it. I have detected a Machiavellian tendency to the republic that not only appears because the Florentine secretary endorsed the form of government, but also because the state takes on numerous strategies of Foucauldian reproduction in order to survive. With these strategies trickling down, the very fabric of society becomes integral to the way in which one can view subject formation of those who live in that society. Tragically, characters become aware of this state of being, but they attribute this tragedy not to ideological state apparatuses but to religion. The very religion that Machiavelli recommends in order to best reproduce a state. And while the character of Coriolanus is briefly alluded to as a god-like figure, it is more likely that he is a beast; alone in his struggle against the state apparatus that has him in its clutches. At this point it might seem, again, that I have gone rather too far in my search for the obliterated subject. I argue that it would not be a tragedy without such loss, and that this loss of agency is also evident in the many references to theatricality in the play. In the next chapter of this thesis I will interrogate this very aspect—using a Gramscian reading of Machiavelli.

6. Political Theatre

Developing the idea of subjects playing their parts on the stage of a political state apparatus, I want to dive more deeply into Machiavelli's theories and examine the many links to political theatre in *The Prince*, *Discourses on Livy* and *Coriolanus*. Following the format of the previous chapter, I will first discuss the issue of theatricality in relation to Machiavelli's theories and the state itself, before moving on to applying those theories and ideas to some of the play's characters. To pinpoint the issue of theatricality, I will be consulting readings of Machiavelli by Althusser and Gramsci—as analysed in my secondary literature. This specificity should clarify that, while Rome is a stage, the characters on it are merely puppets—torn this way and that by norms and needs.

6.1. Machiavelli and Theatricality

Coriolanus runs afoul of two major pieces of advice that Niccolò Machiavelli has for rulers on his journey to consulship. One is to “escape the infamy of those vices that would upset the state” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 88) and the other is the fact that “men judge more by appearances than by deeds” (Machiavelli, *Prince* 97). Coriolanus is told repeatedly by his mother that he

needs to change his behaviour in front of the crowd, but he fails to do that even after promising his mother he would make an attempt. Coriolanus fails at the performance of politics, and that is what this section will be about. I want to briefly lay out readings of Machiavelli's texts that reinforce this theatricality, so that it can later be seen just how severe Coriolanus' mistakes are and how connected they are to the ideas of the state and the individual suggested by this thesis.

While providing commentary on many matters of state, one thing that concerns Machiavelli the most is the well-being and reproduction of the state itself. Naturally, this engages many thinkers—especially Marxist thinkers—who see in Machiavelli's works reflections of our own time:

“Machiavelli is also a theorist of the functioning and reproduction of such a State once founded, for which he articulates in broad strokes the complex relationship between force and consent that will crucially inform Gramsci's theory of hegemony as well as Althusser's theory of ideology, though in different ways” (Bargu 425)

I will reflect on these readings and the relevance they have to this thesis in this section on theatricality, because I believe both of these readings touch on that aspect of the state. Crucially, the Gramscian reading applies *The Prince* to more than one individual, seeing the virtues championed within to be “an auto-reflection of the people itself upon its own ‘qualities, characteristics, duties and needs’, which it has until then observed only ‘as if in a dream’, in a resonant Shakespearean phrase – or more precisely, *as if in a drama*” (Thomas 451). The Shakespearean mention is just a fortunate happenstance in this instance, because the true connection I find is Lacanian—a direct link to the idea of the subject from my theory chapter: “the Subject can only come into being when it is not thinking, because the very act of any thinking that involves its ego creates a smokescreen behind which it disappears” (Bailly 29). A reflection of values performed in a dream in such a dramatic sense allows for this continuous incorporation of Machiavelli into this post-structuralist thesis. The Gramscian connection to the people themselves also brings some balance to the narrative of patricians and plebeians. His notion of the “Modern Prince” is meant to transform “the dispersed and pulverised lives of the subaltern social groups” according to Peter Thomas (444), and it can be argued that, in the hands of the scheming Sicinius and Brutus, that is just what transpires in *Coriolanus*. And as has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, “Machiavelli [...] wanted to propose the radical proposition that Roman dissensions and popular disorder proved beneficial to the Republic” (Brudney 515). While the tribunes ultimately fail, they do at the very least give the people a speaking role in a play about nobility, leadership and virtue.

Louis Althusser goes even further in his use of Machiavelli, with his views being used to “connect Althusser’s Marxist reading (lecture) of Machiavelli’s ‘theory of the New Prince’ with the possibility of producing a collective rupture into ISAs [Ideological State Apparatuses]” (Alloggio 86-87). While this is a fascinating view, and the way that Althusser sees Machiavelli as being truly unique is tempting to someone who appreciates both theorists, I do not agree completely with this reading. Althusser is of the belief that, regarding Machiavelli:

No one has followed him, even imperfectly, despite Machiavelli’s own statement in chapter 6 of the Prince that ‘men almost always walk on paths beaten by others and proceed in their actions by imitation’. On the contrary, Althusser contends, Machiavelli has not been followed; he remains alone because ‘no one has thought in his thought’, either with him or more devastatingly, of course, ever since. (Bargu 423)

And so, this is where I draw the line. Not only is Machiavelli correct in his statement that most paths are constantly re-tread, but it is proved by previous work in this thesis, with Lacanian subjects walking the road laid out for them. Machiavelli did acknowledge class conflict (Brudney 509), but he saw it as a way of reinforcing the status quo: “Machiavelli [...] wanted to propose the radical proposition that Roman dissensions and popular disorder proved beneficial to the Republic” (Brudney 515). The state is always placed first, and its reproduction as an Ideological State Apparatus that exists as a “*plurality*” (Althusser 1349), trickling down the food chain of a society in a Foucauldian manner. In Machiavelli this is also the case. Indeed, it is one of his chapter titles: “CHAPTER XLVII.—That love of his Country should lead a good Citizen to forget private Wrongs” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 482). Therefore, the state comes before the personal. The same that must be maintained by trickery and deception if necessary: “the very existence of Rome depended on the preservation of her army, that army must be saved at any sacrifice, for whether the means be honourable or ignominious” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 471). It is this oppressive state that I have described in this thesis, its influence so complete that it destroys autonomy—forcing people (in this case characters in a play) to *act* in accordance with its rules.

6.2. Theatricality in *Coriolanus*

In this section I want to provide some final evidence of the constructed nature of the subject through moments of theatricality in *Coriolanus*. The audience’s attention is often drawn to the protagonist’s reluctance to play the part assigned to him, and many acts in the play are

performed with ulterior motives. I argue that this is a part of the deception required in order to reproduce the Machiavellian state, and that the Lacanian subjects play this part well. By reading a few choice lines from the play alongside an analysis of theatricality from my secondary sources I aim to prove that this is the case.

As has been previously discussed, the constant struggle between Coriolanus and his patrician family and friends is a site where this issue of theatricality takes place. While he can accept one mask—“If any such be here - / As it were sin to doubt – that love this painting / Wherein you see me smeared” (1.6.67-69)—he struggles to make use of the deceptive tools of statecraft. When encountering the plebeians in order to ask for their voices, he says that “It is a part / That I shall blush in acting” (2.2.143-144), and he seems to be acutely aware of the fact that acting is done for a reward; that it is an unseemly transaction. During act 3, as he argues with his mother about being apologetic to the plebeians, he asks: “Would you have me / False to my nature? Rather say I play / The man I am” (3.2.14-16), and when he is convinced, he complains: “Away, my disposition, and possess me / Some harlot’s spirit!” (3.2.111-112). Not only must he abandon his own self-sufficiency to beg for voices, but he must give up his nature and act—as if performing for money. This is unacceptable to him, but he is forced into it—a microcosm, of sorts, of the entire play: “They semiotise the warrior’s body, dissolving it into that of an actor, a move Martius resists with every fibre of his threatened ‘being’” (Crunelle-Vanrigh 31). The patricians are more pragmatic and as I have described in previous chapters, more Machiavellian as well. Volumnia claims that her position is the intelligent approach: “I have a heart as little apt as yours, / But yet a brain that leads my use of anger / To better vantage” (3.2.29-31). Menenius goes even further in declaring his willingness to do anything in order to maintain the status quo: “For the whole state, I would put mine armour on, / Which I can scarcely bear” (3.2.35-36). These characters will gladly act to achieve their goals—and even die in the attempt. Coriolanus, on the other hand, has to be convinced and told to “Go, and be ruled” (3.2.90) by his mother. Volumnia has no scruples about telling Coriolanus to lie in order to achieve the greatest outcome and avoid bloodshed—which turns out to be her favoured strategy (3.2.53-69). It is argued rightly that “Volumnia presses him to playact for the sake of political empowerment” (Lehnhof 354), and from that can be inferred both the unstable world of Foucauldian political subjectivity and the predetermined path of the Lacanian subject. Cynthia Marshall writes that:

The play encourages viewers to respond to character and spectacle more than to any underlying ideological significance. At the dawn of what Lacan calls the ‘era of the ego,’ theatrical images functioned as the mirror or screen in which

viewers might glimpse their own projected identities (Lacan 1977: 71). As the displacement of self born of such projection/reflection became more and more disconcertingly evident, so too did the hunger for a jouissance that would dissolve structuring bonds. (Marshall 469)

Acting, therefore, only hurries Coriolanus down the path of destruction—even though he will play one part or another all the way to the end. In the world of *Coriolanus*, the characters are trapped on stage: “no stable truth can exist within language or symbolic systems; the individual subject is the effect of discursive forces and hence far from being self-determining” (Marshall 457). There is certainly proof of this tragedy following Coriolanus to his end, some of which I have provided already. But the issue of performance goes deeper, thus requiring slightly more attention.

As Coriolanus goes into exile, he again dons a willing disguise—although this time it is not a painting of blood (4.4.1). I believe this is because this action also belongs to his role as a soldier—a role he accepts. This is also the role he performs in a rebellious manner before the original state—Rome—comes to reclaim him. As his family approaches, he has not changed his mind about the transactional nature of performance: “What is that curtsy worth? Or those dove’s eyes / Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others. My mother bows, as if Olympus to a molehill should / In supplication nod” (5.3.27-31). Yet even though he is aware, this is the method that will see him twice defeated by the end of the play. Again, by acknowledging his place in the world, audiences can see that Coriolanus is conscious of the battle he is fighting in vain. He is certainly a Lacanian subject, referring to his mother as “the honoured mould / Wherein this trunk was framed” (5.3.24-25), and he is aware of his own confusion on the political stage: “Like a dull actor now / I have forgot my part and I am out” (5.3.41-42). After Volumnia’s victory in her verbal battle against her son, she receives her triumph; a standing ovation for her efforts (5.5.1). Coriolanus goes on to face the man he has beaten down countless times, and whose jealousy has made him embrace Machiavellian expedience.

Aufidius and his duplicity has been discussed in terms of subjectivity and politics earlier in this thesis, so all that remains is his own commitment to drama. Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh affords him much praise, writing that: “Aufidius, the Machiavel of the piece, the ‘promise-breaker’ (1.8.2) whose name bespeaks treason and his distance (*ab*) from promises (*fides*). He is the timeserving pragmatist, the theatrical performer treating his dupe to an extraordinary show of passionate commitment” (38). He can tell Coriolanus that he was moved by Volumnia’s speech (5.3.195) while at the same time planning to murder him

(5.3.201-203). As his plans come to fruition as a result of his commitment to theatricality, audiences are once again told that those who act in order to maintain the status quo are successful. In many ways the play is a love-letter to Machiavelli, placing these characters on stage in the world of the play and in reality, holding them up for Foucauldian “examination” and discarding the characters that try to escape it (Foucault, *Discipline* 204). It connects fittingly to the present day, as well:

Demonstrating the gap between subjective identity and shaping ideological codes, and then holding out this gap to viewers as a site of pleasure, *Coriolanus* spans ‘the stretch between theatrical and deconstructive meanings of ‘performative.’” In doing so it anticipates modern debates about the theatrical dimension of political life and about the political valency of entertainment. (Marshall 454)

The many scenes that show audiences that, “in spite of his best efforts, Coriolanus cannot escape the world of performance” (Lehnhof 365), serve this dual purpose—creating its subjects on stage and discarding them through political conflict.

This chapter has served the purpose of clarifying the inclusion of Machiavelli and connecting him to the theatrical of the play and its performing subjects. By examining Gramsci’s and Althusser’s views of the Florentine theorist, I have hopefully demonstrated his usefulness to my analysis, and by showing in more detail how the characters of the play *act* in order to win I hope to have shown how obeying the status quo preserves the divided subject. Perhaps the divided opinions on *Coriolanus* as a political play stems from this confusing performance of values, and I argue that is by design. The final judgement of Coriolanus is in the hands of the people—the audience—as Crunelle-Vanrigh writes: “In the aptly called marketplace, his worth is decided along a scale running from too much to not enough, the control switch resting in the hands of the people” (25). In this manner, the aspect of theatricality that can be found in the play displays the crisis of identity experienced by Coriolanus and the cynical status quo he struggles against.

7. Perceptions of *Coriolanus*

In this final chapter I would like to return to the beginning of this thesis, and the notion that *Coriolanus* has something to say about the political crises of the present day. In previous chapters I have examined political subjectivity, political theatre and how they serve to bring about crises of identity. The play shows division, and there is a common divide among those who view it as well, as made clear in the literature review. Therefore, I will spend these last

sections on how the play is often viewed, with particular focus on political civility and language; how is the political subject constructed and how does this play from the 17th century fit into the post-structuralist, political field of today? And does it matter which side one chooses when analysing *Coriolanus*?

7.1. Controlling the Narrative

Political beliefs and extremes will always exist, and in the 21st century they might seem to be more abundant than ever. But the fact is that the masses, their representatives and the wealthy are locked in a competition for power that has gone on for a long time. In this section I will argue that although these narratives are present in *Coriolanus* and in readings of the play, power itself ends up being the victor despite struggles of ideology. While some of these views will be covered in this short section to introduce the divide, the main argument will focus on the same factors I have been interrogating throughout this thesis—namely the self and the state.

In her guide to Shakespeare's plays, Laurie Maguire asks who the protagonist is and reflects on the fact that "Coriolanus is different things to different people, partly because we are in a political world where people have tactical functions rather than personal identities" (108). This lack of fixed meanings and identities is what I have sought to get to the bottom of in this thesis, and I will get back to the details in later sections. For now, I will give two brief examples of how the play has been used in recent history, beginning with the Nazis. Anselm Heinrich explains their method and, most importantly, the context wherein they used Shakespeare for their own ends: "The German appreciation of Shakespeare, therefore, did not start with the Nazi takeover in 1933 but – as in so many other artistic spheres – the Nazis cleverly used an already existing discourse, intensified and radicalized it, and incorporated it in their cultural propaganda" (Heinrich 232). Radicalisation is easily done in a fascist context, as mentioned by Stephen Greenblatt: "Coriolanus needs, in the customary, time-honored way, to ask for the people's votes. His anti-democratic extremism, however, cannot abide even this minimal show of respect" (169). It is a natural appeal, as explained earlier in this thesis: "the desire of the masses for fascism a historical problem which we have yet to secure the means of resolving" (Foucault, *P/K* 139). Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright, chose to place the focus on the people in his version of the play, but not without manipulating it to achieve his goals: "In his presentation of the Tribunes generally, Brecht adds to their dignity and

integrity. He omits Shakespeare's episode of some hundred odd lines (Il.iii. 153-261) in which the Tribunes persuade the plebeians to change their minds after giving Coriolanus their 'voices'" (Scofield 327). While there is a difference between championing tyranny and the will of the people, I want to point out these uses in order to champion the more Machiavellian view that "politics is not only about reasoned dialogue. It is about maneuvering to be heard through whatever means are available" (Pilisuk 347). Clearly this is done by using the play in the examples above. However, it is also done in the play through the citizens and their decision to be "resolved rather to die than to / famish" (1.1.4-5), by Coriolanus decision to fight Rome and by both Volumnia and Aufidius as they scheme against Coriolanus. In both cases power wins and the individual loses. This power is collected in and exercised by the state apparatus in the Foucauldian sense: "power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions." (Foucault, "Subject" 793). This is the power that affects the characters of *Coriolanus*, and that imbues Volumnia with the attitude that anything can be sacrificed in order to further the state's goals—in the Machiavellian sense. She can lecture plebeians, patricians and her own son in order to save the state from violence and the corruption that is "wholly incompatible with a free government, because it results from an inequality which pervades the State and can only be removed by employing unusual and very violent remedies, such as few are willing or know how to employ" (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 85). Again, this is why she is the "life of Rome" (5.5.1).

This recapitulation serves as a reminder of just how controversial *Coriolanus* has been over the years, and of how it speaks to individuals differently depending on political beliefs. Shrank writes that "interpretations of *Coriolanus* have been—almost without exception—politicized" (Shrank 406), and I agree. However, I will argue that such interpretations—that either demonise or make a hero of Coriolanus or the populace respectively—rather miss the point of the struggle of identity in the play. It is a struggle that is just as political and relevant no matter what 'virtues' one subscribes to, although it might not be as clear-cut as the working classes pitted against the bourgeoisie. Audiences are shown a battle between the individual and the societal force that made it; an essence of power that has taken its own form with the citizens being nothing more than its body and voice. But what does this say about the political subject of today and the methods used to keep them from being the authors of their own lives?

7.2. Contemporary Political Subjectivity

In this section I will briefly describe the political subject from the point of view of political scientists in addition to the view adopted in the rest of the paper. I will focus on the similarities to the subject as it has been discussed thus far, and not veer off too far into contemporary discourse about politics. My aim is to locate the aspect of the subject that might be drawn to the conflict in *Coriolanus*, revealing the ongoing nature of that conflict into the present day.

The language used to describe the contemporary, political subject is similar to that used by theorists mentioned earlier in this thesis, and while there have been developments it is clear that some fundamental likenesses remain. There is a generally optimistic view presented by political scientists like Ranabir Samaddar that the “political subject is formed through political solidarity” (79). However, in the same breath he has to admit that “there is no singular self that pre-exists our relations with others” (Samaddar 83), echoing the theories presented earlier in this paper that suggest subject formation takes place as one interacts with the regime one is born into. It fits particularly into the Foucauldian view, where:

Foucault helps suggest lines of approach to, for example, the contemporary (and not just ‘historical’) political subject, lines that emphasize not progressive development but the contingency of differences, differences rendered by articulated identities, which are always specific, but always also in a condition of development. (Seitz 452)

This suggests that there is an aspect to this subject that remains static throughout the ages, explaining why it is such a simple thing for modern people to connect with a subject’s struggle not only in plays like *Coriolanus* but other plays by Shakespeare as well. But as works by Althusser and Foucault have suggested, governments “train their subjects into an aestheticized politics of civic identity” (Miller 110); a fact that is perhaps clearer in *Coriolanus* than in any other plays by the bard. This refers particularly to my chapter on theatricality. It is clear that “Roman identity in *Coriolanus* hinges on place and, increasingly, on participation: on the city and on the civic, or civil, processes that comprise city life” (Shrank 422), and the crucial conflict comes not from a battle between states or even between classes, but from the play’s “protagonist’s refusal to partake in civic life or to moderate his excessive individualism for the common good” (Shrank 423). As previous chapters have explored, “an individual human being cannot become coterminous with the polity into which he is born, or separate himself entirely from it: no man can become his own father, and no man can name himself” (Hatlen 419), and it is this fact that makes the identity crisis central to the play’s conflict and makes the issue of ideology less important as a result. The subject

becomes suspended between itself and the state—a state with the singular objective of reproducing itself—and is thus divided no matter the mask the state is wearing to motivate its action. By their inclusion into the state as soon as they are born, subjects become the “vehicles of power” (Ansell-Pearson 276) even as they seek to make something of themselves. This is true in *Coriolanus*, the time Foucault was writing in as well as in the 21st century. Valour, it turns out, has not been the foremost virtue for a long time. Instead, subjects become trapped in a discourse of power that obscures the truth of their existence.

An interesting aspect of achieving this obscuring effect is the idea of ‘civility’. It is preached by Greenblatt as he says that the procedure used to elect Coriolanus “depends on all parties sharing a fundamental respect for the system” (169), even as he notes the value of the tribunes and their conniving, claiming that they make the populace see a “plain truth” (169). It is a simple thing to condemn one’s opponent for not respecting democracy. Indeed, Menenius offers a similar call for civility as he confronts the citizens: “your most grave belly was deliberate, / Not rash like his accusers” (1.1.26-27). In the end, the tribunes do not “prove their mettle” (Greenblatt 169), as it is left to Volumnia to save the day—and not by appealing to the people or to the ruling elite, but to the state. Interestingly, the idea of civility is meant to prevent the great division seen in *Coriolanus*, and provide a space for the individual:

Contemporary political society seems more willing than in the past to know something of subjective experience. There are a number of protocols for civility—for example, those of restorative justice—that are designed to facilitate individual self-awareness and to support individuals so that they do not have to revert to ‘splitting.’ Splitting is a psychic defense whereby the individual shores up his or her sense of self by splitting off what is good from what is bad, casting the bad outside him(her)self, and seeking to hold together what is left inside by identifying it with the good. (Yeatman and Żółkoś 13)

I believe this might well be true, but it must be noted that the divisions caused by a lack of civility will ultimately affect the state negatively. In the Machiavellian sense, this becomes yet another way of maintaining a level of discourse that prevents a violent uprising of some sort, just like the ability to accuse (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 49). There is an issue of both language and truth here, which I will get to in the final section of this chapter. Before that, however, I want to present one more view of civility. Namely, one that sees it as a method for the state to control itself: “the state must restrain itself in this way because if it did not, civility’s capacity to restrain it would either disappear or be severely weakened, with the result that the state itself would either disappear or be severely weakened, for the restraint has ultimately made the state more effective and more durable” (Wickham et al. 150). Again, the

state is serving only itself by presenting these concepts as ‘gifts’ to those born into its regime. And individuals like Coriolanus who will not be ‘civil’ are ostracised.

By resisting civility, however, he shines a light on the theatricality of politics and the state: “Coriolanus is not an actor; in Shakespeare’s world this means he is unqualified to be a successful politician” (Maguire 107). Miller explains how this aspect survives into contemporary, post-modern times:

For the postmodern is nostalgic for a historically ramified and derived meaning (Huyssen 613). Ironically, this means that, at the level of policy, the state is enabled to instantiate the new as the already extant, precisely by virtue of what Fredric Jameson calls ‘an age that has forgotten how to think historically’ (ix). Foucault historicizes and renders specific the varied levels of determination that are coming to organize these new social structures. (Miller 111-112)

Perhaps the problematic nature of subjectivity set against the state comes from this inability to learn from history, and these “new social structures” (Miller 112) are not as new as they seem. If anything, the problem is only quantified by the many meanings brought about by post-structuralist and post-modern interpretations. ‘Civility’ turns out to be little more than a strategy for the state to maintain the status quo both internally and externally both in *Coriolanus* and in the real world. It highlights the problem of truth and language, since the latter especially “is used to convince people to gather into societies and subsequently to allow them to function as societies, as ‘polite or courteous’ behavior and speech enable social cohesion” (Shrank 410). Once more, this aspect of language becomes sinister if viewed through the Lacanian lens, making subjects into puppets playing out the state’s wants and needs. However, it is not all doom and gloom for the individual. Foucault did consider the issue of truth-telling, and that is what I am going to spend the last section of this thesis discussing—perhaps in order to find a small glimmer of hope for the political subject.

7.3. Finding the Truth

Foucault’s study of ‘parrhesia’—or truth-telling—reveals a path to self-expression for the subject. It is a thought expressed towards the end of his life, but it should be mentioned in a thesis so preoccupied with issues of language, reality and the subject. In earlier works, Foucault asked: “What relation is there between language and being, and is it really to being that language is always addressed—at least, language that speaks truly?” (*OoT* 306). In this thesis, I have mostly used his theories, alongside those of Lacan, Althusser and Machiavelli in order to paint a bleak picture of the politics in *Coriolanus* and, indeed, of politics as a

whole. And while I stand by my analysis, I want to interrogate parrhesia with the help of Foucault and some other readings of his ideas.

It should be clarified that parrhesia does not offer some ultimate truth. Instead, it might offer a personal truth in a world torn by the conflicts highlighted in previous chapters. Daniele Lorenzini captures two important definitions of the concept in her article: “*parresia* too, as performative and passionate utterance, is neither nonsense nor true or false” (257). The theatrical and impulsive truth of a post-truth world does speak to the constructed nature of a civilisation humankind has lost control over, but it also speaks to the individual: “Foucault’s study of *parresia* can provide us with a class of ethical utterances that are neither true nor false but whose truthfulness plays an essential role for the speaker in the act of uttering them” (Lorenzini 266). This act is subversive to society but rewarding for the individual—an idea that is not alien to readers and audiences of *Coriolanus*. The subversive nature of this act is elaborated on by Torben Dyrberg in his reading of Foucault:

Foucault’s attempt to establish the specificity and autonomy of the political realm is directly linked to his inclination to pinpoint the challenges and pitfalls of democracy as a willed political community. Thus, he pays attention to the unstable relationship between democracy and *parrhesia*: although they condition each other, *parrhesia* might turn out to be manipulative and link up with abuses of power. Hence, democracy can never be secured, because that which conditions it might also destabilize it. (Dyrberg 285)

The struggle of democracy in *Coriolanus* is personified by the play’s protagonist, but as Dyrberg mentions this type of speech act can be used to manipulate, and there are numerous examples of that in the play: from the tribunes’ “lay the fault on us” (2.3.233) to Volumnia’s “I am hushed until our city be afire, / And then I’ll speak a little” (5.3.182). Such statements, seemingly full of self-sacrifice, hide the ulterior motives of these Machiavellian characters who care only for themselves or the preservation of the state. True parrhesia in the Foucauldian sense, I argue, is performed by Coriolanus himself. Consider that:

...the parrhesiast manifests his commitment to the truthfulness of what he says, not only in risking a friendship or his own life in order to utter what he thinks to be true, but also through the harmony, through the homophony he displays between his *logos* and his *bios*—that is, between what he thinks and what he says and at the same time between what he says and his real, actual way of living. (Lorenzini 266)

And consider thereafter the crucial turning points in the play itself. Nearly all of them come as a result of Coriolanus’ telling of what he believes is his own truth, no matter whether it has been handed down to him by Rome or by his mother. From the very beginning of the play when Coriolanus first appears, telling the plebeians that “who deserves greatness / Deserves

your hate” (1.1.174-175), through the “you common cry of curs”-speech (3.3.120) and finally to the very end when he expresses his greatness one last time: “like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles, / Alone I did it” (5.6.115-117). With the concept of parrhesia in mind, one can not only witness how Coriolanus is tormented as a subject in relation to the state—but also how he manages to express his individuality even as it disconnects him from his country, his friends and his family. He might have been turned into something damaged by his mother and by the language that raised him, but the way in which he *lives* his truth does grant him some of the agency he seeks—and makes him worthy of a “noble memory” (5.6.155).

8. Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to demonstrate how the subject is at risk of losing its identity in William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, and how the play can be viewed through a contemporary, post-structuralist lens. This frequently politicised play has seen many interpretations over the years, but in my reading, ideology has played less of a role than it does in more traditional analyses. The battle is between the state apparatus and the individual instead of between the people and the bourgeoisie, and I have argued that the subject is unmade by its resistance to this greater, uncontrollable force. Leadership in *Coriolanus* is, for the most part, an aspect of the status quo exercised by both leaders of the people and the aristocracy. The very language of leadership is the language of the state, and thus characters like the tribunes and the patricians end up serving the status quo—although the patricians, being friends with Coriolanus, find it difficult to negotiate that friendship as he is exiled.

The infamous body metaphor does leave out the head, and it is a headless state that moves forward of its own will that controls the actions of characters in the play. This headless state is the state imagined by Foucault in his works; a system that by its very nature sees subjects divided within themselves. Having received their personhood from the outside world through a language of obscuring virtues, many of the play’s subjects move forward with confusion as a result of this. Volumnia is an exception to this, as she represents the state above all else—including her son. As “the life of Rome” (5.5.1), she becomes one of the play’s triumphant victors by embracing the virtues of Machiavelli. These virtues establish and maintain a stable republic, and it is not a sin to use trickery in order to achieve that end. Likewise, Aufidius employs that same trickery in order to defeat his rival, falling into similar possession by the state apparatus—stuck praising virtues he does not himself possess. By making use of close reading I believe I have found sufficient evidence to suggest that the

state is victorious through its many agents. All with the support of theories of subjection by Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, and of political theories of republicanism, theatricality and state apparatuses laid out by Niccolò Machiavelli and his modern interpreters.

I have read the republic as a stage upon which subjects play out their roles, seldom aware of why they even do so. In *Coriolanus*, reference is often made to ‘gods’ that maintain this elusive order—something I interpret as a confused understanding of the fact that the state is really the Foucauldian runaway train. For the most part, characters would rather remain on board. Friendship and family ties are only exploited in such a cynical environment. Aufidius and Coriolanus might consider each other as mirror images at first, but Aufidius’ realisation that he will never be Coriolanus’ equal breaks down his honour and so he chooses trickery; riling up the crowd much like the self-serving tribunes. The only character to truly rebel against this system, however, becomes the most tormented of all.

Caius Martius Coriolanus shouts and fights his way through the play, always willing to tell his own truth in the face of an oppressive state represented by his friends, his family and even by his enemies. He struggles with the image of himself, championing the military virtues taught to him by his mother but rejecting the world of Machiavellian power and theatre. He wishes to stand out in a world that wants to incorporate him, and as a subject divided between self-sufficiency and maintaining the military role given to him, he is only partially successful. That is what I have argued with the help of Foucault and Lacan. He refuses the language given to him and rejects the state he is supposed to serve, but everyone around him still sees him through those narrow meanings. Thus, he becomes a character that both changes and stays the same, accepting death as he speaks his final truth.

In the final chapter I also looked at perceptions of the play as a political work and came to the conclusion that the obfuscation of ideology that exists in the play remains with us as political subjects, still limiting us in much the same way as Coriolanus is limited. For politically motivated uses of the play have always had to include some sort of addition or reduction. Indeed, I believe that this is because the play is not truly about politics in this sense, but about the politics of the subject. In Shakespeare’s fictional Rome and in contemporary discourse there is an emphasis on the issue of ‘civility’; a word that Machiavelli might have found to be very useful for maintaining the status quo in republics. By dancing to the tune of civility, the strife brought about by inequality can be suppressed. This is where I had to include a section on Foucault’s ideas on parrhesia, since otherwise this thesis would have been nothing but doom and gloom not only for fictional subjects—but for all.

Related to the idea of Coriolanus being able to speak his ‘own truth’, parrhesia gives subjects the chance to sacrifice in order to establish their own, passionate utterances. The play’s protagonist stands out the most during such passionate moments, and speaks out thusly just before his death—sacrificing everything to establish himself as the unsurpassable soldier he is. While his actions come to him partially through linguistic influences as interpreted by Lacan or by examination and discipline as described by Foucault, he is able to make of that something unique—and live his own truth in times of passion. As a protagonist and subject he might not be very likeable, striking out against state, friends and family, but these are the sacrifices that allow him to be his own man. And so, while Volumnia is celebrated for her Machiavellian achievements, her son is celebrated in life and in death for sticking to seemingly impossible standards—even dying for them. Thus, my final verdict remains that the subject in William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* is indeed destroyed: most of the characters submit to the state apparatus, and even Coriolanus is only half a subject, standing out only in his greatest moments. Yet I also believe that the *possibility* of speaking one’s own truth sends a powerful message—and it makes the tragedy all the more hard-hitting when most subjects use only the language of the regime, and the one subject that finds a fragment of himself is killed for it.

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Abstract English/German

This thesis investigates the issue of post-structuralist subjectivity in the play *Coriolanus* by William Shakespeare using the theories of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Niccolò Machiavelli. Ideas of political discourse, the ‘mirror stage’ of subject formation and the virtues of leadership will all be central to the thesis. It is argued that the dynamics of the play can be seen through a post-structuralist lens with Lacanian subjects made by the world around them interacting with a Machiavellian state of Foucauldian power relations. The thesis will interrogate the characters of the play and their relation to the state as well as to the journey made by each subject throughout. How are these characters affected by their relationship to the state and with each other? By looking at issues of self-sufficiency, politics and theatricality, the goal is to shine a light on the strain put on an individual by political forces—and find the tragedy not only in the death of Coriolanus, but in that of the subject as well.

Diese Dissertation untersucht das Thema der poststrukturalistischen Subjektivität im Stück *Coriolanus* von William Shakespeare anhand der Theorien von Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan und Niccolò Machiavelli. Ideen des politischen Diskurses, die „Spiegelphase“ der Subjektbildung und die Tugenden der Führung werden im Mittelpunkt der Arbeit stehen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Dynamik des Stücks durch eine poststrukturalistische Linse mit lakianischen Subjektivität gesehen werden kann, die von der Welt um sie herum in Wechselwirkung mit einem machiavellistischen Zustand der Machtverhältnisse von Foucault gemacht wurden. Die Dissertation wird die Charaktere des Stücks und ihre Beziehung zum Staat sowie zu der Reise befragen, die jedes Thema während des gesamten Stücks unternommen hat. Wie wirken sich diese Charaktere auf ihre Beziehung zum Staat und untereinander aus? Das Ziel ist, durch Betrachtung der Themen Autarkie, Politik und Theatralik die Belastung des Einzelnen durch die politischen Kräfte zu beleuchten - und die Tragödie nicht nur im Tod von Coriolanus, sondern auch in das Subjekt zu finden.