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Traductions
introuvables

Coriolan

by Alexandre Hardy

Translated with Introduction
by Richard Hillman

Référence électronique

Translation to *Coriolan*

by Alexandre Hardy

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CORIOLAN

TRAGEDY

By ALEXANDRE HARDY,
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Argument

Three words will summarise this subject, so well treated and set forth in all its particulars by Plutarch in the life of this great personage, which I would unhesitatingly recommend the reader to consult as its true source. And it will suffice to say that Coriolan, after many notable services rendered to his country, is finally constrained to yield to the envy of the Roman people, who, for supposed crimes, condemn him to perpetual exile. The injury is so keenly felt and so incompatible with his great spirit that he resolves on vengeance at whatever cost. With this design he resorts to Amfidie, the military leader of the Volscian people, a strong nation, and the chief enemy of the Romans, who had taken many towns from them. Amfidie receives him with the utmost courtesy, has him in full assembly elected their field commander against the Romans, whom, with a strong arm, he reduces to defending themselves in the city of Rome, under siege from all sides. The Romans, after some resistance, and assaulted by famine and by dissensions within, as by enemies from without, send to him one embassy after another. But his irreconcilable hatred leads him to propose to them conditions of peace so unequal, shameful, and impossible to imagine that, when they return unsuccessfully, the priests are dispatched in solemn pomp, so that piety might move him with greater pity for his wretched country, deprived of good fortune by his exile. But this was fruitless effort as far as he was concerned, for he seemed to live and breathe only for the total destruction of his own people. In the midst of the general despair, at the persuasion and sole initiative of Valerie, a virtuous Roman lady of the race of Publicola, his mother, his wife, and his children went to seek him out in his camp, to such an effect that their prayers struck home, and that, natural instinct having prevailed over that inflexible constancy, he caused the siege to be raised by the Volsciens. The latter killed him at his return at the instigation of Amfidie, his rival for glory, as a traitor to their nation and one who, when he could have taken Rome, forfeited the occasion to gratify a mother. Few subjects will be found in Roman history more worthy of the theatre than this one.

*Characters*¹

Coriolan

Volomnie, mother of Coriolan

Ædiles

Licinie, tribune of the people

Chorus of Romans

The Senate

Amfidie

Page

Ambassadors

Council of the Volscians

Valerie

Troupe of Roman women

Verginie, wife of Coriolan (non-speaking)

Chorus of Volscians

Messenger

¹ Coriolan's son is missing from this list and was probably represented on stage by a doll; see below, ll. 935-36, and Cavaillé, ed., n. 134. This is obviously a very different (and differently coded) use of the figure from that found in *Coriolanus*, although Shakespeare likewise gives Coriolanus a single son, not children, as in Plutarch. (Cf., however, Hardy's Argument and below, l. 816.)

Act I

Scene i (Coriolan, Volomnie)

CORIAN

1 If truly, Jupiter, your punishing right hand
 2 Deals dreadful justice no wrongdoer can withstand,
 3 If lightning-bolts you wield to avenge the offence
 4 A mob of ingrates commits against innocence,
 5 If always in quarrels you take the righteous part,
 6 Will you not punish the criminal boldness, upstart
 7 Insolence, the gross and irreparable wrong
 8 Whose imprint on my heart and brow is still so strong?
 9 Those that I preserved at the peril of my life,
 10 A revolted rabble of plebeian slaves, rife
 11 With rebellion, the scum of the earth, which profusion
 12 Of liberty provokes to propagate confusion—
 13 Those who have served in armies under my command,
 14 Who know my victories dispersed in every land,
 15 Who thanks to me alone dwell in grandeur and peace,
 16 With ardent hostility conspire my decease,
 17 Dare with words and with deeds to do me injuries,
 18 Slight that name which at the walls of Corioles
 19 My valour gained for itself, when all in one day,
 20 That town subdued, back to the camp I made my way,
 21 Which, from the city under siege a certain distance,
 22 Prepared to offer the relieving force resistance.
 23 There my right hand, unflagging in the acts of Mars,
 24 Could not be content to venture on common jars,
 25 Obtained the Consul's order to take on in the fight
 26 The one who had best hope of countering his might,
 27 Antium's brave warrior—whom that hand struck home,
 28 Thus rescuing from death a citizen of Rome
 29 In the sight of all, who, enraptured by the marvel,
 30 Judged at that moment that my valour had no equal,
 31 Saw me out of breath, with my bloody wounds all stained,
 32 So many foes defeated, with such travail pained,

33 Pursuing nonetheless their army in full flight,
 34 A human flood dispersed by a cowardly fright,
 35 Pursuing as does the furious charging bull
 36 In a grassy pasture his unfortunate rival;
 37 So did I perform, seeking the glory alone
 38 Of public acknowledgement,² for my virtue known,
 39 More content to see my garlanded head surrounded
 40 With leaves of Dodona, where Oracles abounded,³
 41 My praises, chanted by the common mouth, to hear,
 42 Than with treasures confined beneath the lunar sphere—
 43 More content to bring my mother in victory
 44 An unspoken joy, my heart exulting within me,
 45 To receive her praise, in her sweet embrace sustained,
 46 Than to enrich my greed with heaps by pillage gained.
 47 But what good have I gleaned from all the blood I shed?
 48 Why by an honour now proved vain was I so led?
 49 That was where the serpent of Envy took its birth,
 50 And as my glory increased, so it grew in girth.
 51 Envy has since incited against me the hate
 52 Of the idle commons in our city called “great”—
 53 Hate that has carried to this point of insolence:
 54 But that the Senate rendered their rage less intense,
 55 Condemned to death with no formality of trial,
 56 All hopes of curbing their excess met with denial,
 57 My head from the Tarpeian rock precipitated
 58 Would have slaked their fury bloodthirsty and frustrated.
 59 Yes, and one more time again I must be exposed
 60 To whatever concocted lies may be imposed:
 61 I must, it seems, submit. I, come of such a race—

2 Orig.: “n’affectant que la gloire / D’un salaire public”. The context strongly suggests that “salaire” is used in its well-established figurative sense.

3 “Plus content de me voir le chef environné / De l’arbre de Dodone aux Oracles donné”. The allusion is to the *corona civica*, composed of oak leaves, betowed for saving the life of a Roman citizen. The detail, with explanation, comes from Plutarch; see *The Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus*, *Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (1579), trans. Thomas North, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols., vol. 5: *The Roman Plays: Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus* (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 507). (This edition is used for subsequent citations.) The image, however, is enfolded into the rustling leaves of the oaks at Dodona, in which the voices of the gods were heard.

62 To go before the Tribunes, of that populace
 63 Abide the good judgement? O you heavens! I blush
 64 At the thought! I should have hurtled into the crush,
 65 Dying with my sword in hand, magnanimously,
 66 Purging with its blood such crass criminality.
 67 Be sure, you hydra with the hundred heads, be sure,
 68 Vessel that changing winds blow in endless detour,
 69 For so I see it—that is no slanderous wrong—
 70 The insult will not remain unpunished for long.
 71 Your potency usurped I will render so slight
 72 That nevermore between us will be any fight,
 73 And I shall wholly extinguish your raging madness—
 74 But my mother comes to meet me in anxious sadness.⁴

VOLOMNIE

75 This is the fateful day that will grant you, my son,
 76 Your enemies by your humility undone:
 77 You shall crush, by bearing, the fierce ingratitude
 78 And the malignant rancour of that multitude;
 79 You charm its angry rage the instant you give way.
 80 Alas! Do not, therefore, let your passion hold sway.
 81 Yield but for a moment, and they will be content,
 82 And so you will pacify a horrible torment
 83 Causing divided Rome to tremble in your name:
 84 Piety could not have any worthier aim
 85 Or be shown, towards a mother, more becomingly—
 86 Or towards the country—than in heeding my plea.

CORIOLAN

87 Madam, a thousand deaths you will see me endure
 88 Rather than supplicate its pardon to procure,
 89 Rather than give a vile people reason to vaunt
 90 That by imprinting fear my spirit they could daunt,
 91 That those who as their lord ought to acknowledge me

4 In Plutarch's account Volumnia plays no part in trying to persuade Coriolanus to moderation, in contrast, of course, with Shakespeare's play (esp. in III.ii). References to the latter are based on William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. R. Brian Parker, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

92 Should prevail in honour to the smallest degree;
 93 What, me go before the commons on bended knee?
 94 No, I will not do it, and I fear not their fury.

VOLOMNIÉ

95 Yet you are accused—before them you must respond.

CORIOŁAN

96 My innocence is for me, the Senate my bond.

VOLOMNIÉ

97 *Innocence often yields when faced with calumny.*
 98 These Tribunes made you suspected of tyranny,
 99 A crime whose mere name in each and every nation
 100 Was, and always in Rome will be, abomination—
 101 Capable of killing, all forms of law aside,
 102 Anyone at all with such foul suspicion dyed.

CORIOŁAN

103 Willful suspicion—to refute it will be easy;
 104 No detriment whatever can such slander do me.

VOLOMNIÉ

105 If only you humble yourself, I do not doubt
 106 Your peaceful discharge: the people will hear you out.

CORIOŁAN

107 It shall never happen that my humility
 108 Shall increase their credit, and their temerity.

VOLOMNIÉ

109 Wretched Volomnie! O mother unfortunate!
 110 You see yourself disdained, your offspring obstinate.
 111 Your counsel, your reasons, your prayers, your tears' full flood
 112 Cannot moderate these hot outbursts of his blood,
 113 Nor bring him from that storm-cloud to withdraw his head
 114 Which from afar you perceive beginning to spread.
 115 Yet again, my child, as my only comfort cherished,
 116 By the sacred spirit of your father long-perished,

117 By these hands that embrace your warlike countenance,
 118 By piety, once yours in any circumstance,
 119 By these grey hairs, these breasts which in your infancy
 120 Once nourished you, by this profound anxiety
 121 Which for your sake devours my fear-stricken soul,
 122 In this danger keep your anger under control;
 123 Out of pure pity let my appeal overrule,
 124 Let me turn your frail barque away from this whirlpool.
 125 Consider my salutary words in your heart;
 126 Reflect that pride ever dwells alone and apart,
 127 That in regions far from this people who are free,
 128 Sometimes a king will swerve from rigid monarchy,
 129 Yields to the will of one who holds the upper hand,
 130 Hides his losses and, prudent, fails to reprimand.
 131 *Patience prevails—it overcomes everywhere;*
 132 *No road so arduous that patience falters there.*
 133 Here is another point worthy consideration:
 134 With the peace it desires enjoyed by our nation,
 135 Men such as you are bound to be the most neglected,
 136 Most wronged by plebeians with insolence infected.
 137 Their leaders are treated as the plane-tree is used—
 138 In tranquil weather by the traveller abused,
 139 Who strips its foliage, which is later regretted
 140 When by a vengeful cloud he is thoroughly wetted.
 141 Just so we see cast high and dry upon the shore
 142 A ship the ravages of time in pieces tore,
 143 Which the thankless merchant has often dispossessed
 144 Of the Indies' coveted treasures, East and West—
 145 A ship that built his fortune, kept his life in safety.
 146 Such, even such, are the daily effects of envy,
 147 Examples to make you yield with a softened air,
 148 Withdraw yourself from trouble and free me from care.

CORIOLAN

149 Madam, my honour safe, I will do anything.

VOLOMNIE

150 Listen, there's someone at the door, it's opening . . .
 151 Gods! An Aedile! My senses have never so trembled.

Scene ii

(Aedile, Coriolan, Volomnie, Licinie, Chorus of Romans, the Senate)

AEDILE

152 The Senate, the Tribunes, and the people assembled
 153 Summon you, resolved to settle your case at once;
 154 Therefore do not delay in obeying their summons.

CORIOLAN

155 Let us go, since the course of unjust destiny
 156 Hands us over to that hydra of mutiny;
 157 Let us go put its gross imposture to the test
 158 And call on the gods the injury to attest.

VOLOMNIÉ

159 Jupiter! Divine protector of our whole nation,
 160 May you protect my son—that is my supplication:
 161 Inspire his heart⁵ and restore to harmony
 162 This country divided, by your pitiful mercy.

LICINIE

163 That you may purge yourself of crimes laid to your charge,
 164 Attempted crimes against the commonwealth at large,
 165 The people by me, their Tribune, command that you
 166 Respond to my question; the answer is now due.
 167 For what reason, in the first place, have you prevented
 168 That to which the rest of the Senate had consented
 169 For the Sicilian wheat donation: the free
 170 Gift of part, the remainder sold reasonably⁶—
 171 A recompense our needy citizens have earned
 172 Long since for brave and tiring feats, who, now returned

5 “[H]eart”: orig. “courage”. Here, as often in the period—and even in Coriolanus’ own previous use of “courage” (l. 90)—it would be misguided to translate by English “courage,” which the hero hardly lacks. Volomnie does not wish for greater boldness on her son’s part but, on the contrary, for greater depth and breadth of understanding.

6 Hardy’s condensed lines simplify the situation as presented by Plutarch and conflate two lots of grain; see Alexandre Hardy, *Coriolan*, ed. Terence Allott, *Textes Littéraires*, 28 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1978), n. to l. 169.

173 To their lands, the burdens borne of many campaigns,
 174 Bear nothing more than blows to pay them for their pains.
 175 Can you deny it—that brutal enormity
 176 Of injustice, greater still of impiety?
 177 Can you deny it that your soul, replete with hate,
 178 Of the furies of Enyo⁷ has broached the floodgate—
 179 That being thus a troubler of the public peace,
 180 Fomenting sedition when all conflict should cease,
 181 You have well merited capital punishment?
 182 Besides which, we know your treacherous thirst and bent
 183 For tyranny, your ardent striving for that goal,
 184 Which our laws' restraint was unable to control,
 185 Which, the people's enemy, weakens their position,
 186 Purports to bring about their absolute submission
 187 To you, so haughty that addressing you wastes breath;
 188 For these reasons I am the first to vote for death,
 189 If to the charges levelled, as one may suppose,
 190 Inadequate are the defences you oppose.

CORIOLAN

191 Although I might seek revenge, being so aggrieved,
 192 And so return an injury for one received,
 193 I, refused the people's voice—ungrateful refusal
 194 That shamefully denied me the honour of Consul—
 195 I, who cannot bring myself with cunning intent
 196 To show them this scarred body, that they may relent,
 197 To cause them to remember in how many battles
 198 I made camps of foes overflow with funerals;
 199 Invincible, more grandeur on Rome I bestowed,
 200 Enriched with experience, by good fortune followed.
 201 Though rejected, yet no motive of spite provoked
 202 My argument against the subsidy revoked,
 203 But only fear that, treated so generously,
 204 The vulgar should swell their arrogance monstrously
 205 And make a rule of the custom thus acquired
 206 Of forcing the Senate to do what they desired.

7 This may be a case where Enyo, a Greek goddess of war, is conflated with Eris, goddess of discord.

207 As for the last crime cited of affecting power,
 208 If that plague has tainted my soul at any hour,
 209 If it can be proven against my innocence,
 210 Let the people's vengeance be extreme and intense,
 211 Let them destroy my body, no agony sparing,
 212 Torment me with dismemberment, burning and tearing:
 213 You know it, great gods, spectators of human thought—
 214 But, then, no surprise to find such ambushes wrought,
 215 Against all appearance and far from verity,
 216 By you, fire-brands of the commons' mutiny!

LICINIE

217 This you cannot disprove, deny it as you please,
 218 That of the booty won from the Antietes,
 219 By unfair distribution, partiality,
 220 On your own initiative, and by your decree,
 221 Those who remained behind to guard the town for you,
 222 Whose heedful services were hardly without value,
 223 Have nevertheless been cheated out of their share,
 224 A crime to which infinite witnesses will swear,
 225 Who here—the worse for you—seek vengeance in this presence
 226 If not for tyranny, at least for negligence.

CORIOLAN

227 O perverse deception! Wicked malignity!
 228 How far will you go in your effort to destroy me?
 229 Whatever do you have in your heads? And what blot
 230 Upon faith was ever more cursed, what fouler plot?
 231 Purveyors of falsehood, you had given your word
 232 Not to pursue me, that never more would be heard
 233 This term of tyranny, and now, those declarations
 234 Dead as your faith, you spring on me new fabrications.
 235 I call to witness Quirinus,⁸ and you, my father;
 236 You, Mars, held my guardian more than any other;
 237 You also I call to witness, O hardy band,

8 Quirinus: an ancient Sabine god, presumably of war, whose name become an addition of Romulus after his death; see Allott, ed., n.

238 Who graced the risk I took propitiously in hand,
 239 Noble upholders of the mighty Roman sword,
 240 Deserving rather heaven than such a reward—
 241 See, see, how they now hold your leader up to scorn,
 242 How from manly virtue my destruction is born;
 243 See how they prefer you in reclusive repose,
 244 How payment of those wages they wrongly oppose
 245 That you acquired sword in hand, your lives laid on the line;
 246 Behold my justice tainted with thievish design
 247 For dispensing only to you who followed me
 248 The spoil of those dispatched in our victory.
 249 Ha! Their mere numbers impose a chill restraint:
 250 My plea to you is futile, in vain my complaint.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

251 He begins, our rogue lion, to sink to the ground;
 252 Let's make sure he never has the strength to rebound;
 253 May we be left untouched by his compelled submission,
 254 For equally affected is our own position.
 255 It remains that the votes of all should be collected,
 256 So as to condemn him or have his guilt rejected.
 257 Aedile, lose no time, let them tribe by tribe be polled,
 258 That the fate of this haughty man may be enrolled.

THE SENATE

259 Shall we be cowards and permit unbridled chaos?
 260 Plebeians in a fury, blinded, envious,
 261 To weigh the fortunes of the Senate's champion?
 262 To let ourselves in him be wildly trampled on?
 263 We should, if need be, die together as one man,
 264 All die at his feet—but save him if we can.

CORIOLAN

265 Wretched Coriolan! See yourself then the prey
 266 Of the people, apt again to be cast away.
 267 At their untender mercy, see your life in turmoil.

268 Why have you not yet, O Clotho,⁹ unwound my coil?
 269 Why did you not prevent, by cutting short my thread,
 270 This second calumny, a fate unmerited?

LICINIE

271 Following ancient prescripts, spelled out legally,
 272 You have been convicted by a margin of three;
 273 The people of Rome have tempered your punishment
 274 To exile for life—a judgement too lenient;
 275 Return to Rome is forever prohibited,
 276 And if found here tomorrow, you shall lose your head.
 277 You would be well advised to show obedience,
 278 Given the stakes for you, to the terms of the sentence.

CORIOLAN

279 I will obey it—yes, yes, surely with all speed
 280 I'll leave behind these ingrates before they have need.¹⁰

CHORUS OF ROMANS¹¹

281 Go, go, monster of pride, seek a home elsewhere now—
 282 Find some fearful people your threatening can cow.
 283 Yea, what people, except of the dark forest lands,
 284 Or those whom Africa holds on its golden sands,
 285 Or whom Hydaspes conceals on its desert shore,
 286 Would suit the brutal savagery of your demeanour?¹²
 287 Never has Rome witnessed a day of more delight
 288 Than this at hand, which must divide it from your sight;
 289 And never have we brought back from an enemy
 290 A trophy more glorious, useful, salutary.

9 Clotho: the one of the three Fates (Parcae) who held the spindle on which the thread of life was wound. She was often confused with Atropos, who cut it.

10 “[B]efore they have need”: orig. “plustost qu’ils n’ont besoin”. The French is likewise cryptic, but the implication is clear: before they have need to act. Cf. Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, III.iii.124: “I banish you!”

11 Cf. the ignorant boasting of the Citizens in Shakespeare’s play (III.iii.137-44).

12 The battle of the Hydaspes river (326 B.C.E.) marked the farthest extent of Alexander’s advance into India. The Chorus is defining the most distant boundaries of the world as known to Romans.

THE SENATE

291 Ah, gods! Whoever would have thought it? Our indulgence
292 Has been our downfall, brought to light this insolence,
293 Spurred the commons to this act of temerity,
294 The outrage done us all by this last injury.
295 Henceforth, henceforth no point in clinging to the hope
296 That our authority may serve to curb their scope.
297 Henceforth we shall wear the collar of servitude
298 Because we have allowed—O base ingratitude!—
299 The light of the Senate, its glory, its mainstay,
300 By plebeians with votes to be driven away.

Act II

Scene i

CORIOLAN [*alone*]

301 Devoured by my thoughts, offended in my soul,
 302 From one plan to another recklessly I roll,
 303 Frustrated by the fury that boils in my brain,
 304 Like one who wants water his writing to retain,
 305 Arrest the rapid swirl of a whirlpool in motion
 306 Or force the flooding tide to return to the ocean.
 307 Come now, let us settle on a scheme well designed,
 308 A project that will hold in growing from my mind,
 309 One up to bringing down the haughty Roman state,
 310 Though that will be a trifle, compared with my hate—
 311 A trifle to create a mournful wilderness,
 312 Where spirits for eternity stray in distress;
 313 Revenged, to make of that town, with pride overblown,
 314 A tomb strewn over with stones, with grass overgrown;
 315 Playing no favourites, both its parties to destroy—
 316 Matched with the wrong I've had, that's nothing, a mere toy.
 317 That slime of a populace ignoble and vile
 318 Had the strength and audacity to force my exile
 319 In full view of the Senate, which I thought to keep
 320 As my last refuge—wrongly, for those timid sheep
 321 Offered for my rescue mere womanish complaining,
 322 Their silence seeming to accept my honour's staining.
 323 *Friendship makes itself known in trying situations:*
 324 It is not much to melt in mournful lamentations,
 325 With words to pity one supposedly held dear
 326 And at the same time let his honour disappear,
 327 Permit him to be hounded from his native clime:
 328 One is just a greater, the other less a crime;
 329 But they appear no different to my angry eyes:
 330 Gods of vengeance, favour, favour my enterprise!
 331 Grant me that I may, whatever the cost to me
 332 (*Never does one avenged receive an injury*),
 333 Enkindle fatal war, whose flames shall hurtle down

334 Upon the enemies within my native town—
 335 War crueller than the Theban conflict, where each brother
 336 Coloured crimson his hands with the blood of the other.¹³
 337 Grant me that, since I'm by the same ruin oppressed,
 338 We may free all Latin peoples with fear distressed.¹⁴
 339 Equity obliges: it cannot, cannot be
 340 That such a base foundation should tower so grandly,
 341 That the simple shepherds who founded our race
 342 In their grandsons spurn the proudest in highest place;
 343 By violence in mortal actions is foretold
 344 An early ending¹⁵—well, theirs clearly fit the mould.
 345 Elect me, therefore, the instrument of your ire,
 346 So that, as it was hatched, I may snuff out their empire.
 347 Among infinite nearby states to war inclined,
 348 The Volsces are potent; they alone, to my mind,
 349 Have good hope of confronting my ungrateful country.
 350 My valour, backed by their tried assiduity,
 351 A noted leader at their head, one who the foes'
 352 Essential secrets already thoroughly knows,
 353 Being versed in their tricks by long experience,
 354 One for whom Mars has been the study, the sole science;
 355 Certainly, then—for I have not the slightest doubt—
 356 I will get the state of Rome utterly wiped out.
 357 True enough, that nation some losses has sustained—
 358 But light ones, such as in a wink may be regained;
 359 Losses that have rather doubled its hostile urge
 360 Than overwhelmed with hopelessness a troubled courage—
 361 Losses, in sum, that have only increased its hate,

13 The reference is to the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, who were supposed to rule alternately in Thebes; instead, the former banished the latter, who instigated the bloody war known as the Seven against Thebes, in which the two brothers killed each other. Indirectly evoked is also the founding myth of Rome itself, which included the fratricide perpetrated by Romulus upon Remus.

14 Ll. 338-39: orig. "Donnez-moy, qu'accablé de sa mesme ruine, / Nous delivriens de peur toute la gent Latine": the original thus shifts, as in the translation, from singular to plural—somewhat confusingly, although the sense is clear enough. "We" is conceivably the "royal we" ("nous de majesté"), but Coriolan may rather be envisaging the forces he will lead.

15 A not uncommon application to the political sphere of a principle from Aristotle's *Physics*. Cf. N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Jew of Malta*, by Christopher Marlowe, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), n. to I.i.131-32.

362 But meant that revenge for opportunity must wait,
 363 Such as now I offer by my intervention.
 364 But wait now:¹⁶ with him alone I am in contention
 365 For glory—he who holds their great republic’s reins;
 366 It is on him that I must first expend my pains.
 367 A hundred times we have been, by honour induced,
 368 Blind with fury, to the extremity reduced
 369 Of challenging each other in our armies’ sight
 370 To death or total fame of conquest in the fight.
 371 You are wrong: for his magnanimous spirit, new
 372 Moved with compassion, will hold out its hand to you,
 373 Allow itself to give way to your gentle prayer,
 374 If reverent intensity is brought to bear.
 375 I will disguise myself in a garment unknown,
 376 By which the loss I’ve suffered may be frankly shown,
 377 And in that attire his dwelling penetrate;
 378 The most barbarous tribes respect that sacred gate;¹⁷
 379 But let us proceed, whom nothing worse could betide:
 380 *In extreme misfortune, everything must be tried.*

Scene ii
 (Amphidie, Page)

AMPHIDIE

381 So, it seems to me, you heavenly gods intend
 382 The conquests of Rome without limit to extend

16 The syntax of ll. 364-66 is doubtful. I prefer to take the initial “Comment” of l. 364 as a self-interruption parallel to “Tu t’abuses” in l. 371, hence as imparting a conventional “wavering” dynamic to the soliloquy: Coriolan is giving full weight to the possibility that Amphidie will give him a hostile reception. (The soliloquy thus corresponds to the hero’s pondering as recorded by Plutarch (Bullough, ed., pp. 526-27; cf. Shakespeare, IV.iv.12 ff.). Alternatively, however, “comment” may be understood as “because” (the solution preferred by Cavallé), in which case the sentence would not end with l. 366 and the period there should be a comma. (The original punctuation is, as often, of limited use in determining the meaning.)

17 The original specifies “Lares”, i.e., the household divinities

383 To the edge of the world; by decree of the Sisters,¹⁸
 384 They must be the universe's peaceful possessors;
 385 Their arms pushing further, which no one can withstand,
 386 Must range from the west as far as the icy strand,
 387 From the east to the south, despite all opposition,
 388 The hindrance of neighbours in the strongest position;
 389 An edict of destiny has granted their boon
 390 To vanquish this whole round of earth circled by Neptune.
 391 And have you no fear that later they may be tempted
 392 To remount the monstrous feats the Titans¹⁹ attempted—
 393 That they, the earth's obscure abortive spawn—no more—
 394 May send to you in heaven to declare a war,
 395 That they, not meeting with resistance here below,
 396 May seek to deal Jupiter a usurping blow?
 397 No, no, you do your prescience a great disservice
 398 If such a fearful prospect does not make you nervous—
 399 If you dream that that people, for conquest on fire,
 400 The world once subjugated, should not then aim higher.
 401 You do yourselves great wrong—and us, abjectly under
 402 The thumb of these wretched slaves, nothing but their plunder:
 403 Slaves born of brigands gathered at Romulus' call—
 404 He who sullied with his brother's blood the wall
 405 He built,²⁰ established his rule with a parricide
 406 Worthy of the wheel to which Ixion was tied.²¹
 407 Yet gradually this impious man gained strength,
 408 As one sees from a spark a great blaze grow at length,
 409 Or as from a breeze a storm blows up fierce and mighty
 410 Which strikes with fear the denizens of Amphitrite²²—
 411 An accident, truth to tell, strange in the extreme,
 412 An accident resembling a deceptive dream,
 413 And which would make me in the end acknowledge

18 I.e., the three Fates (Parcae).

19 Titans: the Giants who rebelled against the Olympian gods.

20 Because Remus leaped over it (see *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard,, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), *s.v.* Romulus and Remus. (Hereafter *OCD*.)

21 Ixion, punished on the eternally rolling wheel, was the first man to murder one of his kin (*OCD*, *s.v.*).

22 That is, the fish, Amphitrite, wife of Poseidon, being the metonymic queen of the sea (*OED*, *s.v.* Poseidon).

414 The glory of power as Fortune's privilege,²³
 415 That unjust marks of greatness she alone distributes,
 416 Regarding neither good nor evil attributes.
 417 Ah, that doubt is killing, to gnaw me never spares,
 418 Plunges me into a gulf of troubles and cares:
 419 That I could not yet stop them feels like my death-blow.²⁴
 420 But a servant comes running. What transports you so?

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421 A stranger who entered your house just recently
 422 By sleight, deceiving our vigilance cleverly,
 423 Grave of countenance and with a supplicant's air
 424 (For we have done our utmost to send him elsewhere),
 425 Desires, my lord, to speak with you, and reveals
 426 Extreme assurance by following at my heels.

Scene iii

(Amphidie, Coriolan)

AMFIDIE

427 Who are you? What brings you here? What was your intention
 428 In seeking this meeting, contrived with such invention,
 429 So deviously, brazenness with fear combined—
 430 As well as with a sad, imploring, downcast mind;²⁵
 431 Speak out freely, then, holding nothing in reserve:
 432 My aid is accessible to those who deserve.

CORIOLAN

433 On that assurance I disclose myself to you:

23 Orig.: "Que du monde regi fortune auroit la gloire". My translation of this line preserves the ambiguity as to whether the glory of ruling the world is Fortune's or something she bestows; the following line seems to confirm the latter sense, but the gist is the same.

24 Hardy's development of Amphidie into an envy-driven murderer thus begins with representing him as melancholic—a commonplace Renaissance association, not alien to Shakespeare's depiction of Aufidius.

25 L. 430 effectively adds the effect of observation to the qualities merely inferred in line 429.

434 My name comprises that hate I strove to pursue
 435 By killing Volsces on many a battlefield;
 436 Corioles knows it, which my strength forced to yield;
 437 From it I took my name: it is I, Amfidie,
 438 Whom my own people, by ungrateful perfidy
 439 Possessed—traitors!—reward with shameful banishment.
 440 Make use, then, of this offence, back upon them bent;
 441 Your foes thus make return with honourable interest:
 442 Use me, to vengeance of our common wrong addressed
 443 And thwarting of Rome's pride, which all restraint withstands;
 444 I have the same spirit, as well as the same hands.
 445 Same spirit, did I say?—no, of another kind:
 446 My right hand stronger still, and more subtle my mind;
 447 They, inspired by rancour, will find greater fame
 448 For deeds done against Rome than for those in its name.
 449 But if by your lordship I am to be refused,
 450 Let me as a victim of your fury be used,
 451 Both joyful and content to cease all resistance,
 452 My days thereby severed from the sweet hope of vengeance—
 453 My hope being fixed on it, which, if it should fail,
 454 Would render life to me at once cruel and stale,
 455 Obliging me to have recourse to my right hand
 456 And plead with Acheron,²⁶ since men won't understand.

AMFIDIE

457 Pluck up your courage, you captain unconquered still!
 458 You will certainly obtain the Volsces' good will,
 459 Into their protection will be, I pledge, received;
 460 As for the rancorous rivalry we conceived
 461 For glory between us, leaders of enemies,
 462 Henceforth I abjure it, touched by your miseries,

26 “[P]lead with Acheron”: orig. “flechir l’Acheron”. Hardy personifies the underworld river. The idea of suicide (as opposed to mere willingness to die) is added by Hardy to Plutarch and seems significant in view of the suicidal element in Shakespeare’s character. See Richard Hillman, “Tragedy as a Crying Shame in Coriolanus and Alexandre Hardy’s Coriolan: The ‘Boy of Tears’ and the Hardy Boys”, *Coriolan de William Shakespeare: Langages, Interprétations, Politique(s)*, Actes du Colloque international organisé à l’Université François-Rabelais les 3-4 novembre 2006 sous les auspices de la Société Française Shakespeare, ed. Richard Hillman (Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2007), pp. 187-90.

463 Examples to me who, from the inconstancy
 464 Of spiteful commoners may suffer equally.
 465 Through you, then, let them know a man can do them harm,
 466 Though slighted—how far they must fear his wrathful arm.
 467 Let them learn to cherish and grace in his position
 468 One able to bring down their exalted condition,
 469 One—I will not mince words in stating it before you—
 470 Whose right arm served their power as the nerve and sinew,
 471 As a basis for pride, a rampart and a shield.
 472 But what malignant spirit has their eyes so sealed²⁷—
 473 So favourably for us—has dazzled their prudence
 474 That they dare as far as yourself extend their licence,
 475 Attack your glory with insults unjust, directed
 476 Against one to whom altars should have been erected?
 477 The crime's enormity, the size of the injury—
 478 Such an occurrence fills me with perplexity.

CORIOLAN

479 Alas, do you wonder that the envious biting
 480 Of popular enmity can cause such a slighting?
 481 Have you from such biting been exempted thus far?
 482 Yes, you were born beneath a more fortunate star,
 483 Of innocent lambs the unperturbed governor,
 484 While I, poor man, was cursed with those lions that roar,
 485 Barbarians adept in fraud, in treachery,
 486 Who sought to make me suspected of tyranny—
 487 Falsely accused, the gods I summon to attest,
 488 Of that very crime which above all I detest—
 489 With them both judge and witness; wretched, in the end
 490 I was forced to come implore you to stand my friend.

AMFIDIE

491 Why did not the Senators, drawn up on your side,
 492 With their authority turn the assault aside,
 493 Repress the mad excesses of a mob confused,

27 “Sealed”: orig. “siller” (for “ciller”): the term used in falconry for blinding birds by sewing their eyelids shut; cf. English “sill”.

494 Which, the more strength it gets, the more that is abused?
 495 (It tries, little by little, to acquire stature
 496 And a rank forbidden by Heaven and by nature.)
 497 Could they not have boldly, by plausible pretence,
 498 Reversed, if they were resolute, your cruel sentence?

CORIOLAN

499 The timid Senate quailed when my need was extreme;
 500 The hope I founded on it proved a mocking dream.
 501 They have seen—O shame!—the armed rabble of the town
 502 Mount an attack against my life, and my renown,
 503 Opposing it with words alone, with the intent
 504 To save me from death by accepting banishment;
 505 They think me grateful for the shameful life they buy,
 506 A life at the mercy of the first passer-by.
 507 They have no feeling for the slight they've done to me;
 508 My soul, already furious, would like to see
 509 Them gathered in the open, both at the same time,
 510 And punish all together tainted by that crime.
 511 I will do it, provided your community
 512 Is willing to rely upon my loyalty.

AMFIDIE

513 You need not doubt that on this side we are resolved.
 514 My only wish is that our truce could be dissolved,
 515 So we might confront the Romans equitably,
 516 Tangling them anew in nets of hostility;
 517 Set your mind to pondering some malignant ruse,
 518 Which a pretence of honesty would let us use.

CORIOLAN

519 Given extreme desire, a short while suffices
 520 To furnish me baits and hooks, sufficient devices;
 521 I'll have them drawn despite themselves into the lists.
 522 *Dealing with the malicious, no malice exists;*
 523 *Against someone treacherous to make use of treason,*

524 *Lay ambushes for him, is the dictate of reason.*²⁸
 525 Come, whether the helm of the ship of state I'm handed,
 526 Or to try the fortune of Mars I am commanded,
 527 I hope I shall fulfil my charge in such a sort
 528 That I shall earn from all a satisfied report.

AMFIDIE

529 May a bolt of lightning exploding from the skies
 530 Into dusty powder my poor head pulverise
 531 Before I show such ambition as above you
 532 To command in the field. For I have found it true
 533 That, equal in courage, in fortune I am outpaced:
 534 You have more help from Fate; by Heaven you are graced;
 535 Yours the luck of victory that's needed in combat.
 536 The rank of general—there is no doubt of that,
 537 Should new war with Rome be the order of the day,
 538 While I will take the public weal under my sway.²⁹
 539 Let us save this discourse for the Council tomorrow,
 540 And—the first step of my succour—these signs of sorrow
 541 Put off at once, so that, transported with elation,
 542 This evening I may dedicate to celebration
 543 Of your coming—a sign of my sincerity,
 544 Coriolan, in wishing you prosperity.³⁰

28 Coriolan's thirst for revenge is given a distinct Machiavellian quality.

29 Cf. Plutarch, ed. Bullough, p. 532: "himselŕe would keepe home, to provide for the safety of the citties and of his cōuntrie".

30 The personal element and the festive ambiance are developed from a slight hint in Plutarch ("he feasted him for that time" [Bullough, ed., p. 528]) and are notably in keeping with the end of the scene in *Coriolanus* (IV.v.196-222).

Act III

Scene i

(Chorus of Romans, the Senate, Ambassadors)

CHORUS OF ROMANS

545 Will you permit, great gods, one man leaving the city
 546 To carry off Rome's fortune and felicity?
 547 Freeze those huddled within its walls with fear of harms,
 548 When they were rather used to frightening in arms
 549 The rest of Italy's inhabitants,³¹ all regions
 550 Combined, and with the fearsome show of warlike legions
 551 Bowing down their cities, imposed on them the yoke—
 552 And now to forfeit glory at a single stroke?
 553 The Volsces, again and again in wars defeated,
 554 The Volsces, who back to their own land had retreated—
 555 Their power Rome now fears, besieged behind its wall.
 556 Ah, how your hidden judgements may deceive us all,
 557 How often hard for us to gauge the likelihood,
 558 Alas, of what is harmful, what may do us good—
 559 To recognise the source of our prosperity
 560 And then preserve it safe in its integrity!
 561 He whom we lately banned for the rest of his days,
 562 Despised, consumes our city in his anger's blaze.
 563 He has changed sides—no more—and all at once
 564 Destiny has turned a direful face upon us;
 565 Destiny fights for him, graces with gain his army,
 566 Threatens with his fetters our ancient liberty.
 567 Incredible prodigy! Strange and cruel effects
 568 Of Her³² who so quickly destroys what she erects—
 569 Who, fickle, delights to stir up trouble galore
 570 For people whom her shade had sheltered just before.³³
 571 Alas, we feel it, in our inmost spirits daunted,

31 The original uses the common poeticism “Hespérie” (“the Western land”) for Italy.

32 The reference must be to Fortune, though the phrasing is elliptical.

33 Orig.: “A ceux qu'elle couvroit maintenant de son ombre”; “maintenant” here carries the Latinate sense of “recently”.

572 Those virtues wholly lost that our ancestors vaunted,
 573 Devoid of counsel, all defenceless and forlorn,
 574 Helpless as the infant in its cradle new-born;
 575 We are stopped dead, as is the vessel in its course
 576 By that fish endowed by nature with wondrous force,³⁴
 577 And are constrained to ask his pardon for our error.
 578 Ah, for all of us I inwardly quake with terror
 579 Lest his arrogance, at our pleas increased in pride,
 580 May not by our ambassadors be mollified,
 581 Lest he pursue his revenge with obstinacy
 582 And not from a fatal siege deliver our city—
 583 As fatal as that siege which for ten years oppressed
 584 Ilium, once by our forefathers possessed.

THE SENATE

585 *The madman rarely calms himself and turns more wise*
 586 *Until he has received a disastrous surprise;*
 587 He persists in the error of his vain delusion
 588 To the point of producing his utter confusion.
 589 So you in your frenzy ever turned a deaf ear
 590 To well-intentioned warnings not to persevere,
 591 Refusing in due time wholesome counsel to swallow,
 592 For which now—but too late—in repentance you wallow.
 593 To no avail the Senate pointed out to you
 594 The harm to his former town such a man would do—
 595 That one day he might avenge his wrong, to the peril
 596 Both of the state itself and of the common people.
 597 We were not believed; no, you gloried in great style
 598 For vanquishing the Senate by forcing his exile—
 599 A victory absurd, which still smacks of the one
 600 Accomplished by the army of Agenor's son,³⁵
 601 A victory that remains mournful for the victors,
 602 Disposing them, not for laurels, but for remorse.
 603 But what good may be gained from the contrary strife

34 The remora, according to Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (bk. IX, chap. 41), whose power to arrest motion was also exploited in magical preparations.

35 Agenor's son: Cadmus, founder of Thebes, whose soldiers, sprung from a dragon's teeth, destroyed each other, except for five men.

604 Of limbs divided when one body gives them life?³⁶

CHORUS OF ROMANS

605 Of our affliction you may discourse at your leisure,
 606 Your goods being safe from his fiery displeasure;
 607 In the fields, the traitor has ordered them preserved,
 608 With soldiers assigned to see his command observed.³⁷
 609 If the fault was ours alone, so ours is all the pain,
 610 We alone the victims of his rage inhumane.
 611 Why then reproach us, with such importunity,
 612 For an evil from which you have immunity?
 613 Why forbid us the attempt to assuage our anguish
 614 By lamenting the agony in which we languish?

THE SENATE

615 O the simplicity, error, and impudence
 616 To think there's no anger towards us in his intents,
 617 No hidden rancour, bitterness, and enmity,
 618 That more than the commons' he spares our property,
 619 Cunning as he is, but for one reason—to sow
 620 Discord between us, more strongly the flame to blow,
 621 Now that we face together ruin absolute
 622 And are bound to pluck out that discord by the root;
 623 Now that we require a peace between us more—
 624 To help each other—than we ever did before;
 625 You remember, blind men, with whom we have to do,
 626 That he fights with courage, but with subterfuge too,
 627 That where he knows he faces failure if he uses
 628 Achilles' strength, too well he wields Ulysses' ruses.
 629 Such, such he is, I promise, and many a deed
 630 He has done with us is the only proof I need;
 631 I only seek to liken the past to the present.

36 Ll. 603-4 contain what little remains, in Hardy's rendering, of the Fable of the Belly recounted by Menenius Agrippa in Plutarch (Bullough, ed., p. 495) and Shakespeare (*Cor.*, li.93 ff.).

37 According to Plutarch (Bullough, ed., p. 531), this was Coriolanus' deliberate tactic for fomenting dissension between the classes in Rome, as the Senate will shrewdly grasp, and it succeeded in much the way dramatised by Hardy. Hardy's Coriolan—in contrast with Shakespeare's Coriolanus—is notably an all-round soldier who combines personal heroics with strategic shrewdness.

632 But now, alas, we have fresh word of his intent:
 633 Here come our deputies, whose mournful looks downcast
 634 Reflect his rancour without bounds, and bound to last.
 635 Friends, what success have you had? With what disposition
 636 Has he, that heartless man, responded to our mission?

AMBASSADORS

637 Worse than the worst barbarian—infinately;
 638 But for sceptre and crown, effusing royalty
 639 Just like a king, disdains quite simply to give ear
 640 To those he used to have as his companions here,
 641 Resolved to extirpate his country's very name,
 642 And not before to mitigate his fury's flame.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

643 Wretched citizens of a city facing doom!

AMBASSADORS

644 Peace we may hope to find when we are in the tomb.

THE SENATE

645 But did he to any settlement close the door?

AMBASSADORS

646 The terms he offers are no different from war.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

647 O heavens, all is lost!

THE SENATE

Briefly now, please relate
 648 The penalty that is exacted by his hate.

AMBASSADORS

649 As everybody knows, after the truce expired
 650 And he again advanced his troops, which had retired,³⁸

38 Cf. Plutarch, ed. Bullough, p. 535: "Wherefore, the time of peace expired, Martius being returned

651 We, as the people's and the Senate's good behooved,
 652 Beseeched him to command his camp to be removed
 653 Beyond the frontiers of Rome, said,³⁹ if that were done,
 654 That everything within the bounds of right and reason
 655 Would be conceded with a spirit free and willing.
 656 But he, with the turmoil of angry passion thrilling,
 657 With rancour breathing deeply, his gaze turned aside,
 658 Haughtily and curtly your petition denied,
 659 Answered that he, as general, did not possess
 660 A remedy or solace fitting our distress,
 661 But, as a Roman of a patriotic bent,
 662 Foreseeing that Rome's glory is doomed to interment,
 663 Since the destinies take umbrage at great ambition,
 664 He offered us, dispassionate, this admonition:
 665 Render the Volsces, now stronger, the towns we conquered,
 666 Which we have pillaged of their riches and dishonoured;
 667 Promise never again to instigate a war;
 668 Renounce claims against them pretended heretofore.
 669 Thus, he said, would we enjoy the peace so desired;
 670 Thus would his favour be assuredly acquired;
 671 Thus our ship avoids⁴⁰ the close-looming rocks and foam,
 672 And his army would abandon the walls of Rome—
 673 Giving us three days only to deliberate
 674 (At those words Jupiter, when thundering his hate,
 675 Appears less harsh)—moreover, with this stipulation:
 676 That then, excluding all further negotiation,
 677 To punish us his army would enter the town.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

678 O city ill-starred, what's become of your renown?

THE SENATE

679 More artful in secret to have sounded him out,
 680 While plying the Volsces with speeches roundabout.

into the dominions of the Romaines againe with all his armie, they sent another ambassade unto him...”.

39 I supply the second verb for clarification, since the phrasing of the original is especially elliptical.

40 The translation follows the original in switching to the more vivid present tense.

AMBASSADORS

681 Yes, except that he prevented our clever scheme—
 682 After a council, called those highest in esteem
 683 To hear the embassy, at once gave us no choice
 684 But point by point to declare it in a loud voice.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

685 Come, let us shed our blood to feed his cruelty,
 686 Sooner than submit ourselves again to his mercy;
 687 Come, we'll hurl ourselves on his squadrons sword in hand:
 688 A noble end at least remains at our command.

THE SENATE

689 No, return to him now, reiterate our prayers;
 690 The variable sunlight that the same day shares
 691 Shows us that a man can equally change his mind,
 692 Can alter from severity to being kind.
 693 In case of rebuff, there remains a final chance—
 694 To send to him our very priests as suppliants,
 695 Who, out of piety, will cause him to relent.
 696 Make haste, and may our danger make you diligent.

AMBASSADORS

697 Although the prospect of success is worse than bleak,
 698 We will try to get from him the answer you seek.

CHORUS OF ROMANS

699 O bitter destinies! Must our sorrow's flood-tide
 700 Serve to swell a tyrant's insufferable pride?
 701 Must we on a Busiris⁴¹ for pity depend,
 702 When saving him brought us to this pitiful end?⁴²

41 Busiris: legendary King of Egypt, an archetype of cruelty because he sacrificed strangers to Zeus; he was finally killed by Hercules.

42 The perspective of the people is obviously distorted, but it is true that they would not be in this predicament had the death sentence been imposed. The repetition “pity”/”pitiful” imitates the original.

Scene ii

CORIOLAN *[alone]*

703 My vengeance almost half achieved, within my reach,
 704 The impudent plebs, who dared my fame to impeach,
 705 Trusting in their numbers and the name of the city,
 706 Bear, as I see fit, their yoke with servility;
 707 Twice, through their ambassadors, they have seen refused
 708 The pact they pleaded for, repentant and confused,
 709 And cannot hope for it, whatever they may do.
 710 Attempting, now humbled, to gain my grace anew,
 711 To draw me apart, by corruption to entreat—
 712 That is no way to moderate my anger's heat,
 713 Nor will extinguish it, till their glory, supine
 714 And level with lesser peoples, ceases to shine,
 715 When, satiated, I've laid their power so low—
 716 The happiness their luck in combat caused to grow—
 717 That with impunity each subjugated nation
 718 Shall compensate their crime, exacting reparation.
 719 *Nothing happens without a cause, and the provident*
 720 *Gods, on whom we fallible mortals are dependent,*
 721 *Know how to set our arrogance on reason's path,*
 722 *Supplied, when they please, with an instrument of wrath,*
 723 An instrument like me against the vanity
 724 The Romans flaunt, abusing too much liberty.
 725 O sacred, O most righteous, O terrible justice!
 726 For Coriolan to carry it out—what bliss!⁴³
 727 Avenged, the summit of your wishes you attain;
 728 Avenged, a pattern to our children you remain;
 729 Avenged, you'll have acquired more honour, more glory,
 730 Than this arm won in any another victory:
 731 Then stifle once and for all your devouring care.
 732 But my thoughts and spirit wander I know not where.
 733 Am I wrong? No, here again their mission they send,

43 Coriolanus' crowing here carries a touch of the hubris of such Senecan revengers as Thyestes; at the same time, l. 731 hints at mixed feelings. From both perspectives, his downfall is anticipated.

734

Which in a shamefully concluded peace will end.⁴⁴

Scene iii

(Ambassadors, Coriolan, Council [*of the Volscians*])AMBASSADORS [*entering*]

735

Again, one final time, your lamentable city

736

Begs you to use mercy in its adversity.

737

One final time, if your pity may be procured,

738

We say your pardon by the people is assured,

739

A repeal to which all have subscribed their desire,

740

Repeal of your exile, which to us was so dire,

741

Praying you, moreover, to give us audience

742

Somewhere in private, and to hear us out with patience.

CORIOLAN

743

Soldiers, bid the lords of the Council to assemble.⁴⁵

AMBASSADORS

744

At the glance his eye shoots forth, I begin to tremble.

CORIOLAN

745

Confer with me apart on matters that are public!

746

If you do not desist from such a two-faced trick,

747

By treating you as merely treacherous suborners

748

Who seek to bait me and corrupt me in dark corners,

749

We'll have you all taught a lesson! Now, with all present,

750

Tell us if the Romans, induced to turn repentant,

751

Are willing to restore those lands where they intrude,

752

Thus ending the siege, or prefer it continued.

44 Orig.: “Que la honteuse fin d’une paix viendra clore”. The expression is somewhat elliptical but the sense is confirmed by ll. 750-54; Coriolan had forbidden them to return for any other purpose than to accept his shameful conditions.

45 The question mark in the original at this point signifies, according to contemporary practice, emphasis rather than interrogation.

753 If you don't bring the peace prescribed on that condition,
754 Have I not denied you access to our position?

AMBASSADORS

755 May it please you, mollified, those under your sway
756 To withdraw from our confines, moving them away,
757 As much as equity permits them to accord,
758 They will accord you, being desirous of concord.⁴⁶

CORIOLAN

759 Impudence! Is that the beginning and the end?

AMBASSADORS

760 No farther than that does our commission extend.

CORIOLAN

761 Then what now authorises your return to me?

AMBASSADORS

762 *All things are permitted for the good of one's country.*

CORIOLAN

763 You may seek a good but the harm will be your own.

AMBASSADORS

764 You might speak without passion, take another tone.

CORIOLAN

765 No passion moves my soul beyond its normal state.

AMBASSADORS

766 Of the temple of Janus, therefore, close the gate.⁴⁷

CORIOLAN

767 Betraying my party just to gratify you?

46 The blandness of this speech is clearly deliberate, and I imitate the effect of double-talk produced by the repetition of "accord" and the rhyme with "concord".

47 The Romans closed the door of this temple in time of peace, as happened very rarely.

AMBASSADORS

768 No, deigning by peace to make one people of two.

CORIOLAN

769 That is what I wish, on terms of equality.

AMBASSADORS

770 Equality, or you decrease your people's glory.⁴⁸

CORIOLAN

771 Assassins, ingrates—my people, you dare to call them?

AMBASSADORS

772 You always wished—and must wish—that good may befall them.

CORIOLANUS

773 They are all guilty, and all I repudiate.

AMBASSADORS

774 With milder words, at least, our evils mitigate.

CORIOLAN

775 With the first that I spoke their destiny was sealed.

AMBASSADORS

776 Your own country's honour as a prize will you yield?

CORIOLAN

777 I have no country but where my fortune may flourish.⁴⁹

48 The negotiating game played here seems to depend on different inflections of “equality”: Coriolan envisages reducing the Romans to the level of the Volsces; the ambassadors pick up his term to argue that, unless the Romans are treated “equally”, that is, with a generosity beyond what their abject position justifies, Coriolan will do himself a disservice as a Roman.

49 Cavaillé points to a parallel with the repudiation by Shakespeare's Coriolanus, equally unanticipated in Plutarch, of all patriotic feeling, coupled with a resolution to “stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin” (V.iii.33-35).

AMBASSADORS

778 Rome remains, however, the one that did you nourish.

CORIOLAN

779 Rome is the one that wished me to my death pursued.

AMBASSADORS

780 Let your love compensate for her ingratitude.

CORIOLAN

781 Importune me no longer with a vain petition.

AMBASSADORS

782 To others more welcome we relinquish our mission.

CORIOLAN

783 I forbid anyone to come, no matter who,
784 If he seeks to dispute the peace I've offered you.

AMBASSADORS

785 We shall convey this latest woeful information.

CORIOLAN

786 And I continue more devoted in my station,
787 Employing my valour and my dexterity
788 For those who took me in in my calamity.

COUNCIL

789 O bravest of the brave, incomparable sun!
790 How with the loss of yours, our happiness was won!
791 How much we needed such a chief, and in what measure
792 Your virtue must, regarded as an earthly treasure,
793 Oblige one who holds it to stay on its good side:
794 The boldest are broken when with it they collide.
795 Fortune is its follower; fortune itself cannot
796 Revoke what now is purposed by a single jot.

Act IV

Scene i

(Valerie, Troupe of Women)

VALERIE

797 How can you doubt that the gods my courage inspire?
 798 Those good gods whose altars, as waves still tower higher
 799 Above our fragile vessel, all now supplicate
 800 Abjectly? Often miracles originate
 801 In a heart made humble by fear, and singled out
 802 That therein faith in heaven's aid alone may sprout
 803 To render its advice the means of benefit;
 804 Besides which I should think such conduct most unfit,
 805 Worthy some Idol's offspring, not the noble state
 806 Conferred by the blood of Publicola the great,
 807 If any thought of mine was not put to the test
 808 That might profit my country, by hardship oppressed—
 809 Prepared to make a peace full of ignominy,
 810 A peace worth no more than the yoke of tyranny,
 811 A peace to make our ancestors bristle in horror
 812 If they should gaze down upon our cowardly error.
 813 Now the gracious gods have expressly shown their will
 814 That a pledge should remain in our safekeeping still
 815 From our foes' chief, a pledge more than commonly laden
 816 With love and pity: his mother, dear wife, and children.
 817 To implore their succour, implore their potency,
 818 To speak for all of you I'll take the liberty.
 819 Let us then go find them.

TROUPE OF WOMEN

Let us, since you are willing,
 820 The augury of good hope such power instilling
 821 In you—though first we should go together and see
 822 What the Senate wants us to do, it seems to me.

VALERIE

823 Not so: when intents thus virtuous are proposed,
 824 The great gods authorise them, and the case is closed!

Scene ii

AMPHIDIE [*alone*]

825 Madman, what have you done—by what strange urge incited
 826 To ensure your own glory eternally blighted?
 827 Foe to all the honour that your former deeds bore you,
 828 You consent that a rival should be placed before you;
 829 A foreign rival, a traitor and renegade,
 830 Has been put in charge of the Volsces with your aid—
 831 Commands absolutely, leads their troops to the fight;
 832 Your praise is obscured while his own is shining bright;
 833 Your credit is abolished, your renown extinguished.
 834 So that now, when you find yourself wounded and anguished
 835 By jealousy, to clip his wings will not be easy,
 836 Nor to shake the faith of the common soldiery,
 837 Who disdain to accept any other's commands,
 838 Insist that all the authority in his hands
 839 Remain irrevocably, and unless his eye
 840 Falls on you for something—well, you need not apply!
 841 Shall this shame be endured? O gulfs of Taenarus—
 842 Down, instead, to your greedy Prince may you bear us!⁵⁰
 843 My life is worth only what honour will afford—
 844 I can stand to have no equal, much less a lord.⁵¹
 845 What's more, he has proffered me a means of prevailing,
 846 Having the occasion of a bold stroke, but failing—
 847 Occasion, whose forelock alone provides a grip
 848 And fills your hands with wind, if you should let it slip.⁵²

50 Taenarus: traditionally the site of the entrance to the underworld, of which Pluto is the prince; his name means “riches”, so he is “greedy” essentially by etymology.

51 The unstable combination of jealousy and thirst for honour in Amfidie makes one of the most striking points of contact with Shakespeare's Aufidius, who comes to a similar resolution:

Mine emulation

Hath not that honour in't it had, for where

I thought to crush him in an equal force,

True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way,

Or wrath or craft may get him. (*Cor.*, I.II.12-16)

There is no precedent whatever in Plutarch.

52 According to the traditional emblematic figure, Occasion has no hair behind, so cannot be seized after passing by.

849 But then he sought to lose it, giving a month's truce
 850 To his quivering people, stewing in their juice;
 851 Oh, well done!—so that Rome, while the siege was suspended,
 852 With full permission and in all liberty mended
 853 Its spirits, its courage, and now, stocked with supplies,
 854 Mocks us to scorn, as our negligence justifies.
 855 A traitor's faith is worth nothing; he knows no bounds;
 856 He'll do the same thing whenever the music sounds
 857 In his ear of his banishment's repeal: no doubt
 858 We'll soon be hearing of the Volsces put to route.
 859 As author of this harm, on me they'll turn their ire,
 860 Murder me in my bed or set my house on fire.
 861 Pattern of perfidy—go speed your preparation,
 862 For I'll subject your life to close examination:
 863 From now on I will set on you so many spies,
 864 And your movements will be tracked by so many eyes
 865 That you will have trouble putting a plot in place,
 866 Except to your confusion, your bloody disgrace.
 867 If not, I shall set such a trap when you come back
 868 That your glory and your life shall both go to wrack.

Scene iii

(Volomnie, Valerie, Troupe of Ladies, [*Verginie*,⁵³ *Son of Coriolan*])

VOLOMNIE

869 Ladies, may it please Heaven as greatly to speed
 870 This plan of ours as I warrant there is need.
 871 Alas, I shall spare neither my tears nor my prayers;
 872 As I depict them, still worse than they are our cares
 873 Shall appear. Still worse than they are? That cannot be:
 874 Poor Rome has never suffered such calamity,
 875 Since twin brothers founded her on that riverside

53 Verginie is, as throughout, non-speaking, but is addressed in l. 933 and presumably holds her infant son.

876 Where, but for happy destiny, they might have died.
 877 Sure not to be turned away by my angered son,
 878 With a new city I'll replace the vanquished one.
 879 Alas, these are mere words, words tossed into the air
 880 Unfruitfully, which glide away, leave nothing there:
 881 Can I, his mere mother, bow a hero's great mind,
 882 One always more to his country's esteem inclined,
 883 And glory, than to the affection of his parents,
 884 Or to the very life we mortals breathe and sense?
 885 Thus, from loving his country to extremity,
 886 He now pursues it with an equal enmity—
 887 Our ambassadors' brutal and instant rebuff,
 888 Petitioning in vain for peace, was proof enough;
 889 And, worse testimony of his fury unchecked,
 890 The praying of our sacred priests has no effect.

VALERIE

891 The power of a mother surpasses all power.
 892 His duty to you has not failed at any hour.
 893 Humble and respectful, a child so well-disposed,
 894 Piety itself was the model he proposed,
 895 And your weeping will mollify his heart of steel;
 896 Thus Rome will have still another reason to feel
 897 Thankful, more grateful to you than to the Sabine
 898 Matrons who hurled themselves across the battleline
 899 In Latium, making their fathers and husbands friends,
 900 When Mars, roused to rage, was pursuing violent ends.⁵⁴
 901 Only take heart; courageously that fortune dare
 902 Which we, companions with you, wish alike to share—
 903 Whether shame or honour, death or security:
 904 Whatever shall be Fate's immutable decree.

VOLOMNIE

905 Taking risks without hope—thus is madness betrayed.

54 This followed the war between the Sabines and the Romans, who had forcibly carried off the Sabine women to become their wives.

VALERIE

906 But here hope smiles upon you and implores your aid.

VOLOMNIE

907 So many others turned away daunts me with fear.

VALERIE

908 Their credit next to yours like mere smoke will appear.

VOLOMNIE

909 Their credit comprehended the whole country's needs.

VALERIE

910 And who would refuse his own mother when she pleads?

VOLOMNIE

911 Consider that his power on strangers depends.

VALERIE

912 The Volsces are just there to serve his vengeful ends.

VOLOMNIE

913 The Volsces, bitter rivals with us for empire,
 914 Our mortal enemies, must certainly aim higher;
 915 They scarcely deploy for one person's situation
 916 The entire armed forces of that warlike nation.

VALERIE

917 I would much rather see us straightaway refused—
 918 To play thus with excuses cannot be excused.
 919 *Fortune frequently brings felicitous success*
 920 *When one proceeds with hope and not in wretchedness.*

VOLOMNIE

921 Let me perish before, with an ingrate's disdain,
 922 I refuse to plead for my country in its pain.
 923 I refused simply out of fearing his refusal—
 924 Fearing for good reason, if ever I was fearful;
 925 Rebuffed or accepted, I shall not fail to sue:

926 Whether the end of a war or war's doubtful issue.⁵⁵
 927 O pitiful gods, by whom good plans are created,
 928 So just, so mild, omnipotent—all consecrated—
 929 Accompany my voice with a charm that may cleave
 930 His stony heart; may I, in cleaving it, receive—
 931 Receive remission of the wrongs he has endured,
 932 Joined with the favour of a happy peace secured.
 933 Let us go, dear daughter-in-law; with your chaste lips
 934 Send that Mars's bitter rancour into eclipse,
 935 And you, from your cradle, his sweet hope, noble seed,
 936 Oblige your country to you in its dire need.⁵⁶

Scene iv

(Coriolan, Council [*of the Volscians*], Volomie, Troupe of Women)

CORIOLAN

937 You Volscian lords, who do your republic proud,
 938 Whose Olympian worthiness is well allowed,
 939 This vital siege the Council calls us to pursue
 940 Until, between the warring parties, one of two
 941 Has lost, the Romans or ourselves—one bent on taking
 942 Their wall-surrounded world, the other party staking
 943 All on their defence: the outcome with certainty
 944 Unknowable by any except destiny.
 945 As far as human sense and knowledge can find out,
 946 The capture of their stronghold hardly seems in doubt;
 947 Whether compelled to give in quickly by attack
 948 Or worn down by time, with less risk of loss and setback

55 In l. 922, I read, with the 1632 edition, “J’ay refusé”, rather than “Je refuse” (1625), which for me gives poor sense. In any case, the grammar and meaning of ll. 922-26 are uncertain, and my translation remains tentative.

56 Plutarch speaks of Martius’ children as accompanying the women (Bullough, ed., pp. 538-39), and perhaps this was the playwright’s original plan, to judge from l. 816. The mention of the cradle (“bers”) confirms the hypothesis of Cavaillé, ed., n. 134, that a doll was employed. Curiously, there is only one reference to the child in the supplication scene itself (l. 1036), although he is presumably held by his mother throughout, and she is addressed in ll. 983-84 and 1074.

949 (A course that spares blood, gains wisdom's approbation),⁵⁷
 950 The enemy must take the yoke with resignation:
 951 He will have to agree to come to composition
 952 Despite his resistance, along with his ambition.
 953 Now, given the size of the force with which we're faced,
 954 Proceeding by main strength appears to me a waste,
 955 Like fighting shadows, advancing to fall behind.
 956 When one fights for something so precious, one is blind
 957 To dangers; for liberty, fortune, and one's race,
 958 There is nothing impossible, nothing one will not face;
 959 To the last gasp one struggles and will not relent—
 960 As long as physically they still have nourishment
 961 And vigorous blood boils undiminished in veins
 962 That the rich plenitude of spirit swells and strains.
 963 We are far from having to tame men who are famished,
 964 Confined within their ramparts, enfeebled and vanquished,
 965 Amid the children and women plaintively crying
 966 And soul-abandoned carrion silently lying
 967 In heaps—with fear of assaults, the pestilent air,
 968 With Fate at their heels, worked harder than they can bear.
 969 I judge that over time this siege will turn out grievous
 970 And crushing for them, as much as it lightens us;
 971 Such is my view—unless a better case opposing
 972 Is made by someone as to what we are proposing:
 973 Just as a single swallow does not make a spring,
 974 One person's mind does not hold others on a string
 975 And may go quite wrong, as often a horse more able
 976 Loses all its bearings and cannot find the stable.⁵⁸

57 Ll. 946-49, especially in the original, bear comparison with the attempt of Volumnia in Shakespeare to persuade Coriolanus to stoop to a deceptive strategem:

Sa prise ne nous doit balancer incertaine;
 D'ouverte & vive force, ou du temps ménagers
 Avec moins de hazards, de perte et de dangers;
 Moins prodigues de sang, et plus meurs de prudence.

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. (*Cor.*, III.ii.60-63)

58 I translate freely here so as to convey the double sense of "chopper" in the context of the image:

977 Such is human weakness! But—blest divinity!
 978 What troupe of women is making its way towards me?
 979 I recognise my mother and my wife. Now then,
 980 Arm yourself steadfastly, if ever you can harden
 981 Yourself against her. Ah, affection that avails
 982 More strongly than all else surpasses me, prevails;
 983 I see them weep. O wife, model of modesty,
 984 Do not provoke me further by your tears to pity;
 [He rises and descends to greet them⁵⁹]
 985 Comfort yourself with hope, and you, my mother, too,
 986 You to whom my homage for the light of life is due,
 987 Whom I honour above all, to whom all I owe,
 988 What now brings you to my presence? Let me know.

VOLOMNIE

989 My motive, my child, for coming thus in sorrow
 990 This old white head of mine may all too plainly show.
 991 The fault is yours, alas, as you well know. My coming
 992 Has the aim of causing from evil good to spring,
 993 From war, a peace, on condition it may please you
 994 To temper those fiery thoughts that now seize you
 995 With reason; that it may please you to overlook
 996 The insulting actions the raging people took
 997 Against your merit—ignorant ingrates, to slight
 998 Their benefactor, their refuge and guiding light!⁶⁰

it means literally to run into obstacles, as a horse may do, but figuratively to blunder, as of human judgement.

59 The account of Plutarch permits such a stage direction to be inferred and placed with precision: Nowe was Martius set then in his chayer of state, with all the honours of a generall, and when he had spied the women comming a farre of, he marveled what the mater ment: but afterwar-des knowing his wife which came formest, he determined at the first to persist in his obsti-nate and inflexible rancker. But overcome in the ende with naturall affection, and being altogether altered to see them: his harte would not serve him to tarie their comming to his chayer, but comming downe in hast, he went to meete them, and first he kissed his mother, and imbraced her a pretie while, then his wife and litle children. And nature so wrought with him, that the teares fell from his eyes, and he coulde not keepe him selfe from making much of them, but yeilded to the affection of his bloode, as if he had bene violently caried with the furie of a most swift running streame. (Bullough, ed., pp. 538-39)

Hardy's alterations here include having Coriolan first address his wife, a silent character; this makes it possible to concentrate attention quickly on the dramatic encounter between mother and son.

60 Plutarch has Martius' mother speak generally of "injuries", but the dimension of ingratitude here

999 Now they cry to you for mercy, now they repent,
 1000 Now they would stir your heart, less inclined to relent,
 1001 With their calamities, their plaints dolefully sounded.
 1002 Now, your vengeance achieved, you hold their walls surrounded;
 1003 You may, father-like, having given punishment,
 1004 Render them a benefit: the Volsces indulgent.
 1005 You may and you must,⁶¹ pious and magnanimous,
 1006 That your renown may shine sublime and glorious,
 1007 That you may gain the thanks equally of each nation
 1008 By judging our disputes with even arbitration.
 1009 I would not, like a fool, counsel you to betray
 1010 Those who have engaged their army under your sway—
 1011 No more than to seek your country's calamity.
 1012 You must offer pardon, maintain fidelity,
 1013 Between two extremes, find a mid-way to proceed:
 1014 When it comes to the virtues, mercy takes the lead.
 1015 Ah, do you not see how dread of the cruellest fate
 1016 Keeps our minds ever-churning in an anguished state,
 1017 And more will pain your mother and your grieving wife,
 1018 If there is no dousing this deadly blaze of strife,
 1019 If—but such an outcome may the great gods forfend!—
 1020 My prayer is shamefully rejected in the end?
 1021 To hope that your camp may gain the victory,
 1022 That this nation erect a trophy to your glory:
 1023 That is stark impiety; that is mere treason.
 1024 But to wish the contrary? Alas, for what reason?
 1025 You are my blood, my flesh, my bones—in short, my son,
 1026 That which I love most by natural obligation.
 1027 So, if all hope is lost of achieving a peace,
 1028 I have determined not to defer my decease:
 1029 Across my dead body with armour on your back
 1030 You will lead your choice soldiers on to the attack.
 1031 My son, do not descend to such impiety!

as elsewhere is due to Hardy. Cf. Shakespeare, *Cor.*, II.ii.30 (“ingrateful injury”) and IV.v.131 (“ungrateful Rome”).

61 “Tu le peux, et le dois”: cf. Volumnia in Shakespeare, *Cor.*, III.ii.99, “He must, and will”, where “must” and “will” are played on in the attempt to induce Coriolanus to humble himself in the marketplace—the key forerunner of the supplication scene.

1032 By this breast at which your small mouth sucked milk from me,
 1033 By these eyes my tears have drained to the point of dearth,
 1034 By the pains this mortal woman⁶² felt at your birth,
 1035 Bringing you into the world by the chaste amours
 1036 Of the bond of wedlock, and by this child of yours,
 1037 Accord, I pray of you, accord me this my plea,
 1038 And promise to maintain our fearful lives in safety.
 1039 You reply not a word, you turn pale with remorse;
 1040 Your heart travails, shaken by superhuman force.
 1041 Ah, my son; ah, my son—take the pitiful path;
 1042 Know that you need not always forfeit to your wrath
 1043 All I've done for you. Come, embrace him and entreat—
 1044 And if he denies us, let us die at his feet;
 1045 Let his stony harshness together kill us all;
 1046 His vengeance entire—upon us let it fall.
*[They kneel before him; he raises them up.]*⁶³

CORIOLAN

1047 Ah, mother, what have you done to rescue your nation?
 1048 My honour and life you betray to ruination;
 1049 For your country a victory happy and real,
 1050 But to your tamed offspring fatal, funereal.
 1051 Follow me. I will in secret with you converse
 1052 As to when and how I will make this camp disperse.

VOLOMNIE

1053 O power of pious speech, which heaven inspires!
 1054 More precious when beyond hope you grant our desires.

COUNCIL

1055 Vanquished by affection! This murmuring apart
 1056 Means nothing better than that we will soon depart.
 1057 To raise—and be mocked for it!—the siege of a city
 1058 So close to submission, reduced to extremity,

62 The two early editions vary as to whether “mortal” goes with “woman” or with “pains”; I follow the first in this case. Cf. Cavaillé, ed., n. 164.

63 The action mandated by Plutarch (Bullough, ed., pp. 540-41), whom Hardy follows closely in this sequence.

1059 A city that had no greater hope of making it
 1060 Than we now possess any power of taking it.
 1061 To endure that a stranger should thus do us wrong!
 1062 But then, who could hold out against constraint so strong?
 1063 The depth of his piety he gives us to know,
 1064 Rather than his malice, in dealing us this blow.

CORIOLAN

1065 Mother, you may reckon it as something assured,
 1066 Though, even as I vow it, my ruin is procured.
 1067 Return and deliver those ingrates from their fear,
 1068 Since you made that agreement before coming here.

VOLOMNIE

1069 Son, they would credit it from no one in my stead;
 1070 My stay in your camp must be filling them with dread.
 1071 May Jupiter the Protector guard you, until
 1072 We see you again, and preserve you from all ill!

CORIOLAN

1073 Do not hope for that till Erebus holds my life
 1074 Below.⁶⁴ Mother, adieu; adieu, my faithful wife.

VOLOMNIE

1075 Ah, with that thought you throw my heart into confusion:
 1076 O great gods in heaven—may it prove vain illusion!

64 Erebus: Darkness, the son of Chaos; metonymic for the underworld.

Act V

Scene i

(Coriolan, Page)

CORIOLAN [*alone*]

1077 Chill, pale, and trembling with a fearfulness unknown—
 1078 Resistance is vain, my constancy overthrown;
 1079 A hundred mortal presages my eyes encumber,
 1080 Closed the whole night through to the grace of gentle slumber:
 1081 Perturbed and restless spirits, faces of the dead,
 1082 With long lugubrious groans, auguries of dread.
 1083 Sometimes I felt my bowels stabbed by an angry mob,
 1084 An executioner who coolly did his job;
 1085 Then my cast-off spirit seemed far and wide to stray,
 1086 Joined to the crowded ranks of an airy array,
 1087 Imploring all in vain the services of Charon
 1088 To provide it with passage across the Acheron;
 1089 Neglected on the bank, wandering in a craze,
 1090 Like those who have hastened the ending of their days.
 1091 A cry of those birds who are prophets of mischance,
 1092 Prolonged until the dawn, increased my sufferance;
 1093 Phoebus, at daybreak, as if with illness awry,
 1094 Seemed to lour on me with a sinister eye;
 1095 The very ground groaned at every step of mine.
 1096 For one who fears death, that makes many a sure sign.
 1097 Not the Great One himself, in thundering perdition,
 1098 Could frighten me with such a feeble premonition.
 1099 But there's an enemy, spawned by our former quarrels,
 1100 The towering height of my victorious laurels,
 1101 Who fans the fury deep within the city's core,
 1102 Rekindling the embers of an ancient war;
 1103 He can stand it no more that for the Volsces I'm
 1104 The favoured leader, despite my apparent crime,
 1105 Nor that my valour still imposes a restraint
 1106 On the malice conceived against me for that taint,
 1107 Makes it that my fault to piety is imputed

1108 And I will likely be pardoned, not prosecuted.⁶⁵
 1109 He alone, driven by emulous jealousy,
 1110 At all costs aims at purloining my life from me.
 1111 Then let him! To die becomes us on any day,
 1112 To let the laws of Fate above us hold their sway,
 1113 Whether put to sleep by age or in full career—
 1114 But this man who comes in haste freezes me with fear.

PAGE

1115 You are summoned by the Lords of Council assembled.

CORIOLAN

1116 Now calm, you wretched coward, your senses that trembled!
 1117 Resolve now to find safety or to tumble down:
 1118 Then are you sure to wear immortal glory's crown.

Scene ii

(Amfidie, Coriolan, Council [*of the Volscians*], Chorus of Volscians)

AMFIDIE

1119 The Heavens may witness, the sun that shines above,
 1120 That love for our country, a charitable love,
 1121 And my offended honour, which might be suspected
 1122 Of being by this monstrous treachery infected,
 1123 Lead me despite myself to make this accusation
 1124 Against a man who seeks the ruin of our nation,
 1125 Pranked up with courage, hypocritical, disloyal,
 1126 Who made our faulty judgement serve his private quarrel,
 1127 Awaiting nothing but repeal of banishment
 1128 To practise some treason, immune to punishment,
 1129 Some flagrant harm against that people who, credulous,
 1130 Accepted this abortive serpent of Romulus.
 1131 The first to be abused, I shipwrecked on the shoal,

65 Lines 1103-8 are obscure, as Cavallé observes (n. 155); I translate according to his proposed gloss.

1132 Urged this very Council his command to enrol,
 1133 Gave up preeminence, took his word for a token—
 1134 For by a man of worth it will never be broken—
 1135 Sent from an Oracle, not merely something promised,
 1136 That he would become Rome's deadly antagonist,
 1137 Unreconcilable and burning hot for vengeance,
 1138 (Most welcome assuagement of a great heart's offence).⁶⁶
 1139 Yet, pleased by our ills, this pattern of perfidy,
 1140 Basely suborned by tearful femininity,
 1141 Has countermanded our siege for the second time—
 1142 An act worse than sacrilege, an odious crime,
 1143 One that should already have been punished by fire—
 1144 No mercy due, no need his reasons to enquire.
 1145 As to what he has in store at this point, who knows?
 1146 To deliver us bound hand and foot to our foes?
 1147 All that I've already said—but, ha, he's coming now;
 1148 To hold in check my fury, I hardly know how.

COUNCIL

1149 Let us hear, assured that he will have a defence
 1150 Against the accusation of such an offence.

AMFIDIE

1151 Through us the entire community commands
 1152 That you yield your power at once into its hands,
 1153 That you now give account of the wrong—or the right—
 1154 Of an affair that makes Heaven blush at the sight:
 1155 The infinite outrages you have perpetrated,
 1156 Our efforts, our designs, by your actions frustrated.
 1157 Take care, then, to put off, with due obedience,
 1158 Your high office, which is no traitor's recompense.
 1159 Next, it behooves you to respond, by me accused,
 1160 For the authority you have gravely abused.

66 Amfidie's identification with Coriolan and ironic appropriation of his heroism and vindictiveness are striking here.

CORIOLAN

1161 As with the consent of all I took on the charge,
 1162 I'll yield it when deprived by your consent at large.⁶⁷
 1163 Without delay let me declare each incident,
 1164 All that has taken place under my government,
 1165 And give account of it to you and to this Council,
 1166 Best judges whether it has done them good or ill.

AMFIDIE

1167 Double-hearted man, over and over an ingrate,
 1168 Plotter of ruins, refractory to the state,
 1169 With the course of our victories why have you trifled,
 1170 Maintained our wars in breath, which are suddenly stifled?
 1171 Whoever in the first place gave you a commission
 1172 To grant the Romans a truce without our permission—
 1173 Raising the siege just when, in fearful desperation,
 1174 Their city would in days have sought capitulation?
 1175 Why since then have you used your power absolute
 1176 To offer them a peace, a shameful one to boot?
 1177 Why have you raised our siege, treating with abuse
 1178 An army that could, beneath its renown, reduce
 1179 The daunted universe, not just a single place.
 1180 Tell us, traitor, what impelled you to such disgrace—
 1181 If that is how you've chosen to offer us thanks
 1182 For the honour of giving you charge of our ranks,
 1183 With myself speaking out for your candidacy?
 1184 Make up no ruses now, be quick and answer me!

CORIOLAN

1185 May it please you all, patiently hear me explain.
 1186 It shall not be found, I positively maintain,
 1187 That I have showed contempt, that of disloyalty
 1188 To the nation I may at all be counted guilty.
 1189 Rome, at the outset of the war we undertook,
 1190 I never hoped to capture, nor did ever look
 1191 To take it: neither did you; no higher we aimed,

67 Cf. below, 1303-6.

1192 Once their strength was sapped and arrogance was tamed,
 1193 Than to take back the places of yours that they held;
 1194 After discussion, such arrangements I compelled
 1195 Them to perform before I left: I kept my word.

AMFIDIE

1196 So in that limit to our triumphs you concurred?

CORIOLAN

1197 I feared to run the risk of fighting day by day.

AMFIDIE

1198 What risk did you run, their strength confined in that way?

CORIOLAN

1199 The extreme despair of valiant foes in arms
 1200 To an insolent conqueror has caused great harms.

AMFIDIE

1201 A foreign leader's treason, greater cause for fear,
 1202 Often makes complain the people who gave him ear.

CORIOLAN

1203 I pray the benignant gods never to increase
 1204 Your causes of complaint farther than such a peace.

AMFIDIE

1205 Did you not, listening when women did entreat,
 1206 Impose upon our army a shameful retreat?

CORIOLAN

1207 Alas, I know none of you who would not have bent,
 1208 Piety deflecting his dutiful intent.

AMFIDIE

1209 You see how his perfidy he frankly admits.

CHORUS OF VOLSCIANS

1210 The traitor has only too much fuddled our wits

COUNCIL

1233 When something is finished, second thoughts come too late:
 1234 But to make his error appear less reprobate,
 1235 Let us procure his corpse an honourable bier,
 1236 By which his virtues, not his vices, shall appear.⁶⁸

AMFIDIE

1237 I approve what you have magnanimously said;
 1238 It is an enormous crime to insult the dead.

Scene iii

(Volomnie, Messenger)

VOLOMNIE

1239 Like a leaf in the wind or a blustery sea,
 1240 My thoughts with fright have long been tossed inconstantly;
 1241 My head in horror bristling, my blood seized with fears,
 1242 Open my mouth to wailing, my eyes to shed tears.
 1243 With hope I cannot, cannot, set my heart at ease,
 1244 Disaster for my son—no less—my mind foresees.
 1245 One shoal he averted, but a gulf opened wide,
 1246 Subject as thus he was to the popular tide,
 1247 Subject to account to a populace of strangers
 1248 (For which, in my view, the more pressing are his dangers)
 1249 For failing to perform as his mission required,
 1250 For a peace which my prayerful entreaty inspired,
 1251 Harmful to the Volsces, to the Volsces who might
 1252 Better have wielded the arms they brought to the fight,

68 Cf. Shakespeare, *Cor.*, V.vi.142:

First Lord. Bear from hence his body,
 And mourn you for him. Let him be regarded
 As the most noble corpse that ever herald
 Did follow to his urn.

Second Lord. His own impatience
 Takes from Aufidius a great part of blame.
 Let's make the best of it.

1253 Dictated to us, under siege, our will worn down,
 1254 Such laws as a victor assigns a conquered town.
 1255 Alas, my dear child, your surpassing piety
 1256 I fear already has been, but will surely be
 1257 The cause of your disaster, and, kind beyond measure,
 1258 You will have preferred certain death to my displeasure:
 1259 You will have preferred embracing your destiny
 1260 To having my blame, committing impiety.
 1261 I remember, alas, I remember once more—
 1262 Ever since then I dwell upon, and I abhor—
 1263 The grim prediction that you made at our adieu,
 1264 Sadly foreknowing, son, I would be losing you:
 1265 Your forehead pale, your voice in gulping sobs upsurging,
 1266 You said aloud, and so revealed your deepest urging—
 1267 Yes, closing our adieu with tears, you told us then,
 1268 Only with the dead could we hope to meet again.
 1269 O Fate-weaving Sisters, I clasp my hands and pray,
 1270 If his heart has felt you piercing his life away,
 1271 Sooner than endure a death of more painful sort
 1272 From whatever messenger brings me that report,
 1273 Transfix my own, you dismal ministers of hell;
 1274 Use the same force with which your fatal arrows fell.
 1275 Do me so great a favour!—But, who here advances,
 1276 Casting his wild eyes about with distracted glances?
 1277 Ha, it is done! He has seen me, and with a dark stare
 1278 Confirmed the horror of which I am well aware.
 1279 Approach, Messenger, approach; to me you address
 1280 Yourself, your forehead turning pale for my distress.

MESSENGER

1281 Madam, it is you that cruel Fortune pursues,
 1282 Imparting by my mouth her most terrible news.

VOLOMNIE

1283 Boldly recount the evil present in my mind;
 1284 It is not just from today that Heaven proves unkind.

MESSENGER

1285 Your son has been murdered, who was once our Alcides,⁶⁹
 1286 To slake a crazed multitude's homicidal frenzies.

VOLOMNIE

1287 O fear too true! O destinies merciless!
 1288 O the doubtful ills of fortune, how they oppress!
 1289 Fragile, tenuous favour of the fickle crowd!
 1290 But make me believe this mishap: speak it aloud.

MESSENGER

1291 The Volsces assembled, ill-content with the pact,
 1292 Already had scripted the Hero's final act—
 1293 A part of them, at least, instigated by him
 1294 Who, envious, perceived his glory was now dim,
 1295 His fame overshadowed, as, close to the sun's light,
 1296 The stars of the vaulted heavens do not shine bright.
 1297 His name is Amfidie, jealous of domination,
 1298 Who traitor-like had long designed his ruination.
 1299 Accusing him in full Council, he takes the stand
 1300 That he must be deprived of the supreme command,
 1301 Then justify his orders, at once and at large,
 1302 To purge the crimes the people now lay to his charge.
 1303 Coriolan fearing, stripped of authority,
 1304 Helpless subjection to the other's enmity,
 1305 Protests that, granted power with their whole consent,
 1306 He would not resign it without all in agreement;
 1307 He tries nonetheless to allay their sense of wrong
 1308 With honeyed words distilled from his most gentle tongue.
 1309 Indeed, those preeminent made clear by their silence
 1310 That they were far from harbouring spiteful intents,
 1311 That his singular virtues, so deeply respected,
 1312 Would drown in oblivion those crimes recollected.
 1313 Suddenly, the other, fearing him back in grace,
 1314 To his troop of assassins already in place
 1315 Runs in revolt, urges the crime that they conspire,

69 Alcides, i.e., Hercules.

1316 Fills them with audacity, with fury and ire.
1317 Alas! Forbid me to continue with the rest.

VOLOMNIE

1318 From your mournful speech I have only too well guessed:
1319 He is dead; I see him by trampling feet laid low,
1320 His breast taking hundreds of stabs, blow upon blow;
1321 And now, enclosed within a space of deadly chill,
1322 I see that warlike body of his sprawling still
1323 In the marketplace, colourless, stripped of its soul.
1324 O the rage of my pain! O grief beyond control!
1325 O mother steeped in crime, O mother and murderer!
1326 Of your innocent blood the hateful torturer!
1327 O gods, O cruel gods! What execrable fruit
1328 Has it pleased you to bring forth from my pious suit!
1329 Wretch! When I prevented my homeland's devastation,
1330 To my race I brought ruin, my child's immolation.
1331 Might I at least see him—were it permitted me
1332 To grieve his body, captive of the enemy,
1333 To kiss him on the lips, gently his eyes to close,
1334 Then to offer him the bed where the dead repose;
1335 And might I be allowed to speak to him, though dead,
1336 With wild laments to let my loss be comforted!
1337 There is no one but myself who tears will devote;
1338 His country still recalls his knife against its throat,
1339 Remembers that it could not turn aside his hate
1340 And that to me alone it owes this happy state.
1341 This happy state it owes me; death to him I owe:
1342 I cruelly took his life when I made him stoop low.
1343 O my one and only comfort, my dear offspring,
1344 Suppose not that the Styx, though nine times winding,⁷⁰
1345 Can long prevent me from keeping you company;
1346 Sorrow for your death to the soul has wounded me,
1347 Bowed me beneath the burden of a weary age—
1348 One to whom the earth does harm and harsh heaven outrage.
1349 Not with my laments can your shade be satisfied:

70 A traditional notion.

