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CLARK LUNBERRY

## In the Name of *Coriolanus*: The Prompter (Prompted)

The invisible body is a mirror of containers.  
Perfected, a chain of commands speaks.

—Barrett Watten, "Conduit"

CORIOLANUS HAS OFFENDED THE PEOPLE. Obligated by custom to ask for their "voices" before being granted a seat upon the consul of the Roman senate, Coriolanus fails properly to fulfill the assignment given him and instead betrays his contempt for those he must solicit. Now he stands accused of inadequately pleading his position, of mocking the people, and is instructed to try again to seek their approval. His supporters, Cominius and Menenius, and his mother, Volumnia, exhort him to "frame his spirit" and "perform a part . . . [he] hast not done before." They entreat him to swallow his pride, if only for a bracketed moment, return to the marketplace, and ask again, "mildly . . . mildly . . . mildly," for the voices he requires. At this tense and fevered point of the play, and in the midst of the strained negotiation and deliberation, the consul Cominius quietly urges Coriolanus on by simply saying, "Come, come, we'll prompt you" (3.2.107).

The presence of the prompter and the prompted voice is implicitly rendered throughout much of Shakespeare's late tragedy *Coriolanus*. Attributions of the voice, distributions of the voice, and the beginnings and endings of the voice are repeatedly refined, re-found, and refocused. Who is speaking? Who is speaking for whom? And how is speaking spoken? Cominius's "Come, come, we'll prompt you" is a line that resonates throughout the play, a line that eclipses, crookedly eclipses, all voices at the moment of their utterance. Who is prompted, and who prompts whom? And who, in the final account, prompts the prompter?

Caius Martius Coriolanus—the hero-character, the proud, victorious, and multiply wounded warrior—is a man who, on the face of it, resists and repels all promptings, obstinately insisting on speaking always and only for himself. It seems there is nothing more abhorrent and violating to Coriolanus's sovereign dignity than the idea that someone might tell him how to speak, when to speak, and what to speak. "Would you have me," Coriolanus says to his mother in this same scene, "false to my nature? Rather say I play the man I am" (3.2.14-17). And with Coriolanus, there is little doubt that he knows *who he is*, or thinks he does. However, the question that arises from the precise wording of this appeal—"say I play the man I am"—is whether Coriolanus really believes that he *plays* the man he is, rather than *is* the man he is.

Near the end of this same scene, Coriolanus's mother appeals to him a final time, declaring in apparent frustration, "You are too absolute" (3.2.39). She proposes again the beneficial intervention of the prompter, this time pragmatically pleading with her son to "speak to th' people; not by your own instruction,/Nor by th'matter which your heart prompts you,/But with such words that are but roted in/Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables/Of no allowance to your bosom's truth" (3.2.52-57). In her less absolute manner, she apprehends the pragmatic power and contextual necessity of "dissembl[ing] with my nature" (3.2.62), understanding that words that are "roted in" need not be words that are permanently possessed, nor need they compromise those truer promptings of the otherwise inviolable heart.

At last he relents. Coriolanus has been slowly, reluctantly, and, as it turns out, temporarily persuaded to return to the marketplace—"Look," he says boyishly, "I am going" (3.2.134)—to ask once more for the voices of the people, to bow down diminished and demeaned before the "fragments" he disdains. But, of course, once he is again facing the people and is chided by their savvy tribunes (tribunes who all along have been, in one way or another, cunningly prompting the responses of the people, provoking their anger, and rendering their multiple voices singular), once Coriolanus is again required to speak, he cannot in the end fulfill the promise he has made to his mother; he will not repeat the supplicating words that have been given to him. As the tribune Brutus has predicted, Coriolanus cannot *but* "speak what's in his heart" (3.3.28-29). He cannot play the penitent role, and in the final account he will not be prompted, will not allow the words to be "roted" into his mouth. The obstinate, virtuous, and constant Coriolanus ("Let it be virtuous to be obstinate" [5.3.26], he says later in the play) chooses death or banishment over any gainful, cynical violations of his ever-certain sovereignty. Regardless of the consequences, he will not forsake his "own truth" by simply speaking the simple words given him. It will be his own voice, or none at all.

—"la parole soufflée"—

"You have . . . stopp'd your ears against  
The general suit of Rome: never admitted  
A private whisper . . ."

—Aufidius

Resisting, rejecting, repelling the promptings of the prompter: what is at stake (and what is exposed) in the stubborn persistence of these constant convictions? If the voice of the prompter is denied, whose voice is it that finally remains? Unrehearsed, whose words are heard? In his two early essays on Antonin Artaud, Jacques Derrida writes about Artaud's virulent reaction to and banishment of the prompter from his proposed theater. Artaud, as Derrida describes him, bitterly imagined the prompter as an intervening voice set on the margins of the stage to whisper into the ears of the meekly receptive performer, "receiving his delivery as if he were taking orders, submitting like a beast to the pleasure of docility" (189).

In his depiction of Artaud, Derrida presents a person that in many ways strikingly resembles Coriolanus. Like Coriolanus, Artaud could not abide any notion of a prompter, imagining this base and shadowy figure of the theater to be an

invisibly stationed thief of the voice who simultaneously plunders words while whispering them. Derrida writes that for Artaud this stealthy figure of the prompter was “the force of a void, the cyclonic breath . . . who draws his breath in, and thereby robs me of that which he first allowed to approach me and which I believed I could say *in my own name*” (176)—an image that suggests the reversed action of a kind of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation that in fact functions as a form of mouth-to-mouth suffocation. For Artaud, the prompter is thus an agent of denial and death. Likewise, for Coriolanus, the idea of having the proper, prompted words whispered into his ear or breathed into his mouth (even, and especially, at the moment of maximum peril) entailed the gravest of violations.

“Artaud,” Derrida notes, “attempted to forbid that his speech be spirited away [*soufflé*] from his body . . . [and] knew that all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech. Becomes a signification which I do not possess because it is a signification” (175). Coriolanus’s own resistance to being prompted would seem to be derived in part from related convictions concerning “stolen speech” and speech as repeated and repeatable “spectacle”—speech and spectacle in which Coriolanus vehemently resists participating: “I’d rather,” Coriolanus says before the Senate, “have my wounds to heal again/Than hear say how I got them . . . To hear my nothings monster’d” (2.2.68-69). For Coriolanus, the rehearsal and representation of events, robbed and robbing, contaminates consciousness and demeans his dignity, taking with one hand what is given with the other, disabling at the moment of enabling. However, Coriolanus’s resistance both to the repetition involved in prompting and to the indignity of public spectacle evoke as well Derrida’s inescapable and enclosing paradox of signification, which must always and already be understood *as* signification, with the ensuing dispossession of speech implied in this prefiguring formula.

Stolen speech, whispered words, the repeated spectacle . . . these contaminations of consciousness by the exposed constructs of consciousness inevitably create for Coriolanus the intolerable conflict of trying to think outside of thought, of trying to speak outside of what is spoken. This troubling portrayal of troubled speech and thought would seem to suggest that somehow consciousness is contamination, that there is nothing outside of the contamination that can be pointed to as pure and possessed of simple origin, presented as unrepresented, as unprompted. For it is this very contaminating construct of thought that has made it possible for thought itself to be diagnosed as contaminated. “I am in relation to myself,” Derrida writes of Artaud, “within the ether of speech which is always spirited away [*soufflé*] from me, and which steals from me the very thing that it puts me in relation to. Consciousness of speech, that is to say, consciousness in general, is not knowing who speaks at the moment when, and in the place where, I proffer speech. This consciousness is thus also an unconsciousness (‘In my unconsciousness it is others whom I hear,’ 1946 [Artaud]), in opposition to which another consciousness will necessarily have to be reconstituted; and this time, consciousness will be cruelly present to itself and will hear itself speak” (176).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An additional rich, textual dimension of Derrida’s analysis of Artaud is the curious, paradoxical manner in which Derrida, throughout both of his essays on Artaud, seems to *speak for* Artaud, even

For Coriolanus, such consciousness of thought, such *unconsciousness* of thought, such “consciousness . . . cruelly present to itself,” cannot be nobly sustained or endured. He demands of himself and of others a sovereign and unwavering possession of language—a sovereign and unwavering possession of self—that in its tightly, austere projected dimension leaves little room for unconscious mystery or maneuver. As a result, Coriolanus, unburdened by the unconscious, steadfastly resists playing the part that he is already very much in the process of playing, refuses the representation that he is already representing. And it is this obstinate and occluded insistence upon the certainty of his own self, his own unprompted, unrepeatable authenticity, that constitutes a significant aspect of this tragedy’s tragedy. For, as Derrida writes, “What is tragic is not the impossibility but the necessity of repetition” (248)—and, we might add, the necessity of the prompter.

Derrida further observes of Artaud’s prompter that “the prompter whose hole is the hidden but indispensable center of representative structure . . . ensures the movement of representation” (235). And yet, for Coriolanus there is no representation (or there certainly shouldn’t or needn’t be). He is not *playing* the part of the noble warrior, the loyal son, the dignified patrician; he simply, inviolably *is* noble, *is* loyal, *is* dignified, these terms remaining for him stable and uncorrupted emblems in his uncorrupted mind.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, any whispered promptings, either from outside or in, would be a violation of his autonomous boundary, a violation of self and soul. When he finds himself in the compromising dilemma of having to speak the words given him, of having to acquiesce to the promptings of the prompter, Coriolanus chooses instead to stop entirely, destroy entirely the “movement of representation,” rather than participate in the spectacle’s dissembling, repetitive necessities. “There is,” Coriolanus states assuredly, alternatively, “a world elsewhere!” (3.3.135).

Like Derrida’s Artaud, who “desired the conflagration of the stage upon which the prompter was possible . . . [and] wanted the machinery of the prompter spirited away, wanted to plunder the structure of theft” (176), Coriolanus would pursue his own vengeful plunder upon the prompted stage, would incite his own

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to the extent of often adopting the personal pronoun “I” when it appears to be Artaud’s thoughts that are in question. Indeed, it sometimes sounds as though Derrida is prompting Artaud to speak in the manner that Derrida would *have him speak*, and it is frequently difficult to distinguish the ideas of Artaud from Derrida’s ideas *about* Artaud. Presumably this is an intended, *playful* collusion and collapsing on Derrida’s part of the author and his clinical/critical subject, a writerly manifestation of themes developed within the essays—the stealing of language, the speaking for another, the prompting of voices.

<sup>2</sup> An example of a pre-poststructuralist, pre-new historicist reading of *Coriolanus* can be found in Brian Vickers’s 1966 book *Shakespeare: Coriolanus* (coincidentally, the same watershed year that Derrida published his Artaud essay “The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation”). From Vickers’s essentialist humanist perspective, Coriolanus is a variation of an existentialist hero. Thus, in the situation in which Coriolanus finds himself, “the individual is right to reject a corrupt society and to affirm the authenticity of his own values” (37). Vickers describes Coriolanus as a heroic idealist, possessing “spontaneity and immediacy of feeling . . . [i]ntegrity . . . , noble trust and loyalty to others,” and he concludes: “I would rather have his integrity and innocence, however easily ‘put upon’ than all the calculation and political skill in Rome or Corioli” (59). Vickers leaves unexamined an issue that has since preoccupied poststructuralists: representation’s inevitable compromise, and the slippery, unstable referent. Coriolanus’s notions of “trust,” “loyalty,” and “nobility” would thus seem to go unquestioned and unchallenged, taken very much at face value as words whose meanings have remained as constant and inviolable for Vickers as they are for Coriolanus himself.

destructive act of conflagration upon those who would dare to prompt him. If Artaud, as Derrida writes, “wanted to erase the stage, no longer wanted to see what transpires in a locality always inhabited or haunted” (249), Coriolanus wants to burn his to the ground, to reduce his “cankered country” to cinders and ashes.

—word/s—

“Ah, wherefore with infection should he live,  
And with his presence grace impiety . . .”

—Shakespeare’s Sonnet 67

Of all Shakespeare’s major characters, Coriolanus is perhaps one of the least loquacious—one of the least given to soliloquy and extended pronouncement. Indeed, with Coriolanus, not only is prompted language to be resisted, but language in general also seems to be suspect. This character is clearly not, by Shakespearean standards, a man of words but rather a man of action, manifesting and embodying his mother’s instructed belief that “Action is eloquence” (3.2.76). Unlike another of Shakespeare’s great warriors, Othello, who in a polished, and perhaps tactical, manner claims, “Rude am I in my speech/And little blest with the soft phrase of peace” (1.3.82-83), and then goes on to speak quite *unrudely* and at length to justify his marriage to Desdemona, Coriolanus seems by comparison the genuine article, the man of few words, the “strong, silent type.” When Coriolanus *does* speak, it is often with an austere, minimally syllabled, and steely precision that would seem to exhibit, not a simple inarticulateness, but rather a distrust of language—so that he says only what *must* be said, quickly and directly, as if to get the words out of his mouth before they turn distastefully upon him.

Historically, the character Coriolanus’s relative ineloquence may have contributed to the play *Coriolanus*’s relative neglect or, even worse, its dismissal by many critics and scholars.<sup>3</sup> Within the play there are few, if any, immediately memorable, canonical lines that have filtered into the larger culture. No *to be or not to be*, no *tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow*, but rather an abundance of spare, almost pedestrian, phrases like “I banish you” or “There is a world elsewhere”—phrases that, within the precise context of the play and along the heated continuum of accumulated action, are indeed powerful, moving, and often explosive. Yet, in isolation or insufficiently impacted in the momentum of events, these almost banal words and phrases are just as likely to sit dumbly, benignly upon the page, as cold and dispassionate as the character who utters them. However, rather

<sup>3</sup> A famous exception to this assessment came from T. S. Eliot. Eliot rather self-servingly juxtaposed *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* and found the latter to be, contrary to popular opinion, the more successful play. Eliot wrote that Shakespeare’s tragedies “culminate in *Coriolanus*. *Coriolanus* may be not as ‘interesting’ as *Hamlet*, but it is, with *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare’s most assured artistic success. And probably more people have thought *Hamlet* a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the ‘Mona Lisa’ of literature” (47). Eliot’s principal objection to *Hamlet* was that it lacked a convincing “objective correlative,” a term coined and loosely defined by Eliot as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (48). If *Hamlet* is literature’s “Mona Lisa,” perhaps *Coriolanus* would be the neglected, overlooked and underestimated painting in the corner of the gallery, perhaps by an unnamed and forgotten assistant from the studio of Poussin.

than read the laconic manner of Coriolanus as simply indicative of a decline in Shakespeare's theatrical achievement or a waning of his character-building skills, we can also read both the play *Coriolanus* and the character Coriolanus as a carefully crafted exploitation of writerly restraint and character *stasis*,<sup>4</sup> an austere inscribed theatrical examination of lyrical limit, linguistic illusion/disillusion, the cultural formation/deformation of identity, and the evanescent boundary of private language.

With the character Coriolanus, then, perhaps the crucial issue is not simply a resistance to being prompted, but, more profoundly, a resistance to language in general, even a language that one might presume to privately possess. For Coriolanus it is not just *the figure* of the prompter that is the problem, but *the medium* of the prompter as well: *all* language is inevitably tainted. As Derrida observes of Artaud, "As soon as I speak, the words I have found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to me, are originally *repeated* . . . I must first hear myself. In soliloquy as in dialogue, to speak is to hear oneself" (177). Intolerably and maddeningly to hear oneself is to hear the prompter prompting, and language becomes an impure substance that belongs to everyone and no one at once, both plebeians and patricians alike speaking from the same source and substance, repeating and repeating and repeating the words that are always already spoken. "Ah," as Shakespeare's sonnet says, "wherefore with infection should he live . . ." (245).<sup>5</sup> Of course, we already know that Coriolanus has chosen to live "elsewhere!" The question that remains is precisely where "elsewhere" actually is, or even conceivably could be.

In his book *Disowning Knowledge*, Stanley Cavell also addresses the question of language and its prompting in *Coriolanus*. However, instead of the more surreptitious image of the prompter whispering into receptive ears, Cavell presents a more unhygienic encounter in which words, materially imagined, are placed (or more likely shoved) into open mouths, the language transferred salivically in the form of regurgitated repetition. Cavell writes: "A pervasive reason Coriolanus spits out words is exactly that they *are* words, that they exist only in a language, and that a language is metaphysically something shared, so that speaking is taking and giving in your mouth the very matter others are giving and taking in theirs" (165).

Cavell's conception of Coriolanus's spitting out his words with disgust, as though they were foreign particles to be gotten rid of, also suggests an infection or con-

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<sup>4</sup> In his study of *Coriolanus*, Bertolt Brecht suggests that this stasis of character, this unchanging, *unbuilding* figure within the play, may have been entirely intended by Shakespeare. The following is an excerpt from a dialogue between Brecht and an assistant:

W: "Usually you're for developing character step by step. Why not this one?"

B [Brecht]: "It may be because [Coriolanus] doesn't have a proper development. His switch from being the most Roman of the Romans to becoming their deadliest enemy is due precisely to the fact that he stays the same." (264)

<sup>5</sup> A wonderful bit of rich ambiguity in this line, as pointed out by the Arden editors, is the uncertainty as to whether the speaker is himself infected or is instead surrounded by infection. This seems an extraordinarily apt description of the situation in *Coriolanus*: Who is the source of the contamination, the infection? Is it Coriolanus, or instead those who surround him, the plebeians, the patricians? Or does the infection somehow permeate the entire environment, a contagion infecting everyone equally?

tamination of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> This image of a dispossessed language that enters through the mouth and circulates through the invisible interior body like some kind of masticated cud likewise inevitably brings to mind that other orifice embedded in the very name of our hero, *Coriolanus*.<sup>7</sup> Cavell elaborates on the anality of Coriolanus's name when he speculates that what alarms Coriolanus "is simply being a part, one member among others of the same organism . . . [and his] disgust is a function of imagining that in incorporating one another we are asked to incorporate one another's leavings, the results or wastes of what has already been incorporated" (169). Faced with these unpalatable beginnings and endings of language—words as shared substance transferred indiscriminately from mouth to mouth and tongue to tongue, only to be finally noisomely expelled—Coriolanus rejects the words and repels the repeated promptings that would try to place them in his mouth. Rather than speak, rather than use the already befouled language, Coriolanus chooses either silence or the concrete eloquence of action. Standing before the consul of the Roman senate, asked to speak and to plead his case, Coriolanus simply says, "When blows have made me stay, I fled from words" (2.2.74).

—s/word—

"O me alone! Make you a sword of me!"

—Coriolanus

In the final moments of *Macbeth*, with an enraged and vengeful Macduff about to slay the king, Macduff exclaims in anguish, "I have no words; My voice is in my sword . . ." (5.8.7-8). Coriolanus, the later tragic warrior of Shakespeare, also seems to wish to make such a noble claim, to have his voice within his sword, to have the words temper the sharp and deadly metal. In his renunciation of the already-tainted language, Coriolanus affirms the unworded gesture, the violent, uncorrupted act of the warrior that exceeds or precedes the insidious promptings of the prompter through what James Calderwood describes as "the unambiguous expressive power of his sword" (81). With this sword, the inarticulate Coriolanus

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes's "grain of the voice" might also come to mind alongside Cavell's image of language and the open mouth, though Barthes's more erotic overtones would appear to present a very different response to the materiality of the voice. Whereas Cavell's image suggests a certain disgust, dispossession, and perhaps even disease, Barthes's image elicits something far more sensual, a kind of carnal exuberance of the mouth moving toward the fluid dispersions of orgasm. "The *grain* of the voice" Barthes writes, is an "erotic mixture of timbre and language . . . the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony . . . throwing . . . the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss" (66-67). Though Barthes wrote elsewhere that he "had a disease, I see language," with "the grain of the voice" there appears to be nothing infectious about the particles lining the throat. After all, the grains described by Barthes are the grains imagined in the act of "writing aloud," a "vocal writing" that would seem to occur within the hygienic imagination of one's private reading room.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Burke, in his essay "*Coriolanus* and the Delights of Faction," interestingly addresses the pronunciation of Coriolanus's name when he writes, "Though the names [from *Coriolanus*] are taken over literally from Plutarch, it is remarkable how tonally suggestive some of them are, from the standpoint of their roles in this English play . . . And in the light of Freudian theories concerning the fecal nature of invective, the last two syllables of the hero's name are so 'right,' people now often seek to dodge the issue by altering the traditional pronunciation (make the *a* broad instead of long)" (96).



appears to find his medium of articulation, a language beyond language, beyond the insufferable contaminations of repeatable words.

Again, the parallels with Artaud and his proposed theater are instructive and striking, for Artaud also passionately desired to replace the infected language of words with a language of "concrete gesture," a more primal utterance of inflicted wounds, leaving cruel and illegible marks upon the sentient body. As Derrida describes it, "Without disappearing, speech will now have to keep to its place; and to do so it will have to modify its very function, will have no longer to be a language of words . . . , of concepts that put an end to thought and life" (188). Artaud himself wrote in *The Theater and Its Double*—in a manner that brings to mind the hopeless, impossible aspirations of Coriolanus—that, unlike spoken language, the concrete gesture has "an efficacy strong enough to make us forget the very necessity of speech . . . For beside the culture of words there is the culture of gestures . . . [and] the suggestions of gesture will always express more adequately than the precise localized meaning of words" (108-109).

For Coriolanus, the violent, valiant gesture of the sword—whereby he single-handedly defeated Corioli—was an inviolable act, *self*-conceived, unprompted and unpromptable, cutting to the very quick of the real, its unrehearsed and unrepeatable origin. Like Artaud's "concrete gesture," Coriolanus's sword thus expresses "more adequately" than words the self-sustaining presence of nobility and the sovereign self. However, once Coriolanus returns to Rome to be showered in "acclamations hyperbolic" and "praises sauc'd with lies" (1.9.50-52), he angrily, resistantly apprehends that even the decisive gesture of an expertly wielded sword, once done, can be undone, can be redone. Coriolanus observes and deplores that his wordless gestures are indeed subsequently "monster'd" by others—the blood and wounds of action defiled by their syllabled retelling. In a kind of reversed alchemical process, what was pure is thus transformed into something base. To Coriolanus's horror and disgust, the "concrete gesture" is almost automatically recuperated into an ignoble form of vulgar representation: the blood itself turning into ink, the wounds forming into words (legible scars upon the legible body), the language of gesture becoming a repeatable, representable language spoken and respokey.

In the final account, the word is indeed within the sword, literally, materially, coincidentally—as though melted into the very metal of Coriolanus's weapon, Artaud's "gesture" in effect rendered into and reduced to language: S/WORD. Despite his endless desire to escape representation, Coriolanus must again accede to being prompted, to speaking the words already spoken, the gesture already made. The gesture of pure presence, the cruel and violent act at the heart of the real, is already contaminated by the fatal, continued representations of language. The word is always already residing within the sword.

—wound—

"He should have showed us  
His marks of merit, wounds receiv'd for's country."  
—Second Citizen

And from the worded sword (the sordid word), it is the wounds received that must also be made to speak. The citizens clamor to see the wounds, and it is the

custom for these “marks of merit” to be shown, bargained for, and bartered in exchange for the people’s “voices.” But these blooded cuts upon the body, scars from the sword, will not speak for themselves and must instead be spoken for. As one of the citizens in the marketplace says when Coriolanus reluctantly approaches to seek their support, “For, if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them” (179). Like the obstinate voice of Coriolanus, the wounds must also be prompted, tongued into utterance. The initial corporeal silence of the wound, the muted mark of the sword’s wounding penetration, is not alone sufficient—there cannot be, as Derrida writes of Artaud, “stigmata . . . substituted for the text” (189). Like the concrete gesture of the sword, the wound must also be rendered into language, represented as readable text: the incision as inscription, the wound as word.

Earlier, Menenius had rejoiced alongside the warrior’s mother at the news of Coriolanus’s valiant wounds, saying exultantly and admiringly, “The wounds become him” (2.1.122), describing the bloody inflictions as if they were a suit of fine clothing that fashionably made the man. Yet this is precisely what Coriolanus resists: he does not want his wounds to become *him*. His wounds, like his words, are not to be spirited away, stolen, represented as spectacle. For Coriolanus, his definition and identity are to be essentially self-possessed, possessed essentially, and are not to be found de-meaningly inscribed upon his wounded body.

In his initial appearance before the “unwashed” plebeians in the marketplace, Coriolanus hints that he will reveal his many wounds, teasingly announcing, “I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private” (2.3.76-77). But this intimate display is never enacted; the wounds, privately or otherwise, are never revealed. And perhaps they needn’t be, for Menenius is correct, more correct than he may have imagined, his words betraying an even more wounding significance. For Coriolanus’s wounds *have* become him: unseen but still spoken, the private wounds are now the legible lines of the man.

—world—

“He was a kind of nothing, titleless”

—Cominius

When Coriolanus is banished from Rome, he turns and banishes back. With his terse and cryptic pronouncement, “I banish you,” he venomously dismisses those who, he says, “corrupt my air” (3.3.123). Again, having been given the words, Coriolanus takes them in his mouth and spits them back: You banish me? I banish you! Yet, aside from the insolent bravado of Coriolanus’s counter-indictment, it is left fairly in question as to where and how at that perilous moment, surrounded by swords and greatly outnumbered, Coriolanus could conceivably banish anyone. Where but within the dense scenario of his own sovereign imaginings could he now maneuver and mold the outcome of these unfolding, unraveling events? His world is crumbling before him in large part because of the obstinacy of his own convictions, his unwavering resistance to simply submitting to the rote promptings of the prompter, showing contrition, and speaking to the people as necessity demanded. There he stands, condemned and alone, facing the citizens of Rome and audaciously telling them that *they* are the ones who are ban-

ished. But banished from what? Where in the world would they go? Coriolanus is the one being pushed from the gates of the city. And the real question is, where in the world will *he* go?

With his brazen claim to banish the banishers (what might seem an almost infantile rejoinder to a gravely serious, grown-up situation), Coriolanus is perhaps presenting what Horatio in *Hamlet* calls a "prologue to the omen coming on" (1.1.126). For Coriolanus's words could be construed as darkly hinting at an eventual return to Rome, a destructive reentry that would, if accomplished, banish everyone—friend, family, and foe—from the infected scene, purifying by fire the contaminated country. But now, surrounded by patricians and plebeians alike and about to leave his world behind, Coriolanus disdainfully walks away, turning his back on that which he had so often defended and so vigorously battled for. His final emphatic words to the citizens announce his departure for the world "elsewhere!"—a bold, enigmatic claim that must have echoed ominously off the thick interior walls of the city.

Yet, once banished from Rome, that *other* world turns out to be, astonishingly, Antium, home of his arch enemy Aufidius. Arriving anonymously at what would seem to be the deadliest possible destination, Coriolanus almost immediately comes face to face with the man he has repeatedly battled. Asked by an unrecognized Aufidius, "Why speak'st not? Speak, man: what's thy name?" (4.5.54), Coriolanus silently, stoically refuses to identify himself. Though he is questioned again and again by Aufidius, Coriolanus will not say his name. Six times Aufidius demands to know the name of the unidentified figure who has entered his home, and each time, Coriolanus stubbornly, assuredly waits to be recognized, recognized "for the man I am" (4.5.57).

For Coriolanus, the obligation to say his own name, to prompt his own recognition, would again seem to entail a diminishment of dignity, a disgraceful naming of nobility that should not have to be named. From the majestic vantage that Coriolanus has maintained, his name should have instead been transparently present, replete with what Derrida describes as (again, with reference to Artaud) "a perfect and permanent self-presence . . . a magic identification" (193). But in fact, away from Rome, off the battlefield, and out of his armor, this "magical identification" cannot occur, and Coriolanus cannot be recognized by Aufidius for the man he is. The indeterminate figure standing before Aufidius is simply not known. A final time Aufidius demands, "I know thee not! Thy name?" Only then, reluctantly, Coriolanus concedes, for "necessity commands me name myself" (4.5.58). Prompting the memory of Aufidius, Coriolanus is finally obliged to say his own name, to tell his enemy who he is.

Clearly, Coriolanus's purpose in going to Antium is not to find another world, but rather to join forces with his earlier enemy in order to return to the world he has just left. Banished, Coriolanus almost immediately begins plotting not just his reentry into Rome but its total destruction. What has happened to that promised, proclaimed "world elsewhere"? As demonstrated by Aufidius's failure to recognize him, Coriolanus must now understand (or perhaps knew all along) that he can only *be* the man he is, that he can only magically inhabit his name, in the place where both he and his name have gained their noble fame, their resonant,

resident meanings. Once he is outside the Roman walls, Coriolanus is bereft of defining form, of configuring identity. Indeed, Cominius, his former general, on a mission to Antium to appeal to Coriolanus to spare Rome, reports: "'Coriolanus' he would not answer to; forbad all names: He was a kind of nothing, titleless." For if his name is to be renewed, regained, it must be "forg'd . . . o'th'fire of burning Rome" (5.1.11-14).

For Coriolanus there *is* no world elsewhere; there can be no "Coriolanus" elsewhere. Rome is the sole location within which his identity can be understood *as* identity, his presence understood as presence. Echoing Derrida's description and diagnosis of Artaud, Rome is for Coriolanus the necessary site of "the closure of the presence in which he had to enclose himself . . . , delimiting a fatal complicity . . . inhabit[ing] the structures they demolish" (194). "There is no theater in the world today," Derrida later notes, "which fulfills Artaud's desire" (247). Likewise, for Coriolanus, there is no world in the world that can fulfill his impossible desire, sustain his sovereign certainty, no *other* world to which he might possibly go. Banished, he can only banish back, and in the same moment begin plotting his destructive revenge, his destructive return to the slippery world from which he has never really departed.

—assist—

"Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!"

—the conspirators

Artaud imagined a self-engendered theater in which he could claim that "I Antonin Artaud, am my son,/my father, my mother,/and myself" (*Anthology* 238). Likewise, Coriolanus imagines a self-engendered world in which his name is known, his dignity unquestioned, and his nobility transparently present. Appealed to by Menenius to spare Rome from his fiery intentions, if only to save his family and friends, Coriolanus dismisses his earlier ally, saying simply, "Wife, mother, child, I know not" (5.2.80).

Nevertheless, through a series of appeals—first from Cominius, then from Menenius, and finally, effectively, from his family—the intransigent, constant Coriolanus begins slowly to waver, begins to reveal fissures of weakness upon his solid surface. "But out, affection!" he says, bolstering his resistance to his mother's lengthy and impassioned plea, "All bond and privilege of nature break! . . . I'll never/Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand/As if a man were author of himself/And knew no other kin" (5.3.24-25, 34-37). The moment Coriolanus says "As if a man were author of himself" is decisive, for it is the moment that his own diminishing form begins to come more clearly into view.

What Cominius and Menenius cannot accomplish, Coriolanus's mother, wife, and child finally do. Rome will be spared. But the price paid for its preservation is Coriolanus's own solid standing, his own noble self. Before his pleading family (and with Aufidius observing it all from the side), Coriolanus utters words of resignation and defeat that only moments earlier would have seemed unimaginable coming from his hardened mouth: "I melt, and am not of stronger earth than others" (5.3.28-29). Though his mother's effective persuasions were partially predicated on the restoration of his name by his framing "convenient peace"

(5.3.191) between the Volsces and Rome, this transforming moment of assent seems largely one of defeat and *self*-destruction. For all intents and purposes (and foreshadowing his own imminent destruction), Coriolanus is now conquered and compliant, receptive to the promptings of the prompter, and fatally resigned to the closure of his own inevitable, inescapable representation. "Like a dull actor now/I have forgot my part and I am out,/Even to a full disgrace" (5.3.40-43).

Attentively witnessing the scene from the side, Aufidius recognizes the significance of the moment and seizes the opportunity. Coriolanus's acquiescence to his family's appeal and his acceptance of Rome's pardon opens the way for Aufidius's ultimate victory. Upon his return from negotiating a peace between the enemies, Coriolanus is abruptly and brutally killed for his capitulations to Rome. Aufidius then delivers the closing lines of the play over the body of the dead Coriolanus. After speaking words of sorrow, recognizing the loss of an honored enemy, Aufidius makes his final claim on Coriolanus: "Yet he shall have a noble memory. Assist" (5.6.153-54).

Aufidius's use of the word "shall" recalls an earlier explosive moment in the play when the tribune Sicinius dared to use "His absolute 'shall'" (3.1.87) in banishing Coriolanus. Now, in the final moments after Coriolanus's death, the "absolute 'shall'" is heard again, with Aufidius's final enigmatic words providing the final affront, the final wounding blow to the dignity of Coriolanus. Aufidius's instructions are the culminating violation of Coriolanus's honor—his words are delivered, the stage instructions indicate, as Aufidius "stands on" the Roman warrior's dead body—a violation that Coriolanus, in his death, can do nothing to resist or repel. For Coriolanus's "noble memory" is not alone sufficient to sustain itself. Even in his death, Coriolanus's nobility is neither sovereign nor self-evident, but must be assisted, prompted into being.

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