Media-Controlled Political Arenas: Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in Adaptation

Wierik Jansen

Master Thesis

English Literature and Culture

Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr J.F. van Dijkhuizen

Second Reader: Dr M.S. Newton

1 July 2020

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Chapter 1 Power and Identity in Shakespeare's Rome 8

Chapter 2 A Warrior in a Political City 20

Chapter 3 A Manipulative Media World 32

Conclusion 43

Note 45

Works Cited 46

Introduction

The plays by Shakespeare have been adapted countless times. However, the original plays are often themselves based on other stories, or historical accounts. Linda Hutcheon notes that "Shakespeare transferred his culture's stories from page to stage" (2). For example, *Romeo and Juliet* is based on "an Italian Renaissance novella" (Bate and Rasmussen 1675), and the history plays are also written on the basis of historical accounts. In this sense, they are already adaptations in their own right. This makes any adaptation of one of his plays a double adaptation; an adaptation of an adaptation. This thesis will take this notion as its starting point. It will take a look at how Shakespeare used his sources in *Coriolanus*, and after analysing this play, adaptations for the screen will be analysed. The focus of the analyses will be on which themes are emphasised in a particular adaptation, and how these themes are informed by the times in which the work was created.

The main source Shakespeare used for *Coriolanus* is Plutarch's *The Lives of the Most Noble Greeks and Romans*, translated to English by Sir Thomas North in 1579 (Shrank 409 Bate and Rasmussen 1539). Some of the character traits that Plutarch ascribes to Coriolanus can also be found in Shakespeare's Coriolanus. Cathy Shrank notes that according to Plutarch's description, Coriolanus is "brash, forceful … [and] hostile to anything that threatens the primacy of his own patrician class" (409). In his adaptation, Shakespeare made the plebeians and the tribunes the main threat to the patricians and thus Coriolanus. At the beginning of the play, he shows that Coriolanus is hostile to the citizens of Rome, and wants them to be hanged (1.1.173; 1.1.188). However, Patrick Ashby disagrees with this view and argues the opposite. He says that Plutarch's account contains a "striking" "degree of intrigue" (18) and compares Plutarch's Coriolanus to Shakespeare's Richard III, "the arch-Machiavel" (18). In Shakespeare's adaptation, "martial action is contrasted with politic words" (Ashby 19) and Coriolanus "is not a natural politician" (Hadfield 574). Instead, Shakespeare makes Coriolanus

a soldier who excels at “martial action”, but whose inability to use “political words” is an important reason for his eventual banishment from the city. Shakespeare took the elements of the Coriolanus depicted by Plutarch that would fit the themes he wanted to highlight in his play, and discarded the rest.

In his article “Adaptation and Intermediality” Lars Elleström discusses ten “more or less explicit or accepted assumptions” about adaptation, and the field of adaptation studies (513). The seventh assumption states that “Adaptation is a transfer of media characteristics from one medium to another, not from several media” (Elleström 519). This, he says is a widely accepted idea in adaptation scholarship: an adaptation is based solely on one single source. Yet, in the discussion of this statement, he quickly notes that an adaptation may also make use of more than one source.

The assumption Elleström makes does seem to make sense on first glance. For example, take a film adaptation of a Shakespearean history play. Let us assume that the adaptation is a straightforward one, meaning that the setting and time of the original remain the same, and the text of the play is not “translated” into present-day English. Because, by doing any of these things, another layer of interpretation would be added, and would therefore mean another layer of adaptation. So, the director remains ‘true’ to the original work. Then, it would seem, only the play is adapted to film.

However, it can be argued that the final product is a combination of adaptations. Firstly, every film is based on a screenplay. The screenwriter has to interpret the play, and decide what they think is important for the story, what themes and motifs to emphasise. By doing so, they make their own adaptation of the play. After the screenplay is finished, the director has his or her ideas on how it should be acted, but so do the actors themselves. They, in turn, make their own version of the screenplay, their own adaptation. Garcia Landa notes that performances for stage and film have “[d]ifferent traditions of mise-en-scène and acting styles” (184), and these

differences add another challenge to adapting a play to a motion picture. These different traditions are part of the reason why film and stage are different.

Another obstacle to overcome when making a film from a play is the fact that in films it is the camera which directs the attention of the audience. During a stage production, by contrast, the actors on stage can make use of the whole of the stage. Multiple actors are constantly acting and reacting to each other, moving about on stage, and this means that all members of the audience have to decide for themselves what they think is important to focus their attention on, and what is not. Movies do not have this complication, because the director has already decided what is important, and shows the viewer just that. As Linda Hutcheon says, "[n]ot only is the kind of attention and focus different in a theatrical production but plays also have different conventions than films or television shows. They have a different grammar: cinema's various shots, their linking and editing, have no parallel in a stage play" (43). Hutcheon expands the role of the camera to include all cinematic devices. On stage, a close-up shot of one of the actors is impossible. Theatre actors have to portray their emotions in a much more extravagant manner in order to get it across to the audience. A film actor, on the other hand, can make tiny changes in their expression, without losing them, due to a close-up.

Moreover, as Hutcheon noted in the quote above, the way a movie is edited is crucial to how the story that is portrayed is viewed. Editing can make or break any film, no matter how good the actors, or director, because the editor is the one who decides which shots will follow each other. This means that the editor has final say over the story that is being told in the film. The choices they make are the ones that end up on screen. Theatre does not have one person deciding what is important. Instead, each member of the audience decides for themselves. If they want to look at what is happening on the fringes of the stage, no one can stop them. In film, however, it is rather easy to guide the audience's attention. By keeping what is important in focus, and by extension blurring the rest, the viewer does not have much choice to look at

anything else. As Wyver says, “There is also the supposed loss in a screen adaptation of a staging of the audience member’s autonomy of gaze—that, supposedly, seated in a theatre we have the unfettered freedom to look, if we wish, at a spear carrier and not at the king” (n.p.). A television adaptation restrains the audience.

However, the argument that “stagings direct an audience member’s attention just as much as do the shot changes of a screen version” (Wyver, n.p.) could also be made. The lion’s share of the action will take place on a small part of the stage. A spear carrier might be present, but when they are not involved in the action of the scene that is being played out, there is little to no reason to pay attention to them. The king, on the other hand, is more likely to be actively acting and will, therefore, be more interesting to look at. Moreover, a good stage production is like a magician. The attention of the audience is directed to where the director, or magician, wants it to be. In that sense, it is, as Wyver pointed out, not unlike the choices a film director makes to keep the action of a scene in focus.

Wyver also argues that, “to be truly televisual, the medium must be liberated from aspects of and associations with the theatre” (n.p.). It is common to compare an adaptation for television with one performed on stage. Yet, as mentioned above, both media have “a different grammar” (Hutcheon 43), different ways of portraying, telling and showing a story. Because of that, it is unfair to compare television to stage productions, and it is unrealistic to expect a televisual adaptation to meet the same criteria as a theatrical one. This is what Wyver means when he says that television has to be “liberated” from stage. Both media should be respected in their own right, and discussions and analyses should focus on the strengths of either, rather than the shortcomings of both media. Linda Hutcheon notes that all performative media, including television and theatre, have their own customs and “specific constraints and possibilities” (49). These fundamental contrasts between media are how we can tell them apart. But beyond that, they give each medium its own character.

This distinction that differentiates all (performative) media also lies at the heart of adaptation studies as a whole. There is one central question that is the basis for most, if not all, research within adaptation studies: "What can one art form or medium do that another cannot … ?" (Hutcheon 35). John Wyver attempts to give an answer to that question, regarding the difference between stage productions and televised ones. He argues that, when it comes to television adaptations, "[t]he real world environments … represented a decisive move away from the theatrical origins of the productions" (Wyver, n.p.). He is referring to the 2012 TV adaptation of *Julius Caesar* by the Royal Shakespeare Company, but the argument is applicable for all adaptations intended for television. One of the appeals of film, in contrast with stage, is that any theatre production is bound to the stage. Film, on the other hand, can move about freely through any setting the director wants to include in their adaptation. *Romeo and Juliet* can be set in the actual streets of Verona, Henry VII defeats Richard III on the real Bosworth Field. This distinction between stage and screen is fundamental in the difference between both media, and the reception of adaptations for either.

This thesis will focus on *Coriolanus*. Chapter one will analyse the play itself, trying to discern some of the themes that this play deals with, and how they are portrayed by Shakespeare. The other chapters will take these themes, and use them as a basis for the analysis of the film (television) adaptations. In total, two adaptations will be discussed. First, the film adaptation by Ralph Fiennes (2011), starring the director himself as the titular character and Gerard Butler as Aufidius. And second, a filmed adaptation of a stage production, directed for stage by Robert LePage and for screen by Barry Avrich, which came out in 2019. Both these adaptations modernise Shakespeare's play and use news media to manipulate Coriolanus's image and influence the plebeians.

Chapter 1 Power and Identity in Shakespeare's Rome

Coriolanus is traditionally seen as the fourth and final of Shakespeare's Roman plays. However, while the other three plays, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Titus Andronicus* take place either during the time of the Roman emperors, or at the very end of the Republic, *Coriolanus* is set much earlier. It takes place at the beginning of the Roman Republic, just after the last Roman king, Tarquinius, has been exiled. Rome is only a minor power in the Italian peninsula, and is still dealing with the aftermath of their shift from monarchy to republic. .*Coriolanus* addresses the problems that arise from this change in government structure, as it asks a number of questions on various related topics. Two of the main subjects of the play are political power and Roman identity. Shakespeare has his characters ponder and comment on issues such as "who has power?", "how does one gain power, or remain in a powerful position?", and "what are the characteristics of a citizen of Rome?" This chapter will analyse what *Coriolanus* suggests in relation to these issues, on the basis of a textual analysis of Shakespeare's play. The political power balance in Rome is a precarious one, and has a tendency to shift easily. Though the patricians, and the senate especially, act as if they are in charge, this chapter has shown that that premise is faulty. Power does not reside with a single faction, but shifts instead between the citizens, to the tribunes, the army, and even Volumnia.

The first topic to discuss is power. This is the theme that underlies most, if not all events in *Coriolanus*. The time period and the uncertainty both the Roman patricians, as well as the plebeians, find themselves in is well summarised by Shrank. She argues that the play "depicts a time of political flux, as the old patrician order is increasingly required to utilize the rhetoric of popular participation" (Shrank 415). The old system, citizens being ruled by a king, was overthrown a decade and a half before the beginning of the play. After the expulsion of the Tarquins, the patricians have seized control of the city, and installed the Senate. However, the lower plebeian class is discontented about this new rule, and (still) feels oppressed. At the

beginning of the play, the citizens are starving, due to a lack of grain, and the opening scene shows a demonstration which is close to becoming a riot. When the senator Menenius enters the stage, he is barely able to persuade the mob to stop their strike and go back home. Moments after he has done so, however, Coriolanus arrives to inform the senator that another mob has dispersed after a grain dole has been promised.

This first scene immediately begs the question of who holds the real power in the city of Rome. The first encounter with the plebeians at the opening of the play already shows the balance of power in the city. Though the patricians seem to be in control over the situation and their plebeian subjects, it becomes quickly clear that the citizens hold the real power. It would seem obvious that the senate and the patricians are in charge. Menenius tries to resolve the issue the mob poses, without resorting to violence. He does what he can do best: talk. True to his senatorial status, the old politician tries to show the gathered citizens that their efforts are futile. He tells the citizens that "you may as well/ Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them/ Against the Roman state" (1.1.47-9). He uses the parable of the body to explain why it is acceptable for the senators (the "belly" of their society) to hoard all the grain and let the plebeians starve. As he says in his tale,

> Though all at once cannot
> See what I do deliver out to each,
> Yet I can make my audit up, that all
> From me do back receive the flour of all,
> And leave me but the bran (1.1.123-7).

Yet the oration is interrupted by the Second Citizen. He criticises the parable, and challenges Menenius. The Citizen tells Menenius that he is "long about it" (1.1.106), and asks the senator

how he will apply the parable to the situation at hand (1.1.128). With each interruption, Menenius becomes increasingly irritated. In the end, he even calls the Second Citizen "the great toe" and says that he is "one o'th'lowest, basest, poorest" of the mob (1.1.138-9). It seems that the politician has lost control and cannot contain the citizens.

Ironically, it is Coriolanus (then still Martius) who arrives and defuses the situation by bringing the news that another group of rebellious citizens has got the senate to agree to give them "[f]ive tribunes to defend their vulgar [i.e. common] wisdoms" (1.1.200). However, he does so in the manner that will become familiar throughout the rest of the play. He is condescending towards the plebeians and there are few instances when he meets with them without also insulting them. The comment that the Second Citizen makes when Coriolanus enters the stage, "[w]e have ever your good word" (1.1.148), might seem genuine at first, but on a second reading, it is hard to imagine it as anything but sarcastic. Their strike has forced the senate to grant them five tribunes, providing the plebeians with a degree of self-rule, though it still appears minimal at this point in the story.

The true power of the tribunes becomes apparent after the battle for Corioles. They capitalise on Coriolanus's negative image and incite the plebeians against him to exile him from Rome. Caius Martius has been given the cognomen "Coriolanus" for the bravery he showed during the battle for the Volscian city and is offered a consulship. However, he needs the people's votes to become consul. Two of the tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, plot against Coriolanus because they fear that he will strip them of the power they only just gained. They speak ill of him, saying that "when he had no power/ … He was your enemy" (2.3.158-60). Sicinius and Brutus remind the citizens that Coriolanus has nothing but contempt for them, and that he would not use his time in office in their favour, rather the opposite. Since Coriolanus has indeed never said a good word to or about the citizens, they are easily persuaded by the tribunes. When the time comes for the citizens to proclaim Coriolanus their consul, the tribunes

rile him up. They ask Coriolanus provocative questions, or make inflammatory comments. Coriolanus, always quick to anger, takes the bait and lashes out at both the tribunes and the citizens. Menenius and the commander Cominius do try to keep Coriolanus calm, but fail to do so. The tribunes banish Coriolanus, and cry "[i]t shall be so" (3.3.126-ff). The citizens take this cry up, and so drive out Coriolanus.

The citizens are a powerful political entity, though their power is often used or abused by the tribunes for their personal gain. Most of the actions the citizens undertake are prompted by the tribunes. Without the votes of the people, Coriolanus cannot become consul, so the plebeians have the power to decide who will rule over them for that year. Yet, they exert more political power than that, as we have seen. Their strikes at the opening of the play force the senate to create a new political institution, the tribunes of the people. The senate would not have created this position, if it had not been for the people and their cry of injustice. However, the expulsion of Coriolanus from the city of Rome is different. Again, the outcry against injustice and a collective strike by the plebeians rob the senate of any choice but approving the will of the people. But the difference lies in the origin of their motivation. During the revolts in Act 1, the people are driven by hunger and feel neglected by the senate. They act on their own behalf, without any outside prompting. They take to the streets, because they feel like they had no other choice; it is that, or starvation.

The tribunes' manipulation of the plebeians reaches its peak at the trial of Coriolanus. the people do not act of their own accord. They are instructed to follow the lead of the tribunes. Although the tribunes have been newly created, they immediately wish to show that they are a force to be reckoned with, and to increase their political power. Coriolanus has gone to the common people and asked them for their votes. Yet, at slight prompting from the tribunes, the citizens begin to regret their choice., saying that Coriolanus "mocked us when he begged our voices [i.e. votes]" (2.3.138). The tribunes are eager to agree and tell the people that they have

come up with a plan to get rid of Coriolanus: the citizens need to with withdraw their votes, and Coriolanus will not be consul. What the two tribunes do not tell the citizens, however, is that due to this refusal, Coriolanus will "fall in rage" (2.3.244). They will then take advantage of this anger, and use it to remove Coriolanus from the political playing field. Yet they will frame the people's denial of Coriolanus for consul so that "this shall seem … their own" (2.3.249). Through the tribunes' interference with the election, "Shakespeare ensures that Coriolanus' exile is attributable not to plebeian hostility, but to a governmental system which validates plebeian voices" (Ashby 18). The blame for the expulsion lies with the tribunes as the instigators of the incident, not the plebeians.

The tribunes use the power of the people to get their main opponent out of the way. Before the trial of Coriolanus begins, Sicinius instructs the citizens. He tells them to follow his lead, and "[i]f I say 'Fine', cry 'Fine!', if 'Death', cry 'Death!'" (3.3.20). All they have to do is repeat after the tribunes, for the tribunes know that the senate cannot withstand the combined force of the citizens. After all, a joint strike by the citizens is the reason the tribunes are in power in the first place. They manipulate public opinion to serve their own needs. Moreover, they are quick to see the power that command over the plebeians can give them and they capitalise on that as soon as they have an opportunity to do so.

The notion of political power comes up again later in the play, when Coriolanus has joined with the Volscians and is waging war against his native Rome. The Volscian army stands at Rome's gates and the Romans are at the mercy of Coriolanus. Both the general Cominius, and Menenius have gone to Coriolanus to beg him to spare the city and make peace. But Coriolanus sends his former friends away. He is impervious to their pleas. In these scenes, the two factions fighting for political power are not the citizens and the politicians, but rather the politicians and the soldiers. And again the politicians fail to prevail. Their pleas fall on deaf ears, as Coriolanus is bent on destroying the city that expelled him. For all their talking and

reasoning, the politicians are powerless against the army that stands at their gates and are unable to do anything to prevent the imminent destruction of Rome. Only when his mother Volumnia speaks out does Coriolanus stop and listen.

Volumnia succeeds in saving Rome by reminding Coriolanus of his kinship with her, his wife, and child and through them, his kinship to Rome itself. Volumnia has come to the Volscian camp, together with Coriolanus's wife Virgilia and their son. While Coriolanus remained unmoved by the patricians Cominius and Menenius, the sight of these women make him realise what he is about to do. He begs forgiveness from his wife and mother only moments after they arrived, and even kneels before his mother. When she kneels in return, Coriolanus says "[w]hat's this? Your knees to me?/ To your corrected [i.e. reprimanded] son? (5.3.61-2). He is ashamed of how his mother behaves and holds himself responsible for her actions. She comes up with a plan that will keep Coriolanus from razing Rome, while still claiming victory in the war. And after a silence, Coriolanus breaks and accepts the proposal. The women are able to do what the politicians cannot: save Rome.

Thus, the division of political power in Rome is fivefold: first, the politicians in the senate, who appear to be in power, but in reality have to concede much, if not all, of that power to the other three parties. Second, the power of the tribunes stems from the people. Their office is created after the citizen's rebelled against the Senate. They remember the force that the commoners were able to exert on the Senate during the grain riots and make use of that when they want to further their own goals. Third, the citizens themselves are an entity that gains power when they act as a whole, as shown with the expulsion of Coriolanus and the creating of the new tribunal office. This political power is harnessed by the tribunes, but the tribunes do need the support of the plebeians to sustain their own political power. The fourth category is the soldiers and armies, who might not hold political power as much as purely the power to subject people to their will, as Coriolanus shows when he has Rome at his mercy. Furthermore,

Roman politics and military heroism are closely connected: Cominius is a decorated general and the consul at the beginning of the play, and Coriolanus's bid for the next consulship finds its origin in his victory at Corioles. And the fifth and last political power comes from Volumnia. She might not hold considerable power, but is still able to prevail where politics cannot.

In a number of his history plays, Shakespeare shows that murder can be a path to political power and authority. *Macbeth* is a prime example, but many of his history plays also deal with a change of ruler, often against his will. *Coriolanus* is different, however. In this play, "Shakespeare shows political authority emerging from forms of election rather than inheritance or *coups d'état*" (Hattaway 119). Of course, the Roman tradition of deciding their new consuls was historically one of election, but its use in this play is interesting nonetheless, since it shows a fundamental difference with a play like *Richard III*. In that play, multiple monarchs are forcefully removed from office, so first Richard, Duke of Gloucester and later the Earl of Richmond can become king of England. Yet none of the common people of the realm have any say in who becomes their next king. The opposite is true for *Coriolanus*, where the people do play an important role in deciding their next ruler. Even though they are manipulated in the process, without the support of the citizens of Rome, Coriolanus cannot become consul, nor can the tribunes expel Coriolanus. Coriolanus is powerless to act against the people during the election, but has all the power to decide the fate of Rome as he stands before her gates with the full might of the Volscian army at his command. If he had wanted to, he could have destroyed his native home. Yet, he could do nothing when the people made their choice and withheld their votes to make him consul, nor when they banished him. The one person in all of Rome who knows little else but combat and battle does not consider forcing the consulship upon himself by bringing an army to the Forum Romanum. He does not meddle with Roman traditions, but begrudgingly fulfils the requirements set by the people.

The other major issue Shakespeare explores in *Coriolanus* is Roman identity and the play repeatedly asks the question what it means to be Roman. This topic is headed by the Roman "ideology of masculinity" (Kahn 223), which, Kahn argues, stems from the fact that "Rome was a patriarchal society" (223) and the importance of the military in Roman society. As Shakespeare shows in *Coriolanus*, outstanding military achievements are important in a political career, for example those of Cominius and Coriolanus. The ideology Kahn indicates is shown in *Coriolanus* because the Rome depicted by Shakespeare in this play is "fiercely martial" and Shakespeare's Romans believe that "courage in battle is the essence of manliness" (Kahn 223). Coriolanus himself is an excellent example of this Roman manliness. He fought the Volscian army at Corioles single-handedly, and this unique display of valour gains him the cognomen "Coriolanus". Moreover, the militaristic heroism he showed during the battle is the reason why he stands for consul shortly afterwards. Wells comments on the choice of Coriolanus for consul and the process that led to that decision. He says that "eligibility for public office depended on reputation, and since the kind of reputation that mattered most was the glory of victory in battle, the military ethos was self-perpetuating" (Wells 160). As mentioned above, Cominius is also a general who has become consul, much like Coriolanus, which shows that military service is seen as the first step in a political career. Military service is one of the main elements of the Roman identity as it is portrayed in *Coriolanus* and success on the battlefield is measured through bravery and honour. These two traits manifest themselves in a display of glory. "Rome's national culture of violence fed on a system of social values that placed paramount importance on *Gloria*" (Wells 160). Fighting bravely and winning battles is glorious, doing so alone and without the help of the rest of the army even more so.

The play does not only focus on the identity of the main character, but also on that of the Romans as a whole. Shrank argues that the identity of the Romans in *Coriolanus* "hinges" more and more "on participation: on the city and on the civic, or civil, processes that comprise

city life" (Shrank 422). They increase their level of participation as they are "learning to take part under the terms of the scant enfranchisement they have been granted" (Shrank 416) One of these processes is the consular election. This is an important point, as Shrank further argues that the naming of the common people of Rome in this play is of significance: "in *Coriolanus* the people are known as *citizens*, a title that confers a degree of political power and responsibility" (413). This political power is an important aspect for it decides the fate of Coriolanus and, with that, of the citizens themselves, as discussed above. However, the political power of the Roman citizens is not their only identifying feature. The early Romans were characterised by Plutarch in his *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*. The Early Modern English translation by Sir Thomas North from 1579 is one of the main sources Shakespeare used for this play (Shrank 409; Bate and Rasmussen 1539). It is likely that Shakespeare, therefore, knew how "Plutarch characterizes … the early Romans" and that he describes them as "tough warriors who valued bodily strength and physical superiority above all other qualities" (Whittington 132-3)

These Roman qualities Plutarch notes are examined by Shakespeare throughout the play, most notably after the (first) war with the Volscians. At the beginning of that war, the titular character is still named Martius Caius, but his prowess and courage on the battlefield are noted. When the story that Martius has almost singlehandedly routed the entire Volscian force at Corioles reaches the general Cominius, he decides to honour Martius by giving him the cognomen "Coriolanus" (1.9.68-70). The preference of the Roman citizens for strong warriors also plays an important part when Coriolanus has to convince the plebeians to vote for him for consul. The Roman tradition dictates that the candidate show his scars, the wounds from battle to prove that he has bled in defence of his country. The tribunes of the people press this matter. And when Coriolanus refuses to adhere to the custom, they put even more pressure on the importance of the tradition (2.2.129-51). However, Coriolanus still refuses. As he is asking

various small groups of citizens for their votes, he offers one to show him his wounds in private (2.3. 61-2). By making this suggestion, "Coriolanus is reversing the balance of power between the citizens and the military, insisting that it is his right to decide where and to whom he displays his wounded body" (Hadfield 576).

Coriolanus refuses to show his wounds in public, and says that he will "blush in acting", signalling that he feels that he would merely be pretending, or putting on a show for the citizens by doing so. He is convinced that his actions alone should be enough to win him the consulship. However, as Cominius explains to Coriolanus, "the value of rituals", he informs the consular candidate "that praising a general's valor is not intended to flatter or corrupt the warrior, but to inspire in the people a devotion to the Roman state and a sense of belonging to the supreme power in the Mediterranean" (Raspa 219). So, Coriolanus does agree with the commoners that the fact that he has fought for Rome is an important reason for his candidature for consul. Again, this shows that the early Romans valued valour and expertise on the battlefield. Another example is the son of Coriolanus and Virgilia. Volumnia is full of praise, and says of him that "[h]e had rather see the swords and hear a drum than look upon his/ schoolmaster" (1.3.46-7). The little boy is praised not because he is smart and eager to learn, but rather because he is not and is interested in warfare instead.

However, the same qualification that made Coriolanus viable for consul is also the source of his contempt for the plebeians, and makes him disregard them. According to Coriolanus, the common citizens have not acquired any skills close to matching his. Roman society expects powerful commanders and soldiers to be skilful political leaders as well, as is evidenced by their choice of General Cominius as consul, and the fact that Coriolanus is expected to become the next consul after his victory at Corioles. In this society, it is understandable that Coriolanus, one of Rome's greatest warriors in his time, does not value the citizens who refuse to fight alongside him for their city in return. Yet, Coriolanus does take his

contempt for the common people far, if not too far. He not only questions their Roman-ness, but says that they are not Romans at all. To Coriolanus, the plebeians are "barbarians …/ Though in Rome littered: not Romans …/ Though calved i' th' porch o' th' Capitol" (3.1.280-2). He names them so, because they lack any military skill, and that is precisely what Coriolanus is praised for. Menenius agrees with Coriolanus in his anger, but advises him to "[p]ut not your worthy rage into your tongue" (3.1.284). Though he is allowed to criticise the citizens, Coriolanus should be careful not to antagonise them.

Another crucial aspect of Roman identity which Shakespeare emphasises and explores throughout the play is honour. This virtue is mostly seen in connection to the army, and military honour is, therefore, one of the main facets that is highlighted by Shakespeare. Moreover, honour is often an aspect of respect in Shakespeare's play. And disrespect is frequently a consequence of dishonour. For example, when Coriolanus and Aufidius, general of the Volsci, fight each other in Corioles, the Roman says that he hates Aufidius "[w]orse than a promise-breaker" (1.8.2). This indicates that promises are important to the Romans (and possibly also to the Volsci; it would be unusual to make a comment to enrage your enemy if he does not understand the reference). Moreover, Coriolanus's comment implies that it is not just the promise itself that is important, but also to keep the promises made. The person who failed to uphold his end of a promise would lose honour and respect from the one to whom the promise was made. The aversion for promise-breakers is reflected also in Coriolanus's way of dealing with the accusations the tribunes of the people lay before him. Volumnia, Menenius, Cominius and he are discussing how to best handle the situation that the tribunes have created. In the end, they decide that "[t]he word is 'mildly'" (3.2.165). However, Coriolanus does add that if the tribunes will come up with invented charges, that he "[w]ill answer in mine honour" (3.2.167). This means that he will use honour, here meaning truth, to counter the dishonourable strategies the tribunes will employ.

The contempt for dishonourable members of the Roman society is characterised by the treatment of the tribunes when Coriolanus is waging war on Rome. In Act 5, Scene 2, Cominius, Menenius and the two tribunes are panicking at the host that stands before the gates of the city. Yet Menenius does not show anger at Coriolanus for betraying Rome and taking up arms against his native town. Instead, he turns his wrath to the tribunes. He makes some sarcastic comments, thinly hiding his utter contempt for the two men. "You have made good work:/ A pair of tribunes that have wracked for Rome,/ to make coals cheap: a noble memory!" (5.1.17-9). The fury within these words is hard to miss. Though he might once have held the tribunes in high esteem, Menenius has no good words left for them now. And he can hardly be blamed. Because of the scheming and plotting of these men, Rome is about to be sacked. The only reason they had to exile Coriolanus was to increase their own power. Their selfish, honourless acts have directly led to the fact that there is now armed force waiting to enter the city. The tribunes have quickly fallen from grace, due to their disgraceful deeds.

In conclusion, this chapter has taken a look at the various themes Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* examines. The main issues that have been established are the notion of, primarily, political power and Roman identity. The identity of the Romans is characterised by two major elements: warfare and honour. The Roman Republic is at war with the Volscians for much of the play, either expanding or defending its borders, and the warrior culture that Shakespeare represents finds its origin in this militarism. This elevated competent soldiers and commanders to high status, and is the reason why Coriolanus has been chosen as one of the candidates for consul. The other part of the identity of Roman citizens is honour. This honour was to be respected, and those who acted dishonourably, as the tribunes did when they fabricated charges against Coriolanus, were treated with contempt in return.

Chapter 2 A Warrior in a Political City

At the end of 2011, Ralph Fiennes's *Coriolanus* came out in movie theatres. The original play text was reduced by two thirds to make the film an action-packed sequence of events. Fiennes also updated the setting of his film to the modern day, and set it in "a place calling itself Rome" (Fiennes, 00:02:33). He made the location of the film ambiguous, so that it could take place anywhere. The emphasis on the fact that the city is not actually called Rome, but that it has given that name to itself, allows every city to be 'Rome'. This also means the events in the film could happen in every city, anywhere on Earth. The drastic cutting in the play text made the film "an intelligent commentary on the increasingly blurred boundaries between media, politics and war; the compelling tragedy of a soldier unable to relate to others except through aggression" (O'Neill 456). This chapter will focus on these elements in this adaptation of *Coriolanus*; the role of media, specifically television, and how a man fuelled by rage can (not) navigate his way through that world. In Fiennes's adaptation, Rome is a media-dominated society, in which the manipulation of images and narratives through news media is paramount in the fate of political leaders and politics in general. In doing so, Fiennes takes the themes from Shakespeare's play and emphasises them, while simultaneously updating the play to a modern setting.

In the 'Rome' of Fiennes's *Coriolanus*, every action is politicised through the image created by the media. The political nature of the play is extended to its contemporary extreme, and every action gains political significance, especially those taking place within the city. This is done through the use of cameras and television. "Every uneasy encounter with the citizens is captured by multiple camera phones as well as the relentlessly pursuing TV cameras" (O'Neil 457). From the moment Coriolanus gained his cognomen and is rumoured to become the next consul, the news media act almost as paparazzi and are always on his heels when he is out in public. Reporters stand ready to record and comment on his every action. Either consciously or

unconsciously, the pressure on the upcoming politician increases due to the proximity of the cameras and the knowledge that everything he does will be broadcast and criticised. Coriolanus is uneasy with this amount of attention as he does not know how to behave in a proper and decorous manner. He is a warrior, not a statesman, as Menenius hints at during the trial when he defends Coriolanus's harsh words by reminding the audience that "when he speaks not like a citizen,/ You find him like a soldier" (3.3.66-7). Due to Coriolanus's upbringing and his profession he cannot be held accountable for being a bad rhetorician. He is not used to having to speak in front of a camera and is therefore unpractised.

The citizens of this Rome have their own cameras with which they capture most of Coriolanus's public moments. In many of his appearances the crowd that has gathered has taken out mobile camera phones to record the proceedings. As Coriolanus is notoriously terrible at performing in public, his public appearances often turn into catastrophes, which are filmed from all possible angles by the gathered citizens. Various outbursts against the plebeians are recorded. Even though the film itself does not show what happens with those cell phone videos, it can be reasonably implied that those who made the videos sent them to the people they know, thus spreading discontent and gaining support in the protests against Coriolanus. Further effects of modernising the setting of the play are visible throughout the film. The various messengers are cut and replaced by broadcasts on the television news channel "Fidelis TV". However, the use of television is not constricted to the dispatches from the messengers. At the beginning of the film, the viewer is informed about the events prior to the beginning of the film through images of Fidelis TV showing a number of riots, politicians getting out of cars, and general Martius. These images are all accompanied by captions, such as "Senate Declares State of Emergency" (Fiennes 00:02:05) and "General Martius Suspends Civil Liberties" (00:02:18), see figure 1. This immediately sets the scene and the viewer now knows the basis of the grain riot that happens a few minutes later.

Fig. 1. Still from Fiennes, Coriolanus *(00:02:17)*

The shots from the news reel "[intercut] the urban landscape" in the opening of the film, while "the camera follows a young activist" (Pittman 231). She is constantly looking around, checking if to see if she is being followed. Combined with the musical score this evokes a thriller, more than an action film. As she makes her way through the town, she passes huge concrete flats and walks past walls and handrails sprayed with graffiti to an office filled with conspirators. These are the citizens from Act 1 Scene 1, plotting against the state and Coriolanus. However, as Philippa Sheppard notes, Fiennes made many changes to the original text, one of which is in Menenius's discussion with the First Citizen. This dialogue "is reduced to a few lines and a televised speech by Menenius" (Sheppard 274) and the speech was drastically reduced in length as well. The focus of this scene is the mood of the citizens, not the patricians' attempt to soothe them. Moreover, Menenius cannot yet try to calm the riotous mass, since they are not protesting when he appears on television, so there is no riotous mass to calm. Still, the Senate tries to sway public opinion in their favour to prevent a demonstration, though Menenius is unsuccessful.

Nonetheless, Menenius's appearance on television is typical of both the film and Menenius as a character. Firstly, throughout the film, the politician shows that he is aware of "the importance of popular political image" (O'Neill 457) and he understands what he has to do in order to portray himself in a favourable manner, and is keen to do so. That is why he is the one to appear on television and address the general populace of Rome: he has cultivated an image as a man of the people and he is the politician who has the closest relationship with the plebeians, save the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. This close relationship is shown, for example, in the scene where Coriolanus stands trial before the tribunes and the plebeians. As Brutus and Sicinius rile up the audience in the studio, Menenius tries the hardest to get them to calm down again. Moreover, before that broadcast, he and Volumnia are the two people who come up with a plan for how to handle the delicate situation that has arisen. They are the best versed in cultivating political and public images, so it is logical that they take the lead in saving Coriolanus from the wrath of the plebeians.

Secondly, as mentioned above, news media play an important part in this adaptation of *Coriolanus*. From the opening sequence onwards, the viewer either sees direct broadcasts, or is shown characters in the film watching television and reacting to it. Crowdus and Porton observe that the channel Fidelis TV is a "24/7 cable-TV news format that frames much of the film's dialog and action" (18), such as at the opening of the film. But other events are introduced as well later in the film. The attacks by the Volscians both at the beginning of the film and after Coriolanus joins with Aufidius are also news headlines (Fiennes 00:08:07; 01:24:20). This quickly makes the new situation clear, so that Fiennes can focus his film on the events within those situations and does not have to spend time to explain what is happening. The viewer is used to seeing such headlines. As Robert Ormsby states, since the beginning of the twenty-first century "the everyday news of the world was grim and getting worse" with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the financial crisis in 2008, providing regular headlines (223). Headlines

indicating a new armed conflict are not uncommon anymore, and many of the slightly older viewers might even recognise the footage of the riots that Fiennes used for Fidelis TV, as these are images from riots and demonstrations in the 1990s in (former) Yugoslavia (Baker 430, 439; Pittman 216, 230).

Besides the use as a channel purely for headlines, Fidelis TV also features discussions between minor characters in the play. The play text is adapted to be a debate on live national television, instead of discussions in public spaces. For example, when Coriolanus stands for consul, a presenter and two 'experts' talk about the impact the general would have if he were indeed elected to rule their city. Later, when he has carried the vote and has been inaugurated by the Senate, the shot changes to Coriolanus's house. There Volumnia, Virgilia and Young Martius have been watching the (presumably) live broadcast of the proceedings at the Senate, and all cheer and raise their glasses in a toast to his promotion. And the expulsion of Coriolanus is also broadcast live at Fidelis TV. As the audience at the studio is baffled by the eruption of Coriolanus and the sudden acceptance of his banishment, the shot again shows his family, shocked at the turn of events. The next shot is from the Volscian camp where soldiers cheer at the exile of their greatest enemy. In both rooms the television is still on, showing the aftermath of Coriolanus's trial.

Fiennes credits his screenwriter John Logan in an interview with Crowdus and Porton with the idea of using news media in this adaptation. Fiennes further says that the "TV screen … plays into this continual noise of the news we get all the time today" (Crowdus and Porton 21). The use of television as a news medium is, therefore, threefold. Firstly, it is a simple way to communicate a new turn of events to the viewer, in a short amount of time. This is important for this adaptation, since that means that the focus can be on the action. The interruptions of the news media are nothing more than just that, interruptions. They do not take over the story, since they are gone as abruptly as they show up, much like real headlines on a news channel. This

ties in with the second reason for using television, as mentioned by Fiennes above. The news flashes that are shown to the viewer resemble actual news, not only in form, but also in content. As O'Neill observes, "Rome's domestic political tensions are also given contemporary resonance, recalling recent global disputes over civil liberties and distribution of wealth" (O'Neill 457). The Occupy movement and the Arab Spring began in September 2011 and December 2010 respectively. These events might not have influenced the adaptation when they were filming. However, they were fresh in the minds of the people going to the cinemas to see this film, so both have had an impact on the reception of Fiennes's *Coriolanus*.

The effects of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as well as the first years of the second decade are part of the viewers' shared memory, and Fiennes comments on this himself in the aforementioned interview. He is aware that the time in which he made his adaptation is turbulent, saying that "the film is coming out at a time when there's social and economic uncertainty throughout Europe" (Crowdus and Porton 20). This uncertainty stemmed from the fact that the economic recession that began in 2008 was still in progress when the film came out in 2011. Furthermore, "[p]eople [were] protesting on the streets of Athens and London and elsewhere" (Crowdus and Porton 20). People were protesting against their governments because they were feeling neglected and their concerns were ignored. The riots and demonstrations in *Coriolanus* occur because of similar reasons. The people are afraid that their rights will be stripped if Coriolanus becomes consul. The footage Fiennes uses in the news flashes underlines this sense of a global uprising against governments. Many of the large demonstrations, when shown on Fidelis TV, are depicted by images from riots in (former) Yugoslavia. The reasons for these riots were similar to both the riots mentioned above and those in *Coriolanus*: the people have lost faith that their government will take care of them. One example is the most topical for the film: protests against the current ruler of Yugoslavia at that time, Slobodan Milošević. Even the location is the same, the National Assembly of Serbia

building in Belgrade (Baker 439). This allows the viewer to relate the demonstration in the film to that in Yugoslavia.

Fig. 2 Still from Fiennes, Coriolanus *(00:04:42)*

The first protest in the film is that at the grain depot. Fiennes shows the crowd marching towards the locked gates of the depot, see figure 2. They carry banners with slogans such as "dogs must eat" and pictures of Martius's head crossed out, but also iron staves (Fiennes 00:04:15). Within the fenced-off area around the grain depot, armed police is waiting for the protesters. As the people come closer to the gate, "the camera ... slowly cranes down to view the backs of the starving citizens, offering the viewer the perspective of a marcher in this demonstration" (Friedman 476). The viewer is put alongside the starving populace of Rome. This makes it hard not to identify with the desperate mob, as Friedman argues. "Fiennes's camera places the spectator in the position of a plebeian about to be confronted by the scornful Martius" (Friedman 476). From the beginning of the film, the viewer is shown Martius, the main character of the story, as the opponent. This is further reinforced by the opening scene, where the camera follows a lone woman as she makes her way to a secret meeting where this demonstration is being planned. She is set up as the protagonist of the film. Her hatred for

Martius is palpable and from the moment the viewer first hears her speak, he is cast in a villainous light.

Furthermore, the way the police handle the escalating situation at the grain depot, "create[s] immediate sympathy for the rioting crowd … as they are pushed back by policemen in black uniforms with gleaming shields" (Sheppard 274). The desperate violence of the plebeians is met with brutal force from the trained and well equipped police force. Sheppard continues to argue that the way this demonstration, which turned into a riot, is dealt with is "common in modern news" and that this "suggests a pro-plebeian bias" (274). Ormsby also comments on the close relation between the protests in the film and in the real world. He says that the grain riot and the protest at the doors of the Senate in Act 3 Scene 1 "gain political urgency because, by the time the film screened in 2011 and 2012, they would have seemed lifted from contemporary news reports" (Ormsby 230).

Fiennes guides the viewer to the side of the plebeians in his adaptation. To do so, he makes Coriolanus a villain to the Roman citizens and he and his screenwriter John Logan "single out" two of the plebeians (Ormsby 232). They are given slightly larger roles in the adaptation than they had in the play, "to parallel the representatives of the People", the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius (Ormsby 232). These two citizens, played by Lubna Azabal and Ashraf Barhom, are the leaders of the plebeian demonstrations and their faces are visible in every gathering of citizens, whether at a demonstration, a riot, or on the peaceful market square. This allows the viewer to recognise some of the commoners and allows them to identify with them. By literally giving the mob a face (or, in this case, two), it becomes less of a general mass of unknown people. Now, the viewer is almost on the lookout for Azabal and Barhom's faces. One more advantage these two plebeians provide is that they make the violence against the protesters more poignant. Even though Azabal and Barhom's characters are never named in the film, the viewer does feel as if they know them. And when familiar characters are in danger,

the stakes seem higher. Since the viewer cares for these two plebeians, it is easier to care for the entire population of Rome that is being oppressed. Thus, at least for the scenes set in Rome, Coriolanus is the antagonist, while the viewer is sympathetic towards the citizens.

The two plebeian characters played by Azabal and Barhom, Tamora and Cassius (as they are named in the end credits), are, as Ormsby says, parallels to the tribunes (232). Both the plebeian duo and the two tribunes plot against Coriolanus and have similar reasons to do so. The tribunes are afraid that the general will remove their office and take away the power they have (2.1).[2] The citizens, on the other hand, fight against Coriolanus because he is taking away their rights, as becomes clear in the beginning of the film when a headline on Fidelis TV outright states so (Fiennes 00:02:18). When their motives overlap, Cassius and Tamora and the tribunes work together. From the scene at the market square onwards, where Coriolanus has to beg for the votes of the plebeians, the two couples begin their cooperation. Together they make the citizens see the error of their ways, and that they are better off without Coriolanus. This leads first to the crowd that gathers at the Senate as the tribunes charge Coriolanus with treason. Tamora is the first one to pick up Sicinius's cry for the death of the general, which quickly spreads until the entire mob has joined in the chant. Later, at the broadcast trial, Brutus and Sicinius are instructing Cassius and Tamora what to say and when. Again, Tamora is the one to beginning the chant "[i]t shall be so" (3.3.143) and when Coriolanus has left the studio, she leads the audience in cheering. For all intents and purposes, Fiennes made Tamora into the voice of the plebeians, to one who speaks for all. She is in favour of taking action, while Cassius is more reserved and prefers to think things through.

Throughout the exchanges in Rome, Coriolanus is antagonised. Fiennes makes it obvious to the viewer why the plebeians hate the general: his only emotion towards the plebeians is contempt. To each problem he encounters, his reaction is to become so angry that it will go away. He does this in Rome whenever he has to appear in public. When addressing

the plebeians at the grain depot, his contempt towards the plebeians, is evident in every word he speaks (1.1.145-ff). During the televised trial, there are two instances (though it could also be seen as one long instance) when Coriolanus responds with fury. The first is when Sicinius calls him a traitor. This cuts to the heart of Coriolanus's character, as he has done nothing but fight for Rome and her people. To call him a traitor is the single worst insult to him. Yet his reaction only provides the tribunes with more evidence that Coriolanus would make a terrible consul because would not treat the citizens with respect. After he is "sentenced" to exile, the people chant "[i]t shall be so" (3.3.143) over and over again, until Coriolanus breaks. He howls the first line of the monologue that is to follow, "[y]ou common cry of curs" and the camera is very close to his face throughout that outburst. As Ormsby describes the scene, "Coriolanus unleashes his frenzied hatred for the People. Fiennes's face bunches, the veins throb visibly at the sides of his closely shaved head and his lips distend in loathing" (234), see figure 3. All the rage that Coriolanus had held within him now streams out in a flood of fury. In the words of O'Neill, Coriolanus is "a man driven by pent-up rage" (457).

Fig. 3. Still from Fiennes, Coriolanus *(01:06:14)*

This angry Coriolanus then goes to Antium in order to try and form an alliance with Aufidius to take on Rome. The Volscian quickly accepts his former nemesis and together they will "[pour] war / Into the bowels of ungrateful Rome"(4.5.126-7). Not long after the Volscians have renewed their attacks on Roman territory, Aufidius's concern grows as his men increasingly drift towards Coriolanus. Yet Sheppard questions this behaviour, saying that she finds it "hard to believe in the film that the Volscian soldiers would embrace Coriolanus as their hero over Aufidius when he displays so little humanity and Aufidius so much" (276). The Coriolanus whom the viewer has come to know in the first half of the film is uncharismatic and alone when he is not on the battlefield. However, Coriolanus excels in battle not only because he is an exceptionally good warrior, but also because he knows how to lead and inspire his soldiers. He shows this quality during the battle of Corioles, when he encourages the group soldiers with him to renew their attempts to take the city (Fiennes 00:20:50-00:21:33).

Coriolanus's image in Rome is opposed to how the Volscians see him. This is a key contrast between both nations. In Rome he was hated, because he is a warrior in a city filled with politicians. He did not fit in and could not control his temper, so the citizens and politicians cast him out. The Volscian soldiers, on the other hand, venerate the Roman because of his military fury. They are as much warriors as Coriolanus is. While he was a social outcast in Rome, he is accepted by the Volscians because they recognise themselves in him. When they shave their heads, the Volscian soldiers not only behave like Coriolanus they also look like him. In the scenes where first Menenius comes to beg for Rome's salvation, and later Volumnia with Virgilia and Young Martius, Coriolanus sits in the barber chair that was used by his soldiers to shave their heads a few scenes earlier (Fiennes 01:32:35-01:34:31; 01:38:00-01:49:35). That chair has become his throne, and by using it he has accepted his role as their leader. Here in the Volscian camp, surrounded by people who idolise him, Coriolanus seems at ease. He is not

uncomfortable anymore because he finds himself in a society that does account for a soldier like him.

Fiennes repeatedly shows that his Coriolanus is a soldier and not a politician. He thrives in the warrior culture of the Volscians, but is abhorred by the Romans who value politics over everything else. When he has to perform the role of politician, Coriolanus cannot comply and he turns to the only emotion that he has been taught: anger. In Rome television is a powerful medium used to guide public opinion and is a primary source of news. Furthermore, the images shown in the news remind the viewer of recent events. Fiennes evokes riots and conflicts familiar to the viewer in order to highlight that the events of the play are still relevant today, just like they were four hundred years ago. “[H]e updated the film to the twenty-first-century world of economic strife, warfare and backroom politics” (Ormsby 223) and takes the side of the poor, oppressed plebeians in the process.

Chapter 3 A Manipulative Media World

Early in 2019, *Coriolanus* came out during the Stratford Festival On Screen, directed for stage by Robert LePage and for screen by Barry Avrich. This production is a modernised adaptation of the play, filled with humour to lighten the tone of the otherwise heavy subject matter of Shakespeare's final Roman play. Like Fiennes' film version, this adaptation emphasizes the role mass media play in the portrayal of Coriolanus and how public opinion can be swayed by using or misusing television and radio. This Coriolanus suffers from issues with his image, both public and private. This image is continually manipulated by both his allies and his enemies to serve their own goals. Because of the focus on news media and the manipulation of Coriolanus's image, the citizens of Rome are mostly absent in this adaptation. The play becomes a struggle between the tribunes and the patricians for control over Coriolanus's image, and through that, control over Rome.

This adaptation is a "cinemacast", a filmed representation of a theatre production, or "[broadcast] to cinemas" as Michael Friedman defines them (458n1). Barry Avrich is in charge of recording the theatre production on film. The choices he makes for camera standpoints, closeups or wide shots and panning are all in service to the story that is being told. Most of the closeups are either reaction shots, for example in Act 1 Scene 3 when Volumnia and Virgilia are talking about Coriolanus. The camera shows his wife more than his mother, even though the latter does the lion's share of the talking in this scene. Closeups also allow the viewer of the "cinemacast" a better view of the toy soldiers Young Martius puts down in preparation of the battle at Corioles. To signify that a character is utterly alone, or lonely and sad, the original stage production has various parts of the décor obscure everything but an increasingly smaller portion of the stage. At the end of such transitions, only their face is visible amidst a black stage. Avrich chooses to retain the effect that these transitions provide, rather than zoom in on the character's face. After some reorganisation in Act 2 Scene 2 Cominius proclaims Coriolanus

consul at the end of the scene. However, he does not want to be consul and would rather "be [Rome's] servant in my way" (2.1.221). He is unhappy and feels left alone. This is signalled and emphasised by the framing as the scene moves to the next. Avrich opts to keep the entire stage in view to keep the emphasis on his loneliness the theatre production provides.

Just as with the 2011 film adaptation by Ralph Fiennes, this production also gives news media a large part in the action surrounding the main character, Coriolanus. To this end, the opening of the play sets the scene. It opens with a radio show and one of the listeners calls in to voice his opinion of Martius. In the background several television screens are "streaming 24-hour news coverage of some civic unrest" (Fricker n.p.). However, the images on the screens are vague and blurry to keep the attention focused on the actors on stage. At the table in the studio, Menenius defends the Roman general and recounts the parable of the belly. Opposite the politician is a citizen, who takes the part of First Citizen from the original play text, see figure 4. He and Menenius get into a discussion, which comes to an abrupt end as the windows of the radio studio shatter and the two of them, together with the host of the show duck for cover. Thus the violent and volatile state of Rome is introduced simultaneously with the importance of mass media such as the radio (LePage and Avrich 00:04:08-00:06:00).

Fig. 4. Still from LePage and Avrich, Coriolanus *(00:02:27)*

After the explosion, the screen goes black and the introductory titles are shown. They are accompanied by breaking glass and glass shards flying through the screen in imitation of the windows of the studio being blown out. This keeps the explosion in the viewer's mind and establishes it as an important event. There are two reasons why this is of importance. First, the implication is that even the media are not safe from the wrath of the public. However, this notion is not further explored throughout the production. All other times the media plays a role throughout the rest of the play, the reporters are not violently interrupted. Therefore, the second implication is that a protester outside the radio studio got upset and attacked because of the topic of discussion, Caius Martius. The aggressive tone of the citizens is further reinforced by the images shown after the title fades away. In the background are images of riots and demonstrations that are violently beaten down by the police.

A second theme that the opening titles present to the viewer is the importance of the military in the play. This theme is found in the accompanying music. As the title of the play *Coriolanus* comes into view, a militaristic drum can be heard, together with the sound of airplanes. This immediately sets up the importance of the military in this play and that it will

deal much with war. Moreover, by having the name of the main character on screen as the drum begins to play , the name Coriolanus is tied to this martial drum and therefore informs the viewer that he is a man bred for the army. His name leads the music into a more militant path, just as Coriolanus himself leads the Roman army into battle. Shortly thereafter, sepia images of riots appear, faded and grainy so that no distinctive marks are discernible. The protesters are fighting with armed police forces that look not unlike those in Fiennes' film adaptation. Though the shots used for this adaptation seem to be from a real incident rather than a staged one, they are meant to signify a clash between the Roman citizens and it's police taking place during the grain riots from the beginning of the play.

These riots are only referred to but never shown on stage. The opening scene in the radio studio mentions them because Menenius is discussing them with the other guest. The grain riots are mentioned again in the text that appears on screen after the titles. Three sentences inform the viewer about the current situation Rome finds itself in. "For years, the Roman Republic has been at war with the Volscian state. Meanwhile in Rome, famine is the cause of great unrest between the commoners and the nobles. After a series of riots, the commoners are granted two tribunes to represent their voices" (LePage and Avrich 00:07:48). These few lines give viewers all the information they need and the main issues of the play become clear. The three opponents Coriolanus will face throughout the play are introduced in these lines as well: the Volsces, the citizens and "their voices" (LePage and Avrich 00:07:48) in the Senate, the tribunes. The use of "voices" in the introductory text is interesting, as the citizens will have to give their voices to Coriolanus when he stands for consul in Act 3. However, it should be noted that Coriolanus will only encounter two of these three opponents in this adaptation. The citizens are notably absent in this production.

As Drew Lichtenberg notes in his review of the adaptation, the "chaotic, often bloody scenes" with the citizens have been removed from the play. Because of the lack of encounters

between Coriolanus and the plebeians, Lichtenberg argues, "[t]he drama became etiolated, patrician, alternating between back-room political machinations and the impressive rhetorical posturing of Coriolanus and other elites" (374). The focus of the events in *Coriolanus* is more on the struggle between him and the tribunes. Coriolanus's hatred towards the citizens of Rome is much less present, replaced instead with fury aimed at the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. One of the few scenes where the citizens of Rome are physically on stage in this production is during the trial of Coriolanus. The set-up of the stage allows the viewer a sideways look at the Forum Romanum: two sets of stands frame the action of the scene, a table in the middle at which the defenders and accusers stand when they speak, and the two camps on either side of the stage,

see figure 5. A judge or moderator sits at the far end of the table facing the viewers. He is the same man who appeared on the radio show at the beginning of the play to take the side of the common people and can therefore be hardly said to be impartial. In the background several livestreams show the actors from the front so the viewer can still see their faces even when they stand with their backs turned towards the viewer. This gives them the freedom to move and turn as they will to face the different sections of the audience on stage, as well as the audience, while still providing the viewer a look at the actors faces and expressions (LePage and Avrich 01:10:32-01:16:57).

Fig. 5. Still from LePage and Avrich, Coriolanus *(01:12:50)*

The radio show and the cameras at the trial scene give the most voice to the citizens themselves. Yet even there, the Roman citizens do not get to speak much. Instead, the audience takes on the role of citizens throughout the play. The citizens have been "[d]ispersed into the ether" (Lichtenberg 374), their voices reduced to short angry outbursts while calling in to a radio show or cries for Coriolanus's banishment at the Forum Romanum. Little is left of the discussions between them and the patricians, Menenius chief among them, nor of their reactions to the tribunes trying to rile them up against Coriolanus. That scene, after Coriolanus has begged for the people's voices in Act 3 Scene 1, has been reduced to hasty phone calls from the office of the tribunes. The responses of the citizens have been cut entirely. Instead this adaptation focuses on the political side of the tribunes' nervous attempt to save their own skin. Rather than having the plebeians be on stage, LePage opted to move them off stage, so that "the audience became the plebeians" (Lichtenberg 374). This reading of the citizens of Rome becoming the audience is supported by the opening of the play. The first image that is visible is a larger than life bust of Coriolanus. It comes to life through a recording of Andre Sills, the actor playing Coriolanus, that is projected onto the statue. The statue addresses the audience with the speech

that the general would normally give at the riot at the grain depot (1.1.145-170). In this adaptation, however, Coriolanus's words of contempt are directed at the viewer instead of any on stage plebeians. There are no actors whom Coriolanus curses, only the viewer. The viewer is addressed directly on multiple occasions throughout this speech, as in the beginning when Coriolanus says "you dissentious rogues" (1.1.145).

Fig. 6. Still from LePage and Avrich, Coriolanus *(00:00:55)*

The image of Coriolanus that is represented in this opening shows the two sides of his character. On the one hand, the statue itself resembles the classical Roman busts, see figure 6. It indicates that Coriolanus is considered a hero in Rome, or is an important figure, at least. When it begins to speak, the viewer might expect the speech to praise Rome. Instead, Coriolanus's statue does what Coriolanus himself is best at: curse the plebeians (LePage and Avrich 00:00:36-00:01:50). Immediately, this shows the contempt Coriolanus feels for the plebeians and reveals the other side of his character. This side is shown again when Coriolanus is properly on stage for the first time (00:08:02). He is in Menenius's office cleaning a sword and is scorning the citizens of Rome. His speech begins where the statue of the opening had stopped, asking Menenius: "[w]hat's [the citizens'] seeking?" (1.1.170). Coriolanus wishes that

"the nobility lay aside their ruth/ And let me use my sword" so that he could "make a quarry/ With thousands of these quartered slaves" (1.1.180-182). Yet, in this scene his military side is evoked as well by the clothes he is wearing. He appears in a military outfit with a name tag on the front and the flag of Italy on his shoulder.

While the role of the citizens is drastically reduced, this production gives much attention to radio and television. These two media are used to filter the image of Coriolanus that is being broadcast to the citizens. Manuel Jacquez even argues that these "mass media replaced the tangible citizenry of Rome as the key opponent and critic of Coriolanus's views and demeanor" (113). Coriolanus is not harassed or attacked by the citizens of Rome directly; the media take on that role and do not portray him positively instead. Their influence is in part responsible for the downfall of Coriolanus, especially since the nature of these media is that they are able to reach the masses. A single item can be heard and seen by the entire city and so feed the discontent of the citizens. The plebeians get to voice their opinions on live radio as well, which only furthers the media's antagonization of Coriolanus. Still, the radio show does hear both sides of the story, as is expected of good journalism. However, the image the media paint of Coriolanus is rather damning. Admittedly, Coriolanus does not make it easy to do otherwise. Many of his actions, even when reported factually, show that his attitude towards Rome and her citizens is antagonistic.

The tribunes of the people take advantage of Coriolanus's contempt for the citizens of Rome. They know how to use the power television holds in this media-dominated world in their favour. When they have incensed the people against Coriolanus after he has gained their voices for the consulship Coriolanus is enraged to find that the people have revoked their votes so quickly after giving them. The tribunes further infuriate him and when Coriolanus is at his most angry, he cannot contain himself any longer. He lifts Sicinius up off the ground in a remarkable feat of strength and cameras appear almost instantaneously. Both Sicinius and Brutus address

the citizens outside the House of the Roman Republic and those still at home to inform them of the actions of Coriolanus and that he has been charged with treason (3.1). However, the cameras were not present when the tribunes infuriated Coriolanus. The tribunes only wanted the cameras to show up to capture the moments that were beneficial for them. Menenius is quick to see what the tribunes are attempting to do and twice pushed the camera away to try and minimise the damage done to Coriolanus's image by the tribunes. His efforts come too late, however, and Coriolanus, Cominius and the patrician politician are forced to retreat to Menenius's office in the House of the Roman Republic. There Cominius and Menenius eventually get Coriolanus away and to his house. Meanwhile, the tribunes, who have their office adjacent to Menenius's, celebrate their victory with whiskey.

The final image of this scene is of a reporter dashing into Menenius's office with a camera to catch the politician on his way out. Menenius knows it is vital that he at least tries to minimise the damage Coriolanus has done to his own image. He immediately defends Coriolanus's actions in a final and desperate attempt to calm down the people (LePage and Avrich 01:00:35-01:01:05). He makes only a short statement in Coriolanus's defence, saying that "[Coriolanus's] nature is too noble for the world/ … And, being angry, [he] does forget that ever/ He heard the name of death" (3.1.300-305). Although it is short, Menenius does realise the importance of his statement. Without it, all the plebeians see and hear of the struggle between Coriolanus and the tribunes, is the side of the tribunes. They have framed the story in a way that is favourable to them, showing Coriolanus's contempt for the citizens and his angry and violent outburst at the accusations the tribunes throw at him. Menenius does not deny the facts of what happened, but he tries to explain why Coriolanus reacted the way he did. However, his explanation is one that is favourable to him and Coriolanus. In that respect, he is the same as the tribunes.

Since Coriolanus is cut from the opening scene, it takes eight full minutes before he appears for the first time on stage in full, disregarding the bust at the beginning. Karen Fricker

notes that Coriolanus is still the "focus of early scenes" but only through what other people say about him (n.p.). He does not give any impression of what he is like himself, "others celebrate, obsess about, and plot against his military genius" (Fricker n.p.). Coriolanus is called out in the radio show, but is not present to defend himself. That burden lies with Menenius. His mother praises his achievements on the battlefield, but Coriolanus is not there to hear it. He is away fighting more battles (and winning himself the cognomen "Coriolanus" as well), while his wife Virgilia receives it in his stead. Throughout these exchanges, the viewer's only image of the man everyone discusses comes from the talking bust. Yet even that is an idealised representation and not true to Coriolanus's real appearance. The image of Coriolanus is constantly filtered, adapted to serve a purpose and the viewer is left to make up his own mind about Coriolanus's nature.

During the battle scene in Corioles at the beginning of the play, Coriolanus's military endeavours are compared to child play. There is no staged fight that happens on stage. Rather, Young Martius has set up his toy soldiers in battle formation before Act 1 Scene 3. Afterwards, he returns with a toy armoured vehicle, mounted with a camera. The viewer is shown the images this camera captures together with typical sounds of toy guns firing. Young Martius enacts the battle that his father will fight in Corioles. This creates "a telling parallel between Coriolanus's martial games" and his son's "child-play" (Lichtenberg 376), which suggests that there is little to no difference between the two. Young Martius is playing the role of his father in the war against the Volsci, but Coriolanus himself is, as LePage implies, also merely playing a game. Even the aftermath of the battle at Corioles suggests that these men are only playing games, rather than fighting a war. The Roman Camp that the soldiers have retreated to after their victory resembles more the changing room of a sports team than the barracks of seasoned veterans. And Cominius's proclamation that Martius will be known "[a]s to us, to all the world … [as] Caius Martius Coriolanus" (1.9.64-70) seems akin to a sports player being named 'Man of the Match'.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the third act Coriolanus is treated as a child by his mother. She chastises him for his behaviour earlier in front of both the plebeians and the tribunes. Later she tells him what to do, but her tone is condescending, as if she is speaking to a nine year old rather than a grown man. At one point, she even tickles him in an attempt to stop his pouting. The two of them have another falling out not long after that and Volumnia storms out of the room. Coriolanus stands up cautiously, and hollers after her that he will "[go] to the marketplace" and "come home beloved/ Of all the trades in Rome" (3.2.160-5). Coriolanus is not portrayed as an acclaimed war hero and upcoming politician in this scene, but is chided as a child by his mother.

In this adaptation, the image of Coriolanus is constantly modified and manipulated by other people. He is used by the tribunes to further their goals, while the Senate tries to protect him from them and form himself. However, his friends Menenius and Cominius cannot save Coriolanus's image, especially after the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius have used the media to great effect to destroy any goodwill the plebeians might have had for Coriolanus. From the beginning of the play onwards, Coriolanus is shown to be a man with two sides. He has contempt for the citizens of Rome, while simultaneously being the city's greatest military hero. However, despite the fact that his military prowess is unrivalled, his missions are compared to the child's play of his son and his mother berates him as if he is still a boy. This shows a third side to Coriolanus's character that is not explored as much in the play and is instead offers a new insight into his character.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed two recent adaptations of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. The focus of the analyses was how the themes found in the play are adapted and which choices the directors made. In the first chapter, the play itself has been analysed and it has been shown that the Roman identity is characterised by its warrior culture and the notion of honour. This honour is gained primarily through military achievements and forms the basis of personal political advancement.

Both adaptations keep these base characteristics of the play. Fiennes underlines the military aspect of Coriolanus's character and the honour that he gains from his victories on the battlefield. The relation between Coriolanus's victory at Corioles and his nomination for consul is emphasised, thus highlighting the relation between military prowess and political advancement. LePage also underlines this relation and stages the scene where the Senate proclaims Coriolanus consul at a large banquet. However, Cominius's praise for Coriolanus's efforts in the war and his victory at Corioles is much more intimate. Only the general, Coriolanus, and a few soldiers are present when Cominius bestows the cognomen "Coriolanus" on Caius Martius.

Ralph Fiennes highlights the military side of Coriolanus in his adaptation. His Rome is a city in which politicians rule, rather than warriors. Coriolanus does not fit in that society, but he does find his place with the Volscians. Fiennes emphasises the fact that the Volscian soldiers "fly to th'Roman" (4.7.1) and that Coriolanus is accepted and revered by the Volscians. Another theme in Fiennes's film is television. To become a successful politician, Fiennes's Romans have to be able to sway the plebeians through televised appearances, as well as face to face. Yet Coriolanus is incapable of performing in front of a camera. Menenius often has to be a spin doctor and try to keep the citizens' opinion of Coriolanus favourable. Lastly, Fiennes integrated real world images of riots and demonstrations in the Balkan in the 1990s. The effect of this is

that the riots in the film gain significance as it shows that the events in the film are still relevant today, despite the fact that it is based on a play that was written four hundred years ago.

LePage's adaptation also stresses the importance of mass media, as Fiennes's film does. However, the role of the media has changed. News media in Fiennes's adaptation are focused on providing a more or less neutral account of the events as they unfolded. The media in LaPage's production, on the other hand, are used by the tribunes to incite the plebeians against Coriolanus. Brutus and Sicinius show themselves to be masters of manipulation by allowing the cameras only when Coriolanus is enraged and showing his contempt for the citizens of Rome. As in Fiennes's film, Menenius is a spin doctor who has to try and find a way to keep Coriolanus and the plebeians from destroying each other. In order to do so, he also manipulates Coriolanus's image and tries to come up with logical explanations for Coriolanus's contemptuous words.

Shakespeare shows an interest in the theme of political self-fashioning throughout *Coriolanus*. In his play, this self-fashioning takes place through speeches in the political arena. Both Fiennes and LePage appropriate this theme and modernised the way it is represented in their adaptations. They take a similar approach, using television and other news media as a new political arena. However, the two directors emphasise different aspects of these media. In Fiennes's adaptation, the mass media effect of television is underlined. The public appearances and the trial do not take place before large crowds, but cameras film the proceedings to be broadcast on television. This way, Coriolanus's actions are still made known to all the plebeians. LePage, on the other hand, emphasises the manipulative nature of television and radio. Both the tribunes and the Senate use these media to paint a picture of Coriolanus that is beneficial to them, even if it does not show the whole truth. Fiennes and LePage move the political arena away from the speeches Shakespeare uses in his play. Instead, their modernised, media arena becomes the place where politicians fight for control over Rome.

Note

1. It should be noted that in Fiennes's adaptation the office of tribune is not created as a response to the riots at the beginning of the play. The tension of the food shortage is not resolved by granting the citizens a measure of self-rule. In fact, that tension is never resolved at all, but allowed to build up. This leads to the increasing discontent on the side of the citizens against the state and Coriolanus. Fiennes's tribunes were already in that role as politicians before the beginning of the film. Therefore, the tribunes do not have a direct affiliation with the citizens, as they are not chosen from them, merely for them.

Works Cited

Ashby, Patrick. “The Changing Faces of Virtue: Plutarch, Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s Coriolanus.” *Early Modern Literary Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–21.

Baker, Catherine. “‘Ancient Volscian Border Dispute Flares’: Representations of Militarism, Masculinity and the Balkans in Ralph Fiennes’ Coriolanus.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2016, pp. 429–448.

Bate, Jonathan and Eric Rasmussen. *The RSC Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Macmillan, UK, 2007.

Crowdus, Gary, and Richard Porton. “Shakespeare’s Perennial Political Thriller: An Interview with Ralph Fiennes.” *Cineaste*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2012, pp. 18–23,70.

Elleström, Lars. “Adaptation and Intermediality.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Edited by Thomas Leitch, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 509-526.

Fiennes, Ralph, director. *Coriolanus*. Hermetof Pictures, 2011.

Fricker, Karen. “Shakespeare’s Coriolanus brought to the present at Stratford.” Review of *Coriolanus*, directed by Robert LePage. *The Toronto Star*, 25 June 2018.

Friedman, Michael D. “The Shakespeare Cinemacast: Coriolanus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 4, 2016, pp. 457–480.

Garcia Landa, José Ángel. “Adaptation, Appropriation, Retroaction: Symbolic Interaction with *Henry V*.” *Books in Motion : Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*, edited by Mireia Aragay. Brill Academic Publishers, 2005.

Hadfield, Andrew. “Shakespeare and Politics in the Time of the Gunpowder Plot.” *The Review of Politics*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2016, pp. 571–588.

Hattaway, Michael. “Tragedy and Political Authority.” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, edited by Claire McEachern, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 110–131.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.

Jacquez, Manuel Antonio. Review of *Coriolanus*, directed by Robert LePage. *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 37 no. 1, 2019, p. 111-115.

LePage, Robert, stage director and Barry Avrich, screen director. *Coriolanus*. Stratford Festival, 2019.

Lichtenberg, Drew. Review of *Coriolanus*, directed by Robert LePage. *Theatre Journal*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2019, pp. 373–376.

O'Neill, Fionnuala. "Review of Shakespeare's Coriolanus (Adapted for Film and Directed by Ralph Fiennes)." *Shakespeare*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2012, pp. 456–460.

Ormsby, Robert, et al. "Coriolanus as Failed Action Hero." *Coriolanus*. Manchester University Press, 2015, pp. 222-243.

Pittman, L. "Heroes, Villains, and Balkans: Intertextual Masculinities in Ralph Fiennes's Coriolanus." *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2015, pp. 215–244.

Raspa, Richard. "Place in Shakespeare's Coriolanus : The Intersection of Geography, Culture, and Identity." *Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2018, pp. 213–228.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*. *The RSC Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Jonathan Bate and Erik Rasmussen, UK, 2007, pp. 1540-1615.

Sheppard, Philippa. "Propaganda and the Other in Branagh's *Henry V* and Fiennes's *Coriolanus*." *Devouring Time: Nostalgia in Contemporary Shakespearean Screen Adaptations*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017, pp. 254-281.

Shrank, Cathy. "Civility and the City in 'Coriolanus.'" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2003, pp. 406–423.

Whittington, Leah. "Shakespeare and the Greeks: Theatricality and Performance from Plutarch's Lives to Coriolanus." *Classical Receptions Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2017, pp. 120–143.

Wyver, John. "'All the Trimmings?': The Transfer of Theatre to Television in Adaptations of Shakespeare Stagings." *Adaptation,* vol. 7, no. 2, 2014, pp. 104–120.