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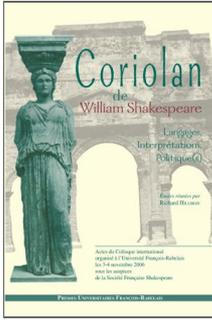
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CORIOLANUS, OR “THE ARRAIGNMENT OF AN UNRULY TONGUE”

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Résumé : *Le propos de cette étude est d’analyser comment, dans Coriolan, Shakespeare met en scène la langue toujours rebelle et indomptable de Coriolan, langue que les personnages essaient en vain d’« arraisonner » tout au long de la pièce. La langue, organe de la parole, révèle toute son ambivalence dans une pièce où les mots doux ne sont que flatterie venimeuse, où le franc-parler (« parrhesia ») dégénère en vitupération et en malédiction, et où le silence est à la fois gracieux et calomnieux. Toute la pièce interroge ainsi les limites de la « bonne » et de la « mauvaise » langue et en fait le site d’une merveilleuse guerre des contraires.*

In Act II, Scene 3, preparing himself to ask the plebeians for their “Most sweet voices” (II.3.108), Coriolanus reluctantly tries to rehearse his part with Menenius:

What must I say?

"I pray, sir"? Plague upon't, I cannot bring
My tongue to such a pace. (47-49)

Coriolanus, who appears here as an actor who cannot play the part that has been written for him, describes his own tongue as an unruly member, a rebellious organ that cannot be bridled or tamed into begging.¹ My purpose is to show that the whole play may be described as the "arraignment of an unruly tongue", that is to say, the arraignment both of Coriolanus' tongue and of the tongue itself as the organ of speech. I borrow the expression from the title of a treatise by George Web, published in 1619, in which the tongue is "arraigned", indicted for "treason" ("high" and "pettie"), "fellowie", "murther" and "breach of the peace". The relevance of the topic appears clearly if we consider the disorders that originate in the tongue in *Coriolanus*, and if we notice that most of the characters' comments on Coriolanus describe the way he rules or misrules – or the way he is misruled by – his tongue. If *Coriolanus* has often been described as a world in which synecdoche prevails,² it appears that the fragmented anatomy depicted in the play gives a prominent place to this powerful though little organ: the tongue.³ Although Web's treatise was written about ten years after *Coriolanus*, it reveals how the Elizabethans and Jacobeans were preoccupied with the issue of the government of the tongue. *A Direction for the Government of the tongue* (1593) by William Perkins; *A Treatise of the Good and Evell Toungue*, translated in 1592 from Jean de Marconville's *Traicté de la bonne & mauaise Langve* (1573) by an unidentified T. S.; Giacomo Affinati's *The Dumbe Divine Speaker*, translated by Anthony Munday in 1605; *The Taming of*

¹ Cf. James 3:8: "[...] but the tongue can no man tame. It is an vnrulie euil, ful of deadelie poison".

² See, notably, Jagendorf.

³ Many contemporary texts insist on the discrepancy between the tiny size of the tongue and the huge effects it has. See James 3:5: "Euen so the tongue is a litle member, and boasteth of great things: beholde, how great a thing a litle fyre kindleth". See Affinati p. 79; Cawdry, p. 750; Bodenham, fol. 143^v; Adams, p. 12; and Vaughan, p. 104. James 3 (entitled "Of the tongue" in the *Geneva Bible*) is essential in the Elizabethan "culture of the tongue". It is constantly quoted and commented upon in the treatises mentioned in this paper.

the Tongue, a sermon by Thomas Adams (1614) – all these texts testify to the importance of the governance of the tongue in Shakespeare's world. Some commentators have noted the link between Menenius' fable of the belly and such texts as William Averell's *A Mervailous Combat of Contrarieties* (1588) or the play *Lingua* by Thomas Tomkis (published in 1607 and performed around 1602),⁴ but without sufficiently noting that in these texts, it is the tongue that rebels against the other members. It is the tongue that initiates discord in the whole body. Shakespeare too gives the tongue the initiative of rebellion when he has the First Citizen exclaim at the very beginning of the play, "hear me speak" (I.1.1-2). What Menenius ridicules as the "great toe of this assembly" (152) is in fact the great "tongue" of this assembly, as the patrician himself has already recognised by commenting on the citizen's eloquence: "Fore me, this fellow speaks!" (117). And what this "multitudinous" (III.1.158) starving tongue arraigns in this play, a play that is haunted by legal language and proceedings,⁵ is more a noisy tongue (the word meaning both "noisy" and "quarrelling", from the French word "*noise*") – Coriolanus' tongue, than a greedy belly, Shakespeare dramatizing what Kenneth Gross, in *Shakespeare's Noise*, calls a "war of tongues".⁶

The crisis in *Coriolanus* comes from the tongue,⁷ which is the site of the major battles that are fought in this play. It is the real "discontented" member, the "mutinous" part (I.1.108, 146). No wonder it should be "pluck[ed] out" (III.1.158). It is the "flabby little organ"⁸ that characters try to rule, to govern, to restrain, but

⁴ On this play, see Patricia Parker and Mazzio.

⁵ See Tanselle and Dunbar.

⁶ Gross, p. 131, in a chapter entitled "War Noise". For this war of tongues, see the use of the words "answer" (I.2.19) and "speak" (I.4.4) to refer to fighting and the repeated injunction "peace" used as a call for silence. On the use of the word "peace", see Cavell, p. 167: "The play literalizes this conventional call for silence by implying that speech is war".

⁷ I start where Riss finishes when he concludes his article as follows: "The tongue continually demonstrates itself as the source of trouble in the play [...] as if the unruly mouth [...] is the real subject of the play" (p. 71).

⁸ Erasmus, p. 323.

that seems to remain ever ungovernable.⁹ In Acts II and III, trying to manipulate Coriolanus, the quasi-ventriloquists Cominius, Menenius and Volumnia endeavour to have him speak "mildly" (III.2.141). Their numerous injunctions and reproaches punctuate these central scenes: "speak to 'em, I pray you / In wholesome manner" (II.3.57-58); "Could he not speak 'em fair?" (III.1.265); "speak fair" (III.2.72); "only fair speech" (98); "Arm yourself / To answer mildly" (140-41). They try to govern the "boy" (V.4.103) Coriolanus' naughty tongue – to the point where the play can be read as the arraignment of the hero's unruly tongue, with characters defining what is a "good" and what is an "evil" tongue.

Yet I would like to suggest that Shakespeare makes the tongue all the more "unruly" by blurring the boundaries between the good and the evil tongues and constantly nurturing doubt as to who and what is the evil tongue in the play. The playwright thus dramatises the ambivalent nature of this organ,¹⁰ showing that the "tongue is a slippery and nimble instrument" indeed.¹¹ Like the "carbuncle entire" (I.5.28) to which Coriolanus is compared by Cominius, the tongue in this play is the site of "contrariety".¹² It is a precious "jewel" that can turn into an infectious "boil" that should be cured. Three aspects of this flexibility, reversibility or "contrariety"¹³ of the tongue in *Coriolanus* may be distinguished.

⁹ See Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Craig and Case, Introd., p. xiv. The expression "ungovernable tongue" is used by George, ed., as the title of chap. 71, which reproduces pp. xi-xxvi of the introd. of Craig and Case.

¹⁰ See Erasmus, p. 365: "O ambivalent organ!". On this essential ambivalence that is at the heart of all the treatises on the tongue, see Mazzio and Vienne-Guerrin.

¹¹ Baldwin, fol. 152^v. See also Bodenham, fol. 47^f: "The tongue is a sleppery instrument".

¹² See Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, in the chapter entitled "On Contrarietie", where the carbuncle (Anthracites) is presented as a figure of "contrarietie" (p. 174). The carbuncle is mentioned again on p. 320: "The carbuncle hath a shewe like fire, & yet hath no fire in it: so hypocrites have the shewe of piety, but in truth are far from it. Plin. Lib. 36. Cap. 5". The text referred to here is Pliny's *Natural History*.

¹³ On the reversibility of the tongue, see Affinati, p. 80:

There be many that haue all these properties of the tongue, but in quite contrary manner to our description. They are sweete of tongue, but how? in flatterie: they are Rose coloured, but in rage, anger and

I will first show that “fair words” of praise convert to pestilent flattery. Then I will suggest that “free speech” goes against “fair speech” and turns into poisonous cursing. Finally, I will briefly analyse the ambivalent treatment of silence, which is presented as both fair and foul.

In *Coriolanus* what Menenius describes as “fair speech” or “wholesome” speech is simultaneously presented as foul speech, as if, to quote James Calderwood, no “good words” were available in this play.¹⁴ This confusion of “good” and “bad” words is conveyed from the start when the citizens react to Coriolanus’ insults by ironically answering him: “We have ever your good word” (I.1.163). But it is first and foremost Coriolanus’ rejection of praise that blurs the frontier between the good tongue and the evil tongue in this play. In John Bodenham’s *Politeuphuia. Wits Common Wealth* (1598), “praise” is the object of several aphorisms, among which can be found: “Too much praise is a burthen”; “it is a point of flattery to praise a man to his face”; and “nothing is more uncertaine then praise, for what one day gives us, another day takes away from us”.¹⁵ These aphorisms may allow us to understand Coriolanus’ rejection of praise. The Roman warrior systematically translates “good words” into flattery. He has no friend but seems to be surrounded only by flatterers or foes. His rejection of praise transforms friendship into hypocrisy and good words into deceitful flattery.¹⁶ “Sir, praise me not” (I.6.16), he says, when Lartius refers to the violence of his “exercise” (15); his mother’s

rayling: they are sharpe, but in detracting: they are agill and flexible, but in various, deceitfull and unconstant speaking: they are close couched and shut up too, but in enuying, as loath to imparte to others any goodnesse (if they have any at all) that themselves are possessed of: So, they will be sure to brag, that they have these fiue conditions, although it bee in a cleane contrary nature.

In Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, the reversibility of the tongue is epitomized in the Malfont episode. Malfont, “whose tongue was for his trespasse vyle / Nayld to a post, adjudged so by the law”, used to be “Bon Font” (V.9.25-26; quoted by Colclough, p. 240).

¹⁴ Calderwood, p. 212. Carol Sicherman develops the same idea and notably speaks of a “dissection of verbal inadequacy in *Coriolanus*” (p. 190).

¹⁵ Bodenham, pp. 117-18.

¹⁶ On flattery, see the article of Tambling, which, however, does not offer the contextual approach developed here.

praise "grieves" him (I.10.15). For him to hear praises is hurtful; his wounds "smart / To hear themselves remembered" (28-29). In his view, praises cannot but be "sourced with lies" (53).

Menenius' speech in Act V, Scene 2, confirms Coriolanus' sceptic vision of praise:

I tell thee, fellow,
Thy general is my lover. I have been
The book of his good acts, whence men have read
His fame unparalleled, haply amplified;
For I have ever varnishèd my friends,
Of whom he's chief, with all the size that verity
Would without lapsing suffer. Nay, sometimes,
Like to a bowl upon a subtle ground,
I have tumbled past the throw, and in his praise
Have almost stamped the leasing. Therefore, fellow,
I must have leave to pass. (V.2.14-24)

Menenius' speech conveys the metamorphosis of praise into lying. It reveals how praise is likely to "tumble" into flattery, how a good tongue is likely to become an evil tongue, and how difficult it is to "tell a flatterer from a friend".¹⁷ The watchman to whom Menenius is speaking translates the sophisticated bowling image into less subtle words:

Faith, sir, if you had told as many lies in his behalf as you have uttered words in your own, you should not pass here, no, though it were as virtuous to lie as to live chastely. (25-28)

Shakespeare suggests that praise is not far from lying and flattery, and Menenius' words seem to prove that Coriolanus' distrust of praise is not irrelevant. His obsession with flattery is such that even drums and trumpets sound flattering and false to him (I.10.41-44).

This rejection of praise is embedded in the way the Elizabethan culture represents flattery. *Coriolanus* reflects what we could call a "culture of flattery", notably reinforced by Plutarch's essay, "How to Distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend", a culture that

¹⁷ See Plutarch's essay, "How to Distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend".

recurrently conveys the idea that “sweet” words of praise may be “poison” (III.1.159).¹⁸ I do not have the time here to draw an exhaustive picture of the representation of flattery in Shakespeare’s world, but I can select a few features that are relevant to my analysis of the play.

In Shakespeare’s world, flattery is associated with inconstancy, instability. The flatterer is “double tongued”¹⁹ and recurrently associated with the figure of the chameleon, who can “turne himsef into al colours save white” in the same way as the flatterer can “chaunge himsef into al shapes and hewes, save honestie”.²⁰ The unreliability of the praising tongue is at the heart of Coriolanus’ portrait of the plebeians in Act I, Scene 1:

With every minute you do change a mind,
And call him noble that was now your hate,
Him vile that was your garland. (I.1.179-81)

Coriolanus’ aversion for flattery and praise goes together with his dream of “integrity”²¹ and constancy (“And I am constant” [237]) that should contrast with the plebeians’ slippery nature. If flattery means change, Coriolanus’ tongue, on the contrary, seems always to have the same sound²² and, contrary to the plebeians’ tongue, does not turn a “yea” into a “no”.²³ Of course, all the irony of Coriolanus’ arraignment of the plebeians’ unruly, flattering, “slippery” tongue appears if one considers that he himself keeps turning “yeas” into “nos” and “nos” into “yeas”. His hesitations in Acts II and III are emblematic of a changeable tongue, and his yielding to his mother’s plea turns a “no” into a “yea”. Coriolanus probably has the most “slippery” tongue in this play.

¹⁸ On the topic of the “sweet poison”, notably related to envy, see Brailowsky.

¹⁹ See Cawdry, p. 285; Fletcher, p. 79; and Affinati, p. 166.

²⁰ Cawdry, p. 283. For the figure of the chameleon as associated with flattery and hypocrisy, see Meres, fol. 320^v; Bodenham, fol. 32^v; and Baldwin, fol. 127^r.

²¹ See Venet.

²² See I.7.25-27:

The shepherd knows not thunder from a tabor
More than I know the sound of Martius’ tongue
From every meaner man.

²³ See III.1.147-48. Cawdry also compares the flatterer to the hyena that will imitate your voice and “sooth you with yea and nay” (p. 283).

The Elizabethan culture of flattery also suggests that the flatterer's tongue hurts and poisons the one who is flattered, like the scorpion, "who has a pleasant face but woundeth deadly with hir [*sic*] taile".²⁴ To characterize flattery, for example, Anthonie Fletcher, in his collection of *Certain Similies* (1595), notes that

the flatterers toong, doth hurt thee more, than the persecutors hand. [...] There is no musick more sweet and pleasant to mens eares, than flatterie, and yet none more pernicious and pestilent than it.²⁵

When Coriolanus tells Brutus, "You soothed not, therefore hurt not" (II.2.71), he similarly reveals that good words may hurt more than dispraise or bodily wounds.²⁶ He prefers the noise of war to what he considers as the sweet but pestilent music of flattery. In Affinati's treatise, the tongue of the flatterer is defined as "An infectious plague, a damnable disease, a sweete poyson, and a deadly hony baite",²⁷ phrases that find numerous echoes in *Coriolanus*.

In Shakespeare's days, flattery was also recurrently related to the myth of Acteon, as appears, for example, again in Fletcher's *Certaine Similies*:

If thou love to be fed with flatterie, then thou wilt feede thy flatterer, and they at the length, will serve thee, as Acteons dogs served him. The flattered shall be devoured by his dog the flatterer.²⁸

This vision of the flattered being devoured by flatterers is at the heart of the iconography of flattery that represents flatterers as lice,²⁹ rats³⁰ or kites³¹ feeding on the flattered. This image,

²⁴ Fletcher, p. 43. See also Cawdry, p. 283.

²⁵ Fletcher, pp. 77-78.

²⁶ See also Shakespeare, *Richard II*: "He does me double wrong / That wounds me with the flatteries of his tongue" (III.2.218).

²⁷ Affinati, p. 96.

²⁸ This is the summary of p. 81, as it appears in the "Necessarie Table", p. Z. On flattery and the figure of Acteon, see also Affinati, p. 92.

²⁹ See Cawdry, p. 283, and Meres, p. 316. Cf. La Perrière, *Théâtre des Bons Engins*, emblem 94.

³⁰ La Perrière, *Morosophie*, emblem 95.

³¹ See La Perrière, *Théâtre des Bons Engins*, emblem 45.

inherited from Plutarch's essay,³² finds very clear expression in *Timon of Athens*, but it is also perceptible in *Coriolanus*, where the warrior metaphorically becomes the lamb that is "loved", that is devoured, by wolves (II.1.7-11),³³ a prey to "parasite[s]" (I.10.45), to "rats" (I.1.159) that feed upon him and want to "put [their] tongues" into his "wounds" (II.3.6-7) in a "city of kites and crows" (IV.5.42).³⁴ They are the "scabs" (I.1.163) that seem to consume Coriolanus³⁵ in the same way as Alexander, whose statue he is compared to by Menenius (V.4.22), was devoured, consumed by flatterers.³⁶

If Coriolanus refuses to be flattered, he also refuses to flatter: "He that will give good words to thee will flatter / Beneath abhorring" (I.1.164-65). He considers the "gentle words" (III.2.61) that Menenius and his mother want him to speak to gain the citizens' voices, the fair speech they refer to, as counterfeiting and flattery (II.3.90-99), while for the plebeians this fair speech is "mockery" (169). Coriolanus "would not flatter Neptune for his trident / Or Jove for's power to thunder" (III.1.258-59) because for him flattery rhymes with hypocrisy and harlotry:

Away, my disposition; and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! (III.2.113-14)

This image too is embedded in the Elizabethan culture of flattery. In *The Dumb Divine Speaker*, one can read that the flatterer is "Not unlike the Harlot, that hath dishonest wordes in her mouth, when her intent is to the purse, which beeing once emptye her vayne talke then ceaseth".³⁷ Throughout Acts II and III, Coriolanus resists this harlot's spirit, apparently preferring free speech to fair speech.

For Coriolanus, liberty of speech seems to be the remedy for flattery. The play dramatizes the opposition between the lying tongue and the tongue as the trumpeter of truth. Yet both tongues

³² Plutarch, "How to Distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend", p. 62 (49D).

³³ On this scene, see Cavell, p. 150.

³⁴ On the flatterer's destructive "licking", see Affinati, p. 89.

³⁵ See also IV.5.77.

³⁶ See Plutarch, "How to Distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend", p. 93.

³⁷ Affinati, pp. 91-92.

prove to be equally pestilent, Shakespeare suggesting that *laudatio* and *vituperatio*³⁸ are equally dangerous, as is suggested by the First Officer: "Now to seem to affect the malice and displeasure of the people is as bad as that which he dislikes, to flatter them for their love" (II.2.20-22). Even if Coriolanus contemptuously refers to the citizens' stinking breath,³⁹ his own breath proves to be as foul as theirs, as Shakespeare turns free speech into foul speech.

What Coriolanus claims is the liberty to blow on whom he pleases (to paraphrase Jaques in *As You Like It*⁴⁰). But the point is that what could be a good tongue proves to be evil. Theoretically, and considering the Elizabethans' definition of the good tongue, Martius' tongue could be good. What characterises him is the correspondence between what he thinks and what he says, between his heart or brain and his mouth.⁴¹ Flattery implies a discrepancy between the heart and the tongue.⁴² The good government of the tongue as it is delineated in the texts we have quoted implies that there should be no divorce between the heart and the tongue. Saying that Coriolanus' "heart's his mouth" (III.1.259) and that "What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent" (260) amounts to saying that he rejects flattery, lying and counterfeiting, which could imply that he is the good tongue in the play.

Moreover, one could find in Coriolanus traces of the Greek concept of *parrhesia*, or "fearless speech" ("*franc parler*" in French), which Michel Foucault, in a lecture given in 1983, defines as follows:

Parrhesia is a kind of verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In

³⁸ See Colclough, p. 249.

³⁹ The stinking breath is explicitly related to slander in Baldwin, fol. 153^f.

⁴⁰ See Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II.7.47-49.

⁴¹ On the topos of the heart and the tongue, see Viswanathan and Vienne-Guerrin. Hence, e.g., Vaughan: "Wherefore was the tongue given to man, but to vent out what the heart conceives?" (p. 98).

⁴² On this dissociation of the heart and the tongue, see Vienne-Guerrin, p. 176. Joseph Hall speaks of the "discord of heart and lips" (p. 35).

parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.⁴³

Foucault notes that etymologically *parrhesiazesthai* means “to say everything” (from *pan*, “everything”, and *rhema*, “that which is said”),⁴⁴ and Coriolanus definitely seems to utter everything he has in mind. The word also refers to truth-telling, which Coriolanus seems indeed to regard as a duty. And, no doubt, he takes a risk in telling what he considers as truth when he draws the insulting portrait of the “rabble” who are about to precipitate him from the Tarpeian rock (III.2). *Parrhesia* seems to be Coriolanus’ natural “kind of speech” (II.3.156), as opposed to the rhetorical devices used by Menenius or Volumnia, and as opposed to the “bastards and syllables / Of no allowance to your bosom’s truth” (III.2.58-59) that Volumnia recommends him to speak. According to Foucault, “the *agora* is the place where *parrhesia* appears”,⁴⁵ which seems to be the case in *Coriolanus*, where everything happens in the market-place.

Yet, Foucault also notes that one should distinguish a “parrhesiastic” speaker from another sort of orator, whose mouth is “like a running spring”,⁴⁶ in Greek the *athuroglossos* or *athurostomia* (*thuro* referring to a door, *glossos* to the tongue and *stomia* to the mouth),⁴⁷ meaning an orator whose mouth does not have a door or a gate, hence one who cannot shut his mouth or hold his tongue. This metaphor of the mouth, teeth and lips as gates that hold the tongue silent appears recurrently in the Elizabethan treatises on the tongue, which abundantly recycle an idea that is present in Plutarch’s “Concerning Talkativeness” and

⁴³ Foucault, pp. 19-20. One should add that, according to Foucault, “the parrhesiastes is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks”. Coriolanus could be described as someone “who criticizes the majority” (Foucault, p. 18).

⁴⁴ Foucault, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Foucault, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Foucault, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Foucault, p. 63.

Erasmus' *Lingua*.⁴⁸ Considering Foucault's description, one would be tempted to say that Coriolanus' speech activity corresponds to *athuroglossos* rather than *parrhesia*. And what makes the difference between the two notions is probably the different degrees of control of the tongue. Foucault notes that "one of the problems which the parrhesiastic character must resolve [...] is how to distinguish that which must be said from that which should be kept silent".⁴⁹ He adds that without *mathesis*, that is, learning or wisdom, *parrhesia* is no more than *thorubos* or "sheer vocal noise",⁵⁰ a definition that perfectly suits Coriolanus, who "carries noise" (II.1.155) throughout the play, shaking "your Rome about your ears" (IV.6.103) indeed. Foucault's description of the fragile frontier between good *parrhesia* and bad *parrhesia* that turns into noisy babbling seems to be particularly relevant to *Coriolanus* and to the difficulty there is in this play in distinguishing "rougher accents" from "malicious sounds" (III.3.53).⁵¹ What makes Coriolanus tumble into bad *parrhesia* is cholera, with which he is associated in the play and which implies a fiery lack of control. In *The Dumb Divine Speaker*, one can read that "The mouthes of angry men [are] like unto a pot boyling uppon a fire".⁵² Coriolanus' tongue is fire.⁵³ The recurrence of images of fire in the play draws a bridge between the motifs of the fiery heart and of the fiery tongue⁵⁴ that causes great disorder and destruction in Rome. Tongues set "whole kingdomes on fire"⁵⁵ in this play.

⁴⁸ Voir Vienne-Guerrin, p. 180.

⁴⁹ Foucault, p. 64.

⁵⁰ Foucault, p. 66. Coriolanus is constantly associated with noise: I.3.30 and 59, I.5.32, I.7.25-27, II.1.154, III.2.114, V.4.21-22, V.6.61. On Coriolanus' noise, see Gross.

⁵¹ On free speech being likely to tumble into simple abuse, see Colclough, chap. 1, "Parrhesia, or Licentiousness Baptised Freedom: The Rhetoric of Free Speech", pp. 12-76. Colclough's main contention is that the desire to counsel was the foundation of free speech in early Stuart England (p. 250). Coriolanus, unlike Gaunt in *Richard II*, does not correspond to this profile.

⁵² Affinati, p. 57.

⁵³ "And the tongue is fyre" (James 3:6).

⁵⁴ For the associations of the tongue and fire, see notably James 3. Cf. Adams, p. 20: "Swearers, railers, scolds have hell-fire in their tongues".

⁵⁵ Cawdry, p. 750.

The difference that Foucault establishes between a good and a bad form of *parrhesia* is conveyed in a more religious way in the Elizabethan texts on the tongue. If those texts recommend the harmony between the tongue and the heart, they also recurrently develop the idea that “The heart of the fool is in his tongue”.⁵⁶ Now Coriolanus, according to Brutus, “speaks / What’s in his heart” (III.3.28-29) and is chidden as a foolish boy by his mother. Moreover, if there is a link between the heart and the tongue, for the tongue to be good, the heart must be good.⁵⁷ One cannot but hear Menenius’ saying that he spends his “malice” in his “breath” (II.1.51-52) with a double ear, as it means both that he is honest and that his tongue corresponds to his heart, while, on the other hand, it suggests that the malice he has in his heart defiles his tongue. The one who tells the tribunes, “more of your conversation would infect my brain” (II.1.91), is in fact himself an infectious tongue. In the same way, Coriolanus, who wants the plebeians to “keep their teeth clean” (II.3.59), is the foulest, the least “wholesome” (58) tongue in the play. We could mimic Cominius’ words to the messenger and say that, though Coriolanus speaks truth, he speaks not well (I.7.13-14).

As Jonathan Goldberg and Maurice Hunt have each shown, in articles whose titles are eloquent enough (respectively, “The Anus in *Coriolanus*” and “The Backward Voice of *Coriolanus*”), what characterises Coriolanus is his excremental speech and a tongue that he does not manage to rule.⁵⁸ He cannot shut the gates or doors of his tongue. He is “ill-schooled / In bolted language” (III.1.324-25), so that “Meal and bran together / He throws without distinction” (325-26), “purg[ing] himself with words” (V.6.8). To play on Volumnia’s words, it seems that “extremities speak” indeed in this play (III.2.43). Trying, like Hercules, to whom he is compared (IV.6.104), to destroy a “Hydra of tongues”, the blatant beast described in *The Faerie Queene*,⁵⁹ Coriolanus is himself the victim of his own monstrous tongue, a tongue that is full of traitorous “infection” (III.1.312)

⁵⁶ Bodenham, fol. 31^v.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Matt.15:18.

⁵⁸ Goldberg, p. 261, notes that Cavell alludes to but represses this vision of the play.

⁵⁹ Spenser, VI.12.27, quoted by Gross, p. 34, n. 2.

and is part of a disease that should be "cut away" (297) and "plucked" (311). His tongue is the "sink" (I.1.119) of the Roman body through which he evacuates all the choleric humours that infect him. It is not fortuitous that there should be an explicit reference to Galenic medicine in the play (II.1.113).

"The hart of a foole, is in his mouth but the mouth of a wise-man is in his heart"⁶⁰: considering this aphorism that is constantly quoted in Elizabethan descriptions of the tongue, one could interpret Coriolanus' silence at the end of the play as a sign of the new wisdom of a man who tries to rule his tongue. Yet Shakespeare's treatment of silence in the play is ambivalent enough to make things more complicated.

Associated with Virgilia, silence is characterised as "gracious" (II.1.172) at the beginning of the play, Shakespeare thus conveying a very common idea that silence "in a woman is a pretious virtue".⁶¹ The play stresses the acoustic contrast between the talkative, loud (IV.2.14) Volumnia and the silent Virgilia who, in Act I, Scene 3, "will not out of doors" (I.3.74) in an episode that suggests that she had rather speak "within doors"⁶² and keep the gates of her tongue shut. The virtue of Virgilia's silence appears all the more conspicuously, since the episodes involving the spies suggest that, in the world of *Coriolanus*, nobody can hold his tongue and that man cannot but babble and reveal secrets to the enemy. Shakespeare also cultivates the contrast between a graciously silent Virgilia and a shrewish husband, who acts "the woman in the scene" (II.2.94) and keeps "scold[ing]" (V.6.107) throughout the play. Many figures inhabit the Elizabethan culture of silence, among whom are Pythagoras, Angerona, Zeno of Elatus, and Anacharsis, who are considered

⁶⁰ Bodenham, fol. 31^v. See also Baldwin, p. 154^v: "The tongue of a wise man is in his heart, but the heart of a foole is in his tongue". See Perkins, p. 14: "A foole powreth out all his mind, but a wise man keepeth in till afterward [Prov. 29:11.]. A word spoken in his place, is like apples of gold with pictures of silver. [Prov. 25:11.]". Prov. 25:11 is also quoted by Adams, p. 11, and Web, p. 145. See Affinati, where silence is described as the "badge of the wise man" (p. 30), while "a foolish man cannot sit silent" (p. 8).

⁶¹ Baldwin, fol. 152^v; see also fol. 156^v.

⁶² Cf. Iago, who asks Emilia to speak "within doors" in Shakespeare, *Othello*, IV.2.146.

as symbols of wisdom and reason.⁶³ Yet one of the favourite mottoes at the time concerning the direction of the tongue is “*tempus tacendi, tempus loquendi*”.⁶⁴ In other words, “Silence and speech are both good, used in due time, but otherwise are both nought”.⁶⁵ Silence in *Coriolanus* is both “good” and “nought”.

Shakespeare notably suggests this ambivalence when Cominius insists on praising Coriolanus, saying:

Rome must know
The value of her own. 'Twere a concealment
Worse than a theft, no less than a traducement,
To hide your doings and to silence that
Which, to the spire and top of praises vouched,
Would seem but modest. (I.10.20-25)

Silence converts to slander, which is here explicitly related to theft, to “de-traction”. The Second Officer in Act II, Scene 2, develops the same idea: “he hath so planted his honours in their eyes and his actions in their hearts that for their tongues to be silent and not confess so much were a kind of ingrateful injury” (II.2.27-30). Silence may be “noisy”, that is to say, slanderous and insulting.

Moreover, the double nature of silence appears when we consider the general development of the play: while in Acts II and III Volumnia and Menenius try to keep the door of Coriolanus’ tongue shut, in Act V they desperately try to open his mouth again, which suggests that Coriolanus does not speak and keep silent “in due time”. There is a problem of timing, as far as the governance of his tongue is concerned. If silence could have been a sign of wisdom in the first part of the play, in Act V it is offending: it is an insult to Menenius first, and then to Volumnia. In Act V, Coriolanus symbolically tries to pluck out

⁶³ On these figures of silence, see notably Affinati.

⁶⁴ Affinati, pp. 4, 33.

⁶⁵ Baldwin, fol. 155^v. The idea appears again on fol. 156^v: “Both speech and silence are excellent vertues, / Used in time and place conuenient”.

the "multitudinous tongue" by closing the gates of his ears⁶⁶ and refusing to hear the Romans' pleas. The play shows that it is the ear that makes the tongue good or bad. And to Volumnia's ear, her son's silence is an insult. At the end of the play, the war of tongues becomes a battle of silences. In *The Dumb Divine Speaker*, Affinati compares silence to "the walls of a city".⁶⁷ In Act V, Scene 3, Volumnia pours words into Coriolanus' ears in an assault that aims at opening the gate of his tongue.

By liberating the tongue of her dragon-son, Volumnia unleashes verbal forces that will lead him to his death. Coriolanus is three times compared to the dragon,⁶⁸ an image that naturally conveys his loneliness and inhumanity but that takes on another meaning if we remember an emblem by Claude Paradin,⁶⁹ which represents a tongue with the wings of a dragon and the tail of a serpent. The motto of the emblem is "*Quo tendis?*" ("Where are you going?") and could be rephrased as "O tongue, thy slippery turns!" (cf. IV.4.12). It illustrates the untameable, dragon-like nature and the traitorous,⁷⁰ "viperous",⁷¹ slanderous nature of the tongue. Coriolanus is called both "dragon" and "viper", and his untameable and traitorous tongue seems to be the dramatic expression of Paradin's emblem. Coriolanus is not "grown from man to dragon" (V.4.13), as Menenius claims. He embodies the idea that the dragon is in man, that the dragon is mankind. "Silence, silence, O man, since thou art like an infant that knowes not how to speake"⁷²: it seems that up to the end of the play, up to the "insolent villain"

⁶⁶ See "Mine ears against your suits are stronger than / Your gates against my force" (V.2.86-87). On the ears in *Coriolanus*, see the chapter entitled, "The Receptive Ear in *Coriolanus*", in Folkerth, pp. 73-86.

⁶⁷ Affinati, p. 27.

⁶⁸ IV.1.31, IV.7.23, V.4.13.

⁶⁹ *Devises Héroïques*, pp. 109-10. The same symbolism appears in George Wither's *Collection of Emblems*, p. 42. For further analysis of this emblem, see Mazzi and Vienne-Guerrin.

⁷⁰ It is the word "traitor" that triggers Coriolanus' rage in both III.3.66 and V.6.85.

⁷¹ For "viper", see III.1.265 and 289. The word "viper" possibly suggests a slanderous tongue. See notably, *Othello*, where Othello calls Iago "that viper" (V.2.282).

⁷² Affinati, p. 52.

(V.6.130) that Aufidius hurls at Caius Martius, the warrior is the infant, the inarticulate “boy” (103) that knows not how to speak.

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