CORIOLANUS

Shakespeare on Management and Labor in Ancient Rome

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This past summer, the Nashville Shakespeare Company presented Coriolanus as their annual offering in Centennial Park. I usually like to attend these performances and read the play in advance so I understand the plot and the language before the performance begins. While reading the play this year, I was struck by how modern the problems seemed: in Coriolanus, Shakespeare presents an uncompromising man gifted in warfare who cannot humble himself to beg for popular approval, set against a populace that is easily led or mislead by their chosen representatives. The play reminded me most strikingly of management negotiations with labor. So often, we see business leaders who, when faced with a difficult situation, refuse to explain their actions, in effect saying: "I know best. How dare you question me?" while at the same time, labor's chosen leaders, usually outside representatives from a union, use their authority with the workers to enhance their own position, or they negotiate an agreement with management, only to sabotage it when they present it to the members for ratification. Both sides are proud: one disdains his inferiors, the other suspects its superiors of evil intent.

In this paper, I will briefly outline Shakespeare's life, touch on the questions of authorship and sources, speculate on why he wrote this play, and then discuss the play itself.

Since we all studied Shakespeare to one extent or another, this brief biographical sketch will serve mostly as a reminder of the details of his life. He was baptized on April 26, 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon, and presumably born shortly before, since the Church of England practiced infant baptism. His father was a glover or leatherworker and his mother related to gentry holding large estates in Warwickshire. He mostly likely received his education at a local grammar school; we know he never attended university.

He obtained a license to marry Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, on November 27, 1582, and their first child, Susanna was born six months later. There is some speculation about whether he was happy in his marriage, but no extant records give any good indication either way. Two further children, twins Hamnet and Judith, were born in 1585; Hamnet died eleven years later. (1)

We do not know for certain when Shakespeare began writing plays and having them performed, but in 1592, a Robert Greene published an attack on Shakespeare, A Groatesworth of Wit, in which he derided Shakespeare as an actor with but little talent for playwriting. From this, we can discern not only that Shakespeare acted, but that he had also been writing plays for some time. (2) When the theaters of London reopened in 1593 after a particularly virulent outbreak of plague, Shakespeare was listed as one of the sharers, or partners, in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the leading theatrical groups of the time. We can see from this that Shakespeare was also a businessman. By 1597, his fortunes had risen sufficiently to purchase a substantial home in Stratford. He continued to write plays and have them performed by troupes in which he was a partner until his late forties, by which time he was listed as living in retirement in Stratford. His death date of April 23, 1616 is commonly taken from his monument in the churchyard in Stratford. During the course of his life, he had risen from the son of a yeoman to a man of means and title. (3)

Over the years, there have been several allegations that a man of Shakespeare's station and education could not possibly have written all the works generally ascribed to him. In 1856, Delia Bacon published the first claim that Shakespeare was not the author of his works. She ascribed authorship to Francis Bacon, one of her ancestors. Her book

produced a veritable cottage industry seeking to explain how and why Bacon was the true author. In 1920, J. Thomas Looney proposed Edward de Vere, tenth earl of Oxford, as the true author of Shakespeare's works. These two proposals dominate the discussion of alternate authorship, although Queen Elizabeth and Christopher Marlowe figure in the discussions too. The complaints center on Shakespeare's education, or lack thereof. While it is true that he never attended university, neither did de Vere, whose education was probably worse than Shakespeare's. As part of his grammar school education, Shakespeare would certainly have studied some Latin, along with French, rhetoric, Christian morals, and classical literature. (4)

All suggestions of alternative authorship collapse for a lack of evidence. No one has found any serious evidence that anyone else wrote the plays or poems. Furthermore, Shakespeare's contemporaries, both friends and critics alike, ascribed the works to him. Surely, if the critics had known something to the contrary, they would not have hesitated to broadcast their accusations. (5)

The story of Coriolanus is taken from North's translation of Plutarch's Lives. Shakespeare also used Plutarch as a source for Antony and Cleopatra and Julius Caesar. He lifted his two main characters, Coriolanus and his mother Volumnia, directly from Plutarch. Some of the other characters, such as the wife, Virgilia, the friend Menenius, and the people's Tribunes, are either inventions out of whole cloth or elaborations of characters barely implied by Plutarch. As usual, Shakespeare adapted his source to enhance the drama of the presentation, although in the case of Coriolanus, he left much of the plot unchanged. He even lifted large sections of prose, hardly altering them at all when turning them into poetry. One of the most famous passages about the body politic

is a combination of Plutarch's tale and a story out of William Camden's Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britain. Likewise, Shakespeare could create a scene by lifting dialogue for one character directly from Plutarch and supplying alternative dialogue for the other character himself, as he did when Coriolanus offers his services to his archenemy, Aufidius. (6)

Scholars feel that Coriolanus was probably the last tragedy Shakespeare wrote. They cite evidence of style and internal allusions pointing to a date of 1608 or 1609, immediately after Antony and Cleopatra. We do not have any records of recorded performances; however, circumstantial evidence in a play by Ben Jonson containing a brief parody of one of Shakespeare's scenes suggests that the play had been performed by 1610. The first direct allusion to the play is its inclusion in a licensing notice of previously uncopyrighted plays given by the publishers of the Shakespeare Folio of 1623. This text and the three following Folio editions constitute the only published texts of the play from the seventeenth century. (7)

The manuscript, which itself no longer exists and from which the Folio text was taken, seems to have been fairly carefully prepared. The printed play is divided into acts, although not scenes, and contains fairly explicit stage directions, which was not the case with all of the plays. As with many of his works, there are certain textual problems, but according to Wilbur Cross, the great Shakespearean scholar at Yale, they are minor in comparison to some of the other works and mainly consist of lines that have been misdivided, alarming syntax, and metrical peculiarities. Cross indicates that there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the authorship. (8)

While scholars are confident that the play was performed by one of Shakespeare's troupes shortly after its composition, we have no actual references to such performances. The first one about which we have verifiable knowledge of a performance was an adaptation by Nahum Tate for the Theatre-Royal in 1682. Tate had observed certain similarities between the play and the events of the latter years of the reign of Charles II and felt that a version of the play might please audiences of the day. He chose, as many producers since have done with Shakespeare's plays, to update the setting to emphasize the timeliness of its themes. (9)

Tate followed Shakespeare's text closely for the first four acts, apart from some drastic cutting. He completely refashioned the fifth act, adding and modifying characters and ending the scene in a bloodbath of operatic proportions. Throughout the eighteenth century, other theater companies revived the play in greatly altered forms, some with greater success than others. The play reentered the mainstream in a production at Drury Lane starring the great John Philip Kemble as Coriolanus and his sister Mrs. Siddon as Volumnia in 1789. Since then, the play has been performed, perhaps more off than on, throughout the English speaking world using the best text available to us. The initial American production of Shakespeare's text occurred in Philadelphia in 1796. (10)

Why did Shakespeare write Coriolanus? There is no written evidence, but we know that he was interested in ancient themes because of his treatments of Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Titus Andronicus, and Timon of Athens. Perhaps, in the early years of Stuart rule, Shakespeare found the intertwining themes of nobility, power, and popularity appealing. As we remember from our history classes, the Stuarts were originally Roman Catholics and subscribed to the idea of the divine rights of kings,

causing them to clash frequently with Parliament, which saw itself as at least the co-equal source of power in the land. By setting some of these same struggles in distant ancient Rome, perhaps Shakespeare and his audience could contemplate these issues in safety.

The play opens on the people of Rome complaining about their hunger during a time of famine. They feel that Caius Martius, later to be known as Coriolanus, has withheld grain from the common people because of his disdain for them. Menenius, a member of the Senate and friend of Martius, appears and almost calms the populace by pointing out that it was the gods who created the dearth of food: "I tell you friends, most charitable care have the patricians of you. . . .For the dearth, the gods, not the patricians, make it and your knees to them, not arms, must help. Alack, . . . you slander the helms o'th'state, who care for you like fathers, when you curse them as enemies" Ii 63-75 and delivers one of the most famous speeches in the play, in which he compares Rome to a body:

> "There was a time when all the body's members
> Rebelled against the belly, thus accused it:
> That only like a gulf it did remain
> I'th'midst o'th'body, idle and unactive,
> Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
> Like labor with the rest, where th'other instruments
> Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
> And mutually participate, did minister
> Unto the appetite and affection common
> Of the whole body. The belly answered –
>
> 'True is it, my most incorporate friends,' quoth he,
> 'That I receive the general food at first,
> Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
> Because I am the storehouse and the shop
> Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,
> I send it through the rivers of your blood,
> Even to the court, the heart, to th'seat o'th'brain;
> And, through the cranks and offices of man,
> The strongest nerves and smallest inferior veins

From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live.

'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.'" Ii 94-144

Menenius then explains his meaning: the senators of Rome are the belly and the citizens the mutinous members. Ii146-147 Already, in the first scene, we can see that the plebeians distrust their superiors, and especially Martius. After Menenius calms the people, Martius appears and promptly insults them, thus stirring them up again: "What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, that, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, make yourselves scabs?" Ii162-164 Where a soft answer would turneth away wrath, Martius adds fuel to the fire by insulting those whom he is responsible for feeding. If he had only explained the problem, or even just kept his mouth shut, he might have avoided later difficulties. Managers could learn from Menenius to explain their actions, even when the actions seem intuitive to them.

Word comes that Rome's enemies, the Volscians, are in arms and attacking Rome and that Martius' services as warrior are needed. The only human praised by Martius in the play is Tullus Aufidius, leader of the Volscians, whose prowess he admires: "They have a leader, Tullus Aufidius, that will put you to't. I sin in envying his nobility, and were I any thing but what I am, I would wish me only he." Ii 226-230 Clearly, Martius only values the abilities of strong, capable leaders, such as his competitor Aufidius. Sometimes, we see also leaders today who only esteem their strongest competitors.

The two Tribunes, elected by the people to represent their interests and allowed by the Senate as a means to quell popular unrest during the recent famine, comment on

Martius' pride: "Was ever man so proud as this Martius? He has no equal. When we were chosen tribunes for the people – Marked you his lip and eyes? Nay, but his taunts." Ii 250-254 Already the Tribunes are taking umbrage at Martius' behavior. If Martius had merely kept his thoughts to himself, as managers often should when speaking generally of their employees, then the representatives of the people might not have had occasion to mark his disdain and begin plotting his downfall.

Next we meet Volumnia, the mother of Martius, and his wife, Virgilia, who discuss how Volumnia raised her son to be a warrior and sent him off to battle at a young age, from which he returned with his brows crowned with oak. After this brief scene, we turn to scenes of battle in which we witness Martius' prowess against the Volscians and their leader, Aufidius. Martius is a skilled and courageous warrior, and leads the fight against the Volscians himself. He berates the common soldiers, drawn from the people of Rome, for their cowardice in battle:

> "All the contagion of the south light upon you,
> You shames of Rome! You herd of – Boils and plagues
> Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred
> Farther than seen, and one infect another
> Against the wind of a mile! You souls of geese,
> That bear the shapes of men, how have you run,
> From slaves that apes would beat! Pluto and hell!
> All hurt behind! backs red, and faces pale
> With flight and agued fear! Mend and charge home,
> Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe
> And make my wars on you! Look to't. Come on!
> If you'll stand fast, we'll beat them to their wives,
> As they us to our trenches. Follow me!" Iiv 30-42

While this kind of speech may work in war, it is easy to see how the common folk would come to believe that their leader disdained them. Unfortunately, as we shall see, Martius keeps speaking this way to the commoners, even in peacetime.

He engages the enemy himself, following them into the gates of Corioles, their main city. This turns out to be a Volscian strategy to capture Martius, because the Volscians close the gates of Corioles, sealing Martius inside. The Romans assume Martius has been killed, until he turns up bloodied but unbowed. He then asks the commanding general, his friend Cominius, for permission to lead the army against Aufidius and the assembled Volscians. Martius gives an inspiring speech that sends the army surging towards the Volscian forces:

> "If any such be here –
> As it were sin to doubt – that love this painting
> Wherein you see me smeared; if any fear
> Lesser his person than an ill report;
> If any think brave death outweighs bad life,
> And that his country's dearer than himself;
> Let him alone, or so many so minded,
> Wave thus, to express his disposition,
> And follow Martius." Ivi 68-76

This speech succinctly outlines Martius' personal code of behavior: that death is inconsequential and that service to the state is dearer than life itself. This can be very inspiring in the heat of combat, but grows tiresome in good times.

Once he meets up with Aufidius, they clash, and as Martius is about to vanquish Aufidius, several Volscians come to the aid of their leader, whereupon Martius fights them all, eventually driving the Volscians inside the city breathless; he is unable to defeat Aufidius in single combat, however. While they fight, they hurl insults at each other in an almost ritualistic way, emphasizing their respect for the other's ability and valor:

> Martius: I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee
> Worse than a promise breaker.
> Aufidius: We hate alike. Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor
> More than thy fame and envy. Fix thy foot.
> Martius: Let the first budger die the other's slave,
> And the gods doom him after!

Aufidius: If I fly, Martius,
Hollo me like a hare. Iviii 1-7

After these deeds of bravery, Cominius honors Martius with the new surname Coriolanus for the city he has defeated. Cominius also berates Coriolanus for his false modesty: "Too modest are you, more cruel to your good report than grateful to us that give you truly." Iix 52-54 Coriolanus hands out the spoils of war to the army and takes only a common part as reward for himself. For the moment, everyone is happy.

In Act II, we quickly learn that Coriolanus is to be made a Consul for his services, a signal honor in Rome, and that the Tribunes are not happy about this projected honor. They accurately predict the course of events:

"Sicinius: On the sudden,
I warrant him consul.
Brutus: Then our office may,
During his power, go sleep.
Sicinius: He cannot temp'rately transport his honors
From where he should begin and end, but will
Lose those he hath won.
Brutus: In that there's comfort.
Sicinius: Doubt not
The commoners, for whom we stand, but they
Upon their ancient malice will forget
With the least cause these his new honors, which
That he will give them make I as little question
As he is proud to do't." IIi216-226

Even though he deserves the honor of being made Consul for his services to Rome, the Tribunes begin to consider how to keep him from obtaining it. They see an opening to deny him the consulship through his pride, noting that it will not be difficult to incite him to some display thereof. They see a contest with two competitors and only one winner: "So it must fall out to him or our authorities for an end. We must suggest the people in what hatred he still hath held them; that to's power he would have made them mules,

silenced their pleaders, and dispropertied their freedoms". IIi240-243 In so doing, they blind themselves to other, competing interests, such as the Volscians. In today's times, we see this perhaps in the current difficulties of our domestic automobile industry. For too long, labor and management saw their universe as one closed to outside competitors and now they are paying the price of invasion by other strong forces.

However, it is fair to note that Coriolanus is not the only person with pride. The Tribunes themselves are proud men, as Menenius notes: "You talk of pride: O that you could turn your eyes toward the napes of your necks, and make but an interior survey of your good selves!" Iii 36-39 He also accuses the Tribunes using small matters to magnify their importance:

> "You are ambitious for poor knaves' caps and legs. You wear out a good wholesome forenoon in hearing a cause between an orange wife and a forset seller, and then rejourn the controversy of threepence to a second day of audience. When you are hearing a matter between party and party, if you chance to be pinched with the colic, you make faces like mummers; set up the bloody flag against all patience, and, in roaring for a chamber pot, dismiss the controversy bleeding, the more entangled by your hearing. All the peace you make in their cause is calling both the parties knaves. You are a pair of strange ones." IIi 66-77

For those managers involved in union grievances, this seems a very apt description.

Not only are the Tribunes proud of their position as representatives of the people, they believe that this position sets them apart from the people they represent. The two men make fun of the people they purport to represent for admiring Coriolanus:

> "All tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights
> Are spectacled to see him. Your prattling nurse
> Into a rapture lets her baby cry,
> While she chats him; the kitchen malkin pins
> Her richest lockram 'bout her reechy neck,
> Clamb'ring the walls to eye him. Stalls, bulks, windows
> Are smothered up, leads filled, and ridges horsed
> With variable complexions all agreeing
> In earnestness to see him. . . .such a pother

As if that whatsoever god who leads him
Were slyly crept into his human powers
And gave him graceful posture." IIi 200-216

The two Tribunes are proud that they are not swayed by the valor of Coriolanus. Occasionally, even today, it can seem as if the people's leaders disdain those whom they represent.

It seems that in addition to election by the Senate, which is assured because of his brilliant defense of Rome, Coriolanus must also beg approval from the populace, which is done by appearing in public to show his wounds and extol his exploits. While Coriolanus is a proud person, the people have their own pride as well. They recognize that they have the ability to refuse Coriolanus: "Once if he do require our voices we ought not to deny him. We may, sir, if we will." IIiii 1-2 After downplaying his exploits to his friends and family, he appears to the people and begrudgingly asks for their voice to elect him Consul:

"Better it is to die, better to starve,
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve.
Why in this wolvish toge should I stand here,
To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear
Their needless vouches?" IIiii112-116

The commoners grant him their voices, but Sicinius and Brutus, the two Tribunes, conspire to have it retracted. While publicly they had agreed to confer the position on Coriolanus, behind his back they try to have the people deny him their voice, but the people are overawed by his deeds and deserving:

"Thus to have said,
As you were fore-advised, had touched his spirit
And tried his inclination; from him plucked
Either his gracious promise, which you might,
As cause had called you up, have held him to;
Or else it would have galled his surly nature,

Which easily endures not article
Tying him to aught. So putting him to rage,
You should have ta'en the advantage of his choler
And passed him unelected." IIiii 190-199

The Tribunes remind the populace of their old dislike for Coriolanus and whip them up to deny Coriolanus their voice. They say: "Enforce his pride, and his old hate unto you" IIiii 219-220 "Say you chose him more after our commandment than as guided by your own true affections, and that your minds, preoccupied with what you rather must do than what you should, made you against the grain to voice him consul. Lay the fault on us." IIiii 229-234. In this way, the two strategize to use the weakness of their opponent to their advantage, not thinking about any potential danger to the whole body. Likewise, in labor/management negotiations, each side seems so intent to win, that it ignores potential larger outside forces. We frequently read in the paper where terms of a contract have been negotiated, only to be voted down by the union members. This pattern often looks as if the negotiators have sat at the bargaining table and said they would endorse the contract, then gone back to the membership and encouraged them to vote against what had just been negotiated.

Brutus and Sicinius then meet up with Coriolanus and his supporters and relay the news that the people have rescinded their voice: "The people cry you mocked them, and of late, when corn was given them gratis, you repined, scandaled the suppliants for the people, called them time-pleasers, flatterers, foes to nobleness." IIIi 41-45 Coriolanus and all present seem to understand that this change is the work of the two Tribunes, but there is little they can do about it: "It is a purposed thing, and grows by plot, to curb the will of the nobility. Suffer't, and live with such as cannot rule nor ever will be ruled."

IIIi 38-41 As happens so often in labor negotiations, both sides suspect the worst about the other and say so, which only adds fuel to the fires.

Coriolanus berates the patricians for the fear that made them allow the people to elect Tribunes to represent them and then insults the people and their Tribunes:

> "For the mutable, rank-scented meiny,
> Let them regard me as I do not flatter,
> And therein behold themselves. I say again,
> In soothing them we nourish 'gainst our Senate
> The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
> Which we ourselves have plowed for, sowed, and scattered
> By mingling them with us, the honored number," IIIi 66-72

Speaking of the Tribunes, he says: "Hear you this Triton of the minnows?" and calls them the "horn and noise o'th'monster's" IIIi 88-94 Management may frequently feel about the union's negotiators and members like Coriolanus does about the populace and Tribunes, that they are meiny folks led by Tritons of the minnows, but even these Tritons have some power.

Management often finds itself frustrated by union work rules when it wishes to make changes in company operations but has to negotiate them with a union. Coriolanus finds this same situation in Rome appalling and predicts problems down the road:

> "This double worship,
> Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
> Insult without all reason; where gentry, title, wisdom,
> Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
> Of general ignorance – it must omit
> Real necessities, and give way the while
> To unstable slightness. Purpose so barred, it follows
> Nothing is done to purpose." IIIi 139-178

To understate the situation, Coriolanus finds it difficult to be politic. After enduring several unfriendly speeches, the Tribunes call for guards to seize Coriolanus and drag him to the Rock Tarpeian on the Capitoline hill, from which state criminals

were hurled: "He's a disease that must be cut away." IIIi295 While encouraging the people to lay hands on Coriolanus, the Tribunes say: "let us stand to our authority, or let us lose it." IIIi 209-210 It often seems that those with some power, whether managers or representatives of employees, feel that they must use their power in order to keep it.

Naturally, Coriolanus refuses to go quietly; his friend Menenius pacifies the crowd and buys a little time for Coriolanus to cool off and perhaps amend his words and ways. During the cooling off period, Volumnia counsels her warlike son to use stratagems to gain his ends, just as he would in war:

> "If it be honor in your wars to seem
> The same you are not – which for your ends
> You adopt your policy – how is it less or worse
> That it shall hold companionship in peace
> With honor, as in war, since that to both
> It stands in like request?" IIIii 46-51

In the same way, businessmen do not quibble to use strategies, even including deception, to gain advantage in running their operations, but they refuse to act the part of friend to their employees when negotiating with the union. While Coriolanus sees the validity of her argument and agrees to try one more time, we can see that it goes against the grain with him to beg the commoners whom he despises for any kind of favor: "Must I go show them my unbarbed sconce? Must I with my base tongue give to my noble heart a lie that it must bear? Well, I will do't." IIIii 99-101

The Tribunes conspire how to provoke Coriolanus into insulting the people and also line up the popular votes to disclaim against election. Coriolanus barely gets started begging for the office when the Tribunes goad him: "We charge you that you have contrived to take from Rome all seasoned office, and to wind yourself into a power tyrannical, for which you are a traitor to the people." IIIiii 63-66 He charges right into it

with his response: "The fires i'th'lowest hell fold in the people! Call me their traitor, thou injurious tribune! Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths, in thy hands clutched as many millions, in thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say 'Thou liest' unto thee with a voice as free as I do pray the gods." IIIiii 68-74 Well, with that speech and another one like it: "You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate as reek o'th'rotten fens, whose loves I prize as the dead carcasses of unburied men that do corrupt my air" IIIiii 121-124, Coriolanus pretty much cooks his own goose and one of the people calls for him to be hurled from the Tarpeian Rock, but, out of consideration for his many services in defense of Rome, the Tribunes sentence him to banishment. While Coriolanus and many business leaders are excellent at leading troops in battle with enemies, they are much less adept at wooing their constituents at home and see every confrontation as a battle. In a fit of anger, he even curses Rome: "Let every feeble rumor shake your hearts! Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes, fan you into despair! . . . till at length your ignorance . . . deliver you as most abated captives to some nation that won you without blows!" IIIiii 126-134 When thwarted, and perhaps even removed from their jobs because of their inability to maintain labor peace, managers even today cast similar curses on their erstwhile employers.

After banishing Coriolanus, the Tribunes congratulate themselves on a job well done: "We stood to't in good time." IVvi 10 Others hurl deprecations at the ingrate conspirers who drove out Rome's greatest defender. The Volscians get word that Coriolanus has been banished and that Rome is at odds with itself, with the patricians, noblemen and Senators angry with the plebeians. Naturally, the Volscians see this discord as an opportunity to renew their war against Rome and begin planning their

campaign. Coriolanus sneaks into Corioles disguised and, after some difficulty reaching his target, offers his services to his old enemy Aufidius, who accepts them with alacrity. When word first comes to Rome and the Tribunes that Coriolanus has allied with Aufidius and is leading an army against Rome, they imprison the messenger for spreading false rumors. When the reports turn out to be true, the Tribunes do not know what to do. The nobles berate the Tribunes for their work: "You have made good work, you and your apron-men, you that stood so much upon the voice of occupation and the breath of garlic-eaters!" IVvi 98-100. In some ways, this speech and others in the same vein are like white collar employees blaming blue collar employees for running off a good president. The people recant their earlier opposition to Coriolanus: "That we did, we did for the best; and though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will." IVvii 145-148 So it is sometimes in corporate relations – when a gifted leader leaves, his employees regret their hasty words and begin pointing fingers at other parties.

In the last act, Coriolanus is at the head of the Volscian army heading to Rome, almost like a modern day business man running a competitor firm now threatening the dominance of his old company. Either Coriolanus or Rome is going to be the loser, as is often the case when management and labor strive against each other. Sicinius and Brutus implore several leading Romans, notably Cominius, Menenius, and Volumnia, to beg Coriolanus for mercy. Menenius is reluctant to go, citing Cominius' experience and lack of success: "No, I'll not go. You hear what he hath said which was sometime his general, who loved him in a most dear particular. . .Nay, if he coyed to hear Cominius speak, I'll keep at home." Vi 1-7 Menenius acts almost like a manager who would rather see his

company fail than seek help in conjunction with labor. Even under duress, the two sides still cannot make common cause; again, a good current example is our auto industry. An historical example is Eastern Airlines: the employees preferred to see the airline go under rather than cooperate with management.

Even the appearance of Volumnia with Virgilia and Coriolanus' son does not seem to sway him: "I beseech you, peace! Or, if you'd ask, remember this before: the thing I have forsworn to grant may never be held by you denials. Do not bid me dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate again with Rome's mechanics" Viii 78-82 However, Volumnia gives an impassioned speech, reminding her son of the vagaries of war and abasing herself and her party before him:

> "Thou know'st great son,
> The end of war's uncertain, but this certain,
> That, if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
> Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
> Whose repetition will be dogged with curses. . .
> Down ladies! Let us shame him with our knees.
> To his surname Coriolanus 'longs more pride
> Than pity to our prayers. Down! An end!
> This is the last. So, we will home to Rome,
> And die among our neighbors." Viii 140-173

Coriolanus is overcome: "O mother, mother! What have you done? . . . You have won a happy victory to Rome; but for your son – believe it, O believe it! – most dangerously you have with him prevailed, if not most mortal to him." Viii 182-189 Here we see that every leader has his approachable side, his Achilles heal.

Upon its salvation, Rome rejoices and honors its patroness, Volumnia. However, Aufidius remembers his ancient enmity against Coriolanus and effects his plot to rid himself of his old enemy. He accuses Martius of treachery: "Ay, Martius, Caius Martius! Dost thou think I'll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol'n name 'Coriolanus' in

Corioles? You lords and heads o'th'state, perfidiously he has betrayed your business and given up, for certain drops of salt, your city Rome – I say 'your city' – to his wife and mother, breaking his oath and resolution like a twist of rotten silk; never admitting counsel o'th'war; but at his nurse's tears he whined and roared away your victory, that pages blushed at him and men of heart looked wond'ring each at other." Vvi 88-99 Ever true to his nature, Coriolanus is outraged and cannot hold his tongue:

> "Your judgments, my grave lords,
> Must give this cur the lie; and his own motion –
> Who wears my stripes impressed upon him, that
> Must bear my beating to his grave – shall join
> To thrust the lie unto him. . .
> If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
> That, like an eagle in a dovecote, I
> Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles.
> Alone I did it." Vvi 104-107 and 112-115

He reminds Aufidius how often they have met in battle and how, each time, Aufidius and Volsce have been the losers. Like a gifted manager afflicted with hubris, he is compelled to speak of his exploits when holding his tongue would have served him better. Thus, he incites the Volscians, who murder him.

While there are other themes and threads that I could have focused on in this paper, my experiences in labor contract negotiations made the parallels in this play jump out. Where Coriolanus was proud, disdainful, and intractable, I saw typical behaviors of managers. Where the people of Rome were fearful and easily swayed, I saw occasional glimpses of employees. And where the Tribunes were duplicitous and also proud, I saw reflections of the union representatives. Perhaps you will also see reflections of this play as we watch our industries struggle through this recession.

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ENDNOTES

1 – Riverside, pp. 3-4
2 – Pelican, p. xvi
3 – Riverside, p. 4
4 – Pelican, p. xix-xx
5 – Pelican, p. xx
6 – Yale, pp. 1203-1204
7 – Yale, p. 1204
8 – Yale, p. 1204
9 – Yale, p. 1204
10 – Yale, pp. 1204-1205