



A LITERARY RESEARCH ON CORIOLANUS – A SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY

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Abstract-

Shakespeare’s play has a forbidding quality despite its bleakness and lack of essential warmth. With his vision for all time the playwright created a tragedy depicting a paradox. It is his ability to find faults on both sides and his sympathy to find virtues on both sides. His paradoxically noble protagonist stands out as a man supremely guilty of pride, the vice and at the same time supremely noble in pride, the virtue. He imparts to the Roman hero the added impersonality of a divine power. The Greco-Roman heroic ideal in its Renaissance form had an effect on the play: Coriolanus. There is a marked difference in the approach of the playwright. He surrounds a deeply flawed but noble hero at the opening of the tragedy with praise and scorn together. Coriolanus is seen in his superiority and pride. This tragedy presents the struggle of wrong and wrong. Shakespeare adapted Plutarch’s moral history to fit his dramatic subject of the Achillean hero.

T.S. Elliot: ‘One of Shakespeare’s Most assured artistic success.’ Coriolanus is the most original of Shakespeare’s tragic dramas.

The main events and the important scenes are:

1. Coriolanus’ attack on the tribuneship.
2. His banishment and his joining Aufidius.
3. The climactic scene with his mother.

All these are based on Plutarch. Shakespeare has wonderfully transformed The Plutarchan original. The scene in which Menenius begs Coriolanus to spare Rome tallies with Plutarch. Shakespeare has invented all of the scenes in which Volumnia figures with one exception. The boy killer of butterflies is Coriolanus in miniature. Shakespeare gives more importance to Coriolanus’ pride and uncontrollable temper and especially to the close emotional bond to his mother. His nature is heroically simple, his behaviour inept. His temperamental aloneness brings his inevitable downfall and destruction. Though simple and tactless, he is endowed with the eloquence of a soldier, violent and powerful. Heroic violence is self-destructive and therefore Coriolanus stands alone as a deeply tragic figure among the heroes of Shakespeare.

Chapman says the right way to settle anger is to throw reins on thy passion and serve us. (Gods) Shakespeare does not limit to portraying a flawed, proud and angry man. He set the deeds of Coriolanus against the great parable of Menenius: The body’s members and the revolt against the belly. The metaphor of the disease and health of the body politic: belongs to a game played between patricians and people. ‘The Belly smile of the patricians versus the ‘great toe’ of the plebeians’.

Theme (s):

The theme is a Non-human aloneness which

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Plato called solitariness. But a sense willfully given to self opinion and obstinate mind, not yielding to others’ reason but to their own, have solitariness. Wholeness of the state is the public ideal. Metaphors of the body politic keep reminding us that the great natural order is realized in a whole of which the single man is only a part. Coriolanus fails to understand this bond of nature. In Coriolanus nature behold Shakespeare’s awesome and non-human hero. ‘Boy?’...this is Coriolanus’ way of saying men hero in his scornful tone. But the simple word boy recalls a long history of boyish irresponsibility and lack of control.....

The theme is consuming pride. From his pride springs his contempt of the common people. His failure to control his contempt for the commonality brings about his banishment and ultimately his destruction. The tragedy is the ruin of Coriolanus from a great and honored warrior to a dual traitor. The way he won his fame is irrelevant he is a self-seeker after fame. The tragedy made by Shakespeare is not that of a noble spirit ruined by lack of education (learning: as Plutarch outlines). It is a tragedy of a noble spirit ruined by something in itself, which education cannot touch or at least does not touch. Coriolanus stands for the nobility as against commonality. Shakespeare deliberately chooses to present a paradoxical hero full of harsh integrity and violently anti-democratic values. He infuriates the Plebeians with angry taunts and insults.

You dissentious rogues

You fragments

These quartered slaves

Coriolanus is a tragedy of a great spirit who

cannot stoop to flattery in the way of the world. He is neither politic nor political. There is a real political conflict in the play between Patricians & Plebeians – the Nobility in the commonalty. Coriolanus achieves a wonderful integration of political and personal issues. The Plebeians have a real grievance that they have real difficulty in expressing. They are badly served by their mean spirited leaders. There is an acute feeling of class hatred. Caius Marcius has stolen a name in Coriolanus 'Hears't thou Mars'. When he calls upon the God of War to Witness what is being said Aufidius forbids this invocation. "Name not that good thou boy of tears." "Boy?" Is the final magical insult which drives Coriolanus directly to his doom. He recalls in disbelief. "Ha--

"Which is exactly the word spoken by a determined Iago. "Ha I like not that" 'Alone I did it. 'Boy'?"

The final 'boy' sounds plaintive as well as unbelieving. In many ways Coriolanus acts out the fact that he is indeed 'a boy of tears.' Coriolanus may be taken as a political play. It has a close relation to the food and enclosure riots that were taking place in England around the time of its composition. The Patrician – Plebeian Conflict is presented in an extreme form. (Set firmly in angry invective). The tribunes pretending to be watchdogs of the people are conceived as manipulating villains. The patricians are not less villainous in their Doctoring of anti democratic values. Volumnia and Menenius are as calculating as the tribunes in their desire to produce political effects. There is something tainted in Volumnia's Victory, in Coriolanus failure, something fine and ennobling. His willingness to accept failure makes him a greater man than he would have been where he is successful in getting revenge. In Coriolanus we begin by disliking him and end by admiring him. On another count, Coriolanus is not political and his honesty and harsh integrity provides the basis of the tragedy. Coriolanus, appearing before Aufidius house in Antium 'In mean apparel, disguised and muffled' Delivering his important soliloquy. 'O world they slippery turns' is an apolitical Coriolanus.

He is not politic at all, for he is not political. His speech shows no awareness of the powerful events that have precipitated his banishment. The essence of his separation from politics is in his banishment speech. He banishes the Roman mob that has banished him and says darkly:

'There is a world elsewhere' –

The world elsewhere would mean the Volscian camp where Coriolanus joins his indoubtable foe

to Fight against the 'cankereb country'. But in reality he departs from Rome 'a lonely dragon' condemned to inhabit a private world that is essentially of his own making. It is not the world of introspective anguish (like Lear's) and reevaluation: it is the same Roman political world it is certain geographical remove. There are moments in the play when truth seems about to break through. Truth dawns upon him outside the gates of Rome and the public hero finds himself without a public.

As Eugeve waith points out:

The world sought 'elsewhere' is not that of the Romans & Volseiano..... It is a world of absolutes.....The world of heroes and generals, the brides of war. Ironically and athetically he found in dishonorable Rome "neither his "external city" without "nor his paradise thin"". The world of Romans or of the Volscians will always be an unnatural scene to him and his capitulation to it a deed that the gods will laugh at. But the tragedy seems intent on demonstrating one fact, the fact that there is not a world elsewhere. For ultimately everything Roman is involved with everything Volscian. They can't exist as separate entities. Shakespeare's play is very rewarding. It focuses on the idea of the re-assertion of human weakness and the tolerations it needs. The figure who must be tragic is defeated in Coriolanus by society's instincts.

The paradox of this deeply flawed noble hero yields subtle truth. It reaches the limit of tragic validity and sometimes goes even beyond. On the person of the 'self born', stern-angry God fierce, proud and solitary, wrathful and disputatious, Shakespeare seems to have brought his tragic inception to an end. Merely human pity cannot penetrate that area of paradox, nor can solve that mystery.

For it is its on consummation...

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