

THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS

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The Tragedy of Coriolanus by William Shakespeare & Israel Gollancz

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & ISRAEL GOLLANCZ

THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS

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used is that of the "Cambridge" Edition.*



The Forum.

William 1864
SHAKESPEARE'S
TRAGEDY OF
CORIOLANVS



· WITH · PREFACE ·
· GLOSSARY · &c · BY ·
· ISRAEL · GOLLANCZ ·
· M · A ·

· MDCCCXCVI · PUBLISHED · BY · J · M · DENT ·
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"He was a man too full of passion and choler, and too much given over to self-will and opinion, as one of a high mind and great courage, that lacked the gravity and affability that is gotten with judgment of learning and reason, which only is to be looked for in a governor of State: and that remembered not how wilfulness is the thing of the world, which a governor of a commonwealth, for pleasing, should shun, being that which Plato called 'solitariness'; as in the end, all men that are wilfully given to a self-opinion and obstinate mind, and who will never yield to other's reason but to their own, remain without company, and forsaken of all men. For a man that will live in the world must needs have patience, which lusty bloods make but a mock at. So Marcius, being a stout man of nature, that never yielded in any respect, as one thinking that to overcome always and to have the upper hand in all matters, was a token of magnanimity and of no base and faint courage, which spitteth out anger from the most weak and passioned part of the beast, much like the matter of an impostume: went home to his house, full freighted with spite and malice against the people."

NORTH'S PLUTARCH: *Life of Coriolanus.*

5 May 20. 1874

Preface.

The First Edition. *Coriolanus* was first published in the Folio of 1623, where it was originally placed at the head of the division of "Tragedies," occupying pages 1-30; subsequently, however, *Troilus and Cressida* was placed before it. The text of the play is extremely unsatisfactory, due to the careless transcript put into the printers' hands.

The play is mentioned in the Stationers' Registers, under date of Nov. 8, 1623, as one of sixteen plays not previously entered to other men.

The Date of Composition There is no definite external evidence for the date of *Coriolanus*; * general considerations of style, diction, and metrical tests † point to 1608-1610 as the most probable years, and justify us in placing it next to *Antony and Cleopatra*, closely connected with it by consideration of subject and source.

* The reference to the "ripest mulberry" (III. ii. 79) was thought by Malone and Chalmers to bear on the date; for in 1609 the King made an attempt to encourage the breeding of silkworms. Similarly, Chalmers found in the references to famine and death allusions to the year 1609. Political allusions have also been found. All these doubtful pieces of evidence seem utterly valueless.

† The light-endings and weak-endings, scanty in all the previous plays (the largest number being 22 of the former, and 2 of the latter, in *Macbeth*), reach the number of 71 and 28, respectively, in *Antony*; 60 and 44 in *Coriolanus*; 78 and 52 in *Cymbeline*; 42 and 25 in *The Tempest*; 57 and 43 in *The Winter's Tale*. All these are plays of Shakespeare's Fourth, or last, Period.

Read 295, O. S. 12-8-74

170430

The Source of the Plot. *Coriolanus* was directly derived from Sir Thomas North's famous version of Plutarch's "*Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*," the book to which Shakespeare was indebted also for his *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and, to some extent, for *Timon of Athens*, and which has been fittingly described as "most sovereign in its dominion over the minds of great men in all ages." North's monumental version is one of the masterpieces of English prose, and no better proof exists than a comparison of the play with its original. Shakespeare has borrowed North's very vocabulary, and many of his most striking effects; so closely does he follow the whole history that North's prose may actually assist in restoring a defective passage; e.g. in Act II. Sc. iii. ll. 251-253 the folio reads:—

" And Nobly nam'd, so twice being Censor
Was his great Ancestor ;"

the lines are obviously corrupt, owing to the loss of some words, or of a whole line; the passage is adequately restored simply by "following Shakespeare's practice of taking so many of North's words in their order, as would fall into blank verse," and there is little doubt that it should be printed thus:—

"[And *Censorinus* that was so surnamed,
And nobly named so, twice being Censor ;"

the words given in italics are those taken from North. As an instance of the closeness of the play to its original the following lines afford an excellent illustration:—

" Should we be silent *and not speak, our raiment*
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile. Think with thyself
How more unfortunate than all living women
Are we come hither ;"

Shakespeare has here merely touched with the magic of his genius these words of North:—"If we held our peace (my son) and determined *not* to speak, the state of our poor bodies, and present sight of our raiment, would easily bewray to thee what life we have led at home, since they smile and abode abroad. But think how with thyself, how much more unfortunately* than all the women living we are come hither." The same correspondence is found in the other great speech of the play; "the two speeches," as Mr George Wyndham excellently observes, "dressed the one in perfect prose, the other in perfect verse, are both essentially the same under their faintly yet magically varied raiment."

The literary history of North's book is briefly summarised on its title-page:—"The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, compared together by that grave learned philosopher and historiographer PLUTARKE OF CHERONIA, translated out of Greek into French by JAMES AMYOT, Abbot of Bellemeuse, Bishop of Auxerre, one of the King's

* "Unfortunately" in the editions of 1579, 1595, 1603; but "unfortunate" in the 1612 edition; hence some scholars argue that Shakespeare must have used the late edition, and that the play must therefore be dated 1612 or after; the argument may, however, be used the other way round; the emendation in the 1612 edition of North may have been, and probably was, derived from Shakespeare's text.

In this connection it is worth while noting that there is a copy of the 1612 edition of North's *Plutarch* in the Greenock Library, with the initials "W. S." In the first place it is not certain that the signature is genuine; in the second, if it were proved to be Shakespeare's, it would merely seem that Shakespeare possessed this late edition of the work. *Julius Cæsar* is sufficient evidence that he possessed a copy of one of the early editions. It happens that in the Greenock copy there are some suggestive notes in the *Life of Julius Cæsar*, and these seem to me to tell against the genuineness of the initials on the fly-leaf. Vide Skeat's "*Shakespeare's Plutarch*," Introduction.