

Coriolanus

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Coriolanus

Because there is a famine in Rome, the ordinary people are dissatisfied with the rich patricians. They particularly resent Volumnia's arrogant son Caius Martius, who makes it clear how much he despises them. The citizens revolt against the patricians because they suspect that they are hoarding corn for themselves. As a result they are given two new representatives, or tribunes, with seats in the Senate.

The riots stop when war breaks out between the Romans and the neighbouring Volscians. In the war Caius Martius leads the Roman army in attacking the town of Corioli, where he shows such bravery that he is honoured with the title 'Coriolanus'.

Back in Rome the patricians want Coriolanus to put his name forward for the position of consul. Reluctantly, he agrees, although he will need to show humility to gain the agreement of the citizens. However, he again shows his contempt for them and they turn against him. Encouraged by the tribunes, the citizens even demand Coriolanus' banishment from Rome.

In revenge, Coriolanus joins the Volscians and his former enemy Tullus Aufidius. Together they march on Rome. Coriolanus refuses to listen to any of his former colleagues, who beg him not to attack, and it is only the pleas of his mother, wife and son that persuade him to spare the city. After making peace, however, he is killed by the resentful Volscians.

Media:

DVD:

The Spread of the Eagle (BBC TV 1963), dir. Peter Dews (mini-series covering 4 Roman plays)

Coriolanus (BBC TV Shakespeare 1979), dir. Elijah Moshinsky

Coriolanus (2011), dir. Ralph Fiennes

CD Audio:

Coriolanus (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]