

Volumnia/Kony

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To Jaice

Acknowledgments

The fact that *Volumnia/Kony* exists at all proves that there is such a thing as being in the right place at the right time.

When selecting my committee, I superstitiously followed the dictates of destiny. Dr. Kevin Donovan initiated this project when he recommended a film version of *Coriolanus* to a doctoral candidate—a recommendation that I intercepted as a mere spectator at that candidate’s dissertation defense. And without Dr. Marion Hollings’ enthusiasm at the mention of Volumnia’s name, I would not have felt swayed to write on Shakespeare. The lessons: attend thesis and dissertation defenses, and talk to professors during their office hours. With unstinting patience and expert advice, both Drs. Hollings and Donovan proved that destiny was right to recommend them.

Thanks to the College of Graduate Studies, which granted me a research assistantship on Dr. Jennifer Kates’ literary magazine *SHIFT*, *Volumnia/Kony* will soon be followed by my other opus: *Holy SHIFT*. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Dr. Kates, who let me unleash my God complex on her magazine’s third volume—three being the number of the Holy Trinity, after all.

My grandparents, Ron and Donna, gave me a place to live and kept me fed. More important, they provided the love and encouragement that I needed to power through an intense writing process.

Gregg Bunn and Jason Snyder opened their home to me so often that it became first my home *away from* home, and then, ultimately, just my home.

Finally, in this thesis about, among other things, the relationships between parents and sons, I can’t neglect to mention my own parents. When I speak the title *Coriolanus*,

I hear two names: my father's (Corey) and mine. But *Volumnia/Kony* is concerned foremost with mothers, and I feel very fortunate that my mom (Amy) is as different from Volumnia as a person can be.

Abstract

Early-modern England, with its mixture of empiricism and mysticism, greatly esteemed analogical thinking and made literary heroes out of newly translated ancients such as Plutarch, whose *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* was a principal source for Shakespeare's Roman plays. Updating Plutarch's methodology in *Parallel Lives* for the twenty-first-century academy, *Volumnia/Kony* makes an analogy between the Roman lives of Coriolanus and Volumnia and the Ugandan lives of Joseph Kony, his Lord's Resistance Army, and the LRA soldiers' mothers. But *Volumnia/Kony* disrupts conventional timelines of influence-transfer to consider how lives separated by many centuries criss-cross and constitute each other. Adapting Slavoj Žižek's speculation that Shakespeare had read Lacan, I argue that Shakespeare, in preparing for the writing of *Coriolanus*, had obviously watched the viral YouTube video "Kony 2012" and thus was well apprised *avant la lettre* of the massacres that would play out in Uganda and Sudan. Seeing the Lord's Resistance Army in Shakespeare's iambs, then, is neither to hallucinate nor to force an anachronistic reading—the Ugandan soldiers were already there.

Volumnia/Kony investigates the relationships among its parallel lives in three chapters. Chapter One, "The Lord's Coriolani," tests the concept of "terrorist" as applied to Kony and his child soldiers by reading them alongside one of Shakespeare's most enigmatical tragic heroes. Chapter Two, "Come Back Home, Killing Machine," focuses on the United States Army Special Forces' psychological operations mission in Uganda. The U.S. army's reputedly ingenious strategy—using mothers' voices to peaceably recall militants to their villages—has at least one antecedent almost three-millennia old: the

Roman embassy led by Volumnia to her betrayed and vengeful son, as recorded in Plutarch's "Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus." Adapting Plutarch's material in dramatizing the maternal petition, Shakespeare draws mothers, sons, and matters of state into a recurring psychopolitical dynamic. A brief coda, "Solidus," plays fast and loose with time and Bloomian influence theory, using Jorge Luis Borges' Pierre Menard to examine the literary-mathematical relationship between Volumnia and Kony as signifiers and all that they represent—enduring motifs of maternal-filial bonds and power's corrupting effects on idealistic revolutionaries. Ultimately, Borgesian, Bloomian, and Žižekian ironies open to, if not quite common sense, at least a restoration of traditional vectors of influence. When Shakespeare penned his works, he willed a future in which every person and every event was destined to be Shakespearean.

Table of Contents

Chapter		Page
Overture	Why the Virgule?	1
1	<i>Volumnia/Kony</i> : The Lord's Coriolani	12
2	<i>Volumnia/Kony</i> : Come Back Home, Killing Machine	32
Coda	Solidus	49
Outro	1608/2020	59
	Works Cited	64

Overture:
Why the Virgule?

I think of ideas as having shapes
and when I sense that two different
texts or writers have the same shapes in
them, I know I can bring them together.
—Anne Carson, *The Paris Review*

During the Obama administration, United States Army Special Forces intervened in the Ugandan massacres perpetrated by Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army. The LRA, the most durable and destructive of the rebel militias formed after Yoweri Museveni's attainment of the Ugandan presidency in 1986, has waged war against Museveni's government and innocent Ugandans for at least three decades. Obama's special deployment succeeded in crippling the LRA because of an altogether different kind of airstrike: when helicopters appeared over Kony's camps, the child soldiers heard the apocalyptic machines speak, strikingly, in their mothers' voices. The uncanny effect of this war strategy—reportedly devised by Army Colonel Bethany Aragon—has been hailed as a breakthrough in America's popular press. With the help of Pathways to Peace, the United States Special Forces all but completely dissolved the massacring army, dubbed a “messianic Christian terror cult” by Jared Keller in *Task & Purpose* (pars. 8, 1). According to Keller, the Department of Defense is keen on using Aragon's so-called psychological operations strategy as a model for future nonviolent military intervention (par. 14). Consensus opinion holds that something extraordinary happened in the skies over Uganda circa 2017: the *Wall Street Journal* ran their report of the operation with the title “Pizzas, Loudspeakers and Moms: The U.S. Military's Unorthodox Mission Against Joseph Kony” (Phillips).

Unorthodox, maybe, but not unprecedented. Go back four centuries and William Shakespeare dramatizes a similar mission in *Coriolanus*. The eponymous Roman soldier, who clings too ferociously to his inherited values, turns the whole of his considerable wrath against Rome; then, in the play's last act, a "fresh embass[y]" led by Coriolanus's mother "[wins] a happy victory to Rome" (V.iii.17, 186). Travel all the way back to the fifth century B.C.E. and the mother's mission turns up again in much the same form, this time as historical event. If two precedents don't quite make an orthodoxy, they at least effect opportunities for comparative analysis. To readers of Plutarch, to Shakespeare enthusiasts, and to followers of international news—especially the ongoing saga of United States interventionism—the links, however apparently tenuous at first, between Coriolanus and Kony and between Volumnia and the mothers of the Ugandan rebel soldiers can only prove to be adamant upon closer inspection.

I watched the lives of *Coriolanus*'s protagonists and the LRA soldiers connect during a rather fateful sequence of events. In March 2019, while attending a dissertation defense at Middle Tennessee State University—a defense chosen randomly and on a whim—I made a mental note to read *Coriolanus* after Dr. Kevin Donovan, director of the graduate English program and soon-to-be reader on my thesis committee, recommended Ralph Fiennes' 2011 film adaptation of the play to the doctoral candidate. Two months later, on the Friday before Mother's Day, the ping of my phone momentarily drew my attention away from *Coriolanus*. The message on my screen, a group text sent from my mother, read: "I want all my babies to come to church with me on Mother's Day." Naturally, her babies obliged. That Sunday morning, the sermon was delivered by a Christian writer named Annie F. Downs. In her amusing, engaging way, she held my

attention—despite my reluctant attendance. But my attention was soon rewarded; in a topical example of the “power of a mothering voice,” Downs mentioned a name that apparently traveled the world in 2012 thanks to a viral video but that, for whatever reason, I had never heard: Joseph Kony (Cross Point 47:40-50:10). Downs recounted the story of Kony’s violent rampage through Uganda and Sudan, his mass abduction and arming of children, and then—the detail that stuck out to me—the supposedly brilliant strategy devised by the United States military to inspire mass defections from Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army: recording messages from mothers telling their abducted sons to come home and then using helicopters and loudspeakers to blare those messages over Kony’s camps (47:40-50:10). I waited for the obvious connection to be made, and when it wasn’t, I leaned over to my mom and whispered, “*That’s straight out of Coriolanus.*”

Everything old, so the saying goes, is new again.

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If there is one theme that runs right through *Volumnia/Kony*, it is precisely that: everything old is new again. Even at the stylistic level, one hears a scholarly accent that all but disappeared after the institutionalization of theory. The patrilineage of *Volumnia/Kony* can be found in such figures as Harold Bloom, Denis Donoghue, and Walter Pater. Bloom’s appeal to me is purely narcissistic: I love seeing aspects of my own cognition reflected in Bloom’s writings. Donoghue’s *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls*, the best book that I read in graduate school, became for me a kind of pitch-pipe on days when my authorial voice needed tuning. And as for that book’s subject, he and his

philia assured me that some present or future Pater—some connoisseur of strangeness—will read my thesis and find much to love in it.

Volumnia/Kony is concerned primarily with mothers, however, and it is the work's matrilineage that matters most. I owe my critical acumen to two women: Pauline Kael and Camille Paglia. Kael, one of my lifelong heroines, poisoned the well of academic theory for me early on. In a 1982 interview on Writer's Workshop, made blessedly available by YouTube, Kael summarizes the very antipathy to theoretical formulae that I detected, as an adolescent *cinéaste*, in her film reviews: "My own response is the sum total of what I have learned and what I know . . . The fact that I do not apply a theory does not mean that I'm impressionistic . . . Only bad critics impose an academic formula" (9:14-12:16). Kael's work is more interesting than that of the leading Marxists, postcolonialists, and feminists (all of whom I read extensively to prepare for this thesis) precisely because Kael is *sui generis*. As she well knew, one must see a text without clouding one's vision with a single, hackneyed critical perspective. An alternative approach—one that has accorded with my usual interpretive style—is the methodological hodgepodge, and the supreme practitioner of the hodgepodge is Paglia, whose debut, *Sexual Personae*, "struck [me] like a planet" (*Coriolanus* II.ii.111-12). Peter Holland, in his textual note on that vivid metaphor, explains that to strike like a planet does not entail an actual collision, as in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, but instead signifies "the malign influence of a planet," which, according to Renaissance astrology, could "cause . . . earthly infections" (246n112). If Paglia's influence is malign, it is because, as Bloom taught us, all powerful influences "contaminat[e]" (*Anxiety* xxiv). When I first read *Sexual Personae* as an undergraduate, I knew I was reading

something genuinely unorthodox: a scholarly work as mindscape, with its own geography, atmosphere, and climate. *Volumnia/Kony* does not attempt to cure itself of Paglia. I do not engage with her in a Bloomian “agon . . . for aesthetic supremacy” (xxiv). Instead, our Gilbert-Gubarian collaboration befits a work concerned ultimately with peaceful reconciliations: between mothers and sons, between tyrants and nations, and, as in *Sexual Personae*, among disparate and seemingly incommensurable hermeneutics. *Volumnia/Kony* thus represents the hodgepodge as theoretical *détente*. It performs the difficult work of bringing peacefully together clashing methodologies and interpretive strategies, all of which comprise the sum total of what I have learned and what I know.

It also rests in my cognitive sweet spot. *Volumnia/Kony* is, essentially, an extended analogy; thus, it is a thoroughly Renaissance work, channeling and recapturing the heady early-modern mania for connection. As hard science emerged in the period, the old mysticisms refused to go quietly. The two modes of thought—rational and pre-rational—coexisted in the same milieu and, often, in the same mind. This intellectual hybridization continues to seduce; students of early modernism, such as the “stubbornly pre-Enlightenment” Paglia, sometimes delight in mingling Baconian empiricism with occult “superstition” in the Renaissance way: “I subscribe to a Renaissance cosmology, a divine network of correspondence, where everything is in analogy to everything else” (*SAAC* 118). *Volumnia/Kony* subscribes to the same cosmology; I simply held the two signifiers together in my mind and the connections practically made themselves. I must be careful here, though: in *The Conceit*, K. K. Ruthven cites the Elizabethan poet and rhetorician John Hoskins, who “stressed the importance of ‘inventing matter of agreement in things

most unlike,” but who also stipulated that to invent an agreement was not to force one: “the connection is ‘there’ all the time, but one needs acuity of wit in order to perceive it” (8). My method in *Volumnia/Kony* is one of agreement-invention in Hoskins’ analogical sense: by acuity of wit, I, like Anne Carson, descry similar shapes and then bring them together—although it seems, to my vestigial early-modern outlook, that the shapes conjoin quite independently of my suturing hand (Carson n.pag.).

The same analogic principle operates in *Volumnia/Kony* at the level of direct quotation. In *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, Marjorie Garber examines all the ways in which Shakespeare is “sampled” (xvii). His words echo in advertisements, newspaper headlines, art exhibition and film titles (xvii-xviii). Margaret Litvin, using *Hamlet* as a case study, finds headline writers all over the world responding to a Danish controversy from 2006 by weaponizing the same reference: “Something is rotten *outside* the state of Denmark” (14). And throughout Jonathan Gil Harris’s *Shakespeare and Literary Theory*, quotations from Shakespeare’s plays are treated to cleverly overdetermined readings in order to illustrate abstruse theoretical arguments: for instance, “I am not what I am,” spoken by Viola and Iago in separate plays and prompted by specific dramatic situations, become proto-utterances of and fodder for Lacanian psychoanalysis (91). Many quotations in *Volumnia/Kony* follow suit, adapting and appropriating words, phrases, or sentences “with scant attention to the context of the lines being quoted” (Garber xxi). Some writer’s idiosyncratic phrasing might suggest a mystic correspondence with my own, or with an idea that I’m trying to articulate, and the mere suggestion prompts a closer examination and the discovery of a usable linkage. “Wires, wires everywhere,” Paglia writes, tweaking Coleridge—a Shakespeare enthusiast (*SAAC* 118). Cant the wire

or suture between the names *Volumnia* and *Kony* rightward ever so slightly and it could just as easily be a dash linking two signifying “beads” and suggesting a detail from the “endless chain of connectedness that is the cosmos” (118). *Volumnia/Kony*, from abstract idea to individual phrase or quotation, is a tight network of analogic wires.

Renaissance metaphysics exert a noticeable influence on post-structuralist theories of literary production. When Slavoj Žižek writes that “Shakespeare without doubt had read Lacan,” and when Terry Eagleton insists that Shakespeare also took in “Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida,” the two theorists are intuiting time-defying connective wires (qtd. in Harris 4). Following Žižek and Eagleton’s post-structuralist logic, I argue that Shakespeare not only read Plutarch to prepare for the writing of *Coriolanus*, but certainly watched the viral video “Kony 2012” and followed closely the United States’ military intervention in Uganda. His play is as much about the lives of Joseph Kony, the child soldiers of the LRA, and the soldiers’ mothers as it is about the ancient lives of *Coriolanus* and *Volumnia*. In ways that will be examined and theorized throughout *Volumnia/Kony*, the events in Plutarch’s “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” Shakespeare’s play, and recent Ugandan history are all echoes and adaptations of each other. Jets of mind-spun spider silk shoot across time and bind them all together.

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So why the virgule? And where is the subtitle? No matter how lofty the contents of my thesis, I could never bring myself to call it “The Lacanian Helicopter: Tracking Transhistorical, Transcultural Changes in the Maternal Superego from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* to Twenty-First Century Uganda” or “Rhetoric Rotorized: New Comparatist

Readings of the Maternal Petition in *Coriolanus* and in Twenty-First Century Uganda,” for all the reasons discussed above. *Volumnia/Kony*, by contrast, represents the sleek New Thesis: hip, compressed, unstodgy. Instead of intimidating or repelling potential readers with a blitz of specialized verbiage, the title *Volumnia/Kony* is eye-catching, instantly scannable, mysterious. It symbolizes an actual break with the page-length titles of the early-modern period (such as the title used by Plutarch’s first English translator, Thomas North). Besides, the virgule separating Volumnia and Kony evokes far more than a subtitle ever could. It brings two figures, a play, and millennia-spanning events into a tight, mutually illuminating relationship. When quoting dialogue from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, I indicate breaks by situating a virgule between separate lines of verse—a standard literary critical practice. The virgule in my title represents the continuity in and the collapsibility between all that the names Volumnia and Kony signify, the uncanny way that Shakespeare’s ancient Rome and the real events of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century Uganda seem historically enjambed. My ideal reader should imagine how easily a line of dialogue in *Coriolanus* could break off after the name Volumnia and then anachronistically pick back up, on the other side of a virgule, with the name Kony.

Both the title *Volumnia/Kony* and the analogy it represents descend from Plutarch, one of Shakespeare’s many sources for *Coriolanus*. Plutarch’s Greek passed through French (in a celebrated 1559 translation by Jacques Amyot) before getting “Englished” by Thomas North in 1579 and ending up in the hands of Shakespeare sometime afterward (Hight 117; Plutarch, title page). In his introduction to the Arden Shakespeare *Coriolanus*, Peter Holland notes that Plutarch’s structural principle in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* was to write about “paired, parallel lives, one Roman and one

Greek” (32). Holland goes on to formulate Plutarch’s modus operandi thus: “The Life of A is present in Plutarch only because there is a comparison to the Life of B” (43).

Plutarch, a Renaissance analogy-finder long before the Renaissance, finds in Alcibiades (Life A) and Coriolanus (Life B) a similar core experience that differs only in the details: for example, both men were hated by the citizens of their country, Alcibiades because he was “geven to flatterie” and Coriolanus because he was “arrogant, prowde, and tyrannical” (190). The essence of the comparison convinces despite the particular, unassimilable facts. *Volumnia/Kony* performs the same kind of operation by plugging the names of its central figures into the Plutarch formula: the Life of Volumnia is present in my work only because there is a comparison to the Life of Kony. Volumnia (Life or Signifier A) and Kony (Life or Signifier B) differ in unignorable ways, but the essential links between them prove enlightening. By drawing these personages together—one Roman and one Ugandan—I am writing and theorizing from a “cast of mind” that, Holland notes, stimulated and inspired none other than Shakespeare himself (31). In my neo-Plutarchan title, the virgule is half the symbol representing a geometric parallelism. *Volumnia/Kony* records semblances across vast spans of time, but its ostensible parallels are actually intersections, connection points on the divine network of correspondences Paglia describes above.

I scrutinize that network in three chapters, all of which share the thesis title. Chapter One, subtitled “The Lord’s Coriolani,” foregrounds Kony and examines not only the temperamental affinities between him and Coriolanus, two “bullying warrior-chief[s],” but also between Coriolanus, the “overgrown child,” and Kony’s youthful Lord’s Resistance Army (Greenblatt 182, 166). Chapter Two, “Come Back Home,

Killing Machine,” highlights Volumnia, as well as the numerous mothers who have lent their voices to the Kony-thwarting mission. When Chapter One yields to Chapter Two, the subtle change in emphasis is signaled by the italicization of the foregrounded figure’s name in the chapter title. This visual cue follows the sculptural principle of *contrapposto*. The first chapter, “Volumnia/*Kony*,” bears down on the Ugandan warlord, and then, in “*Volumnia/Kony*,” the stress shifts to the other side of the virgule—as if Michelangelo’s David has stirred to life, à la *The Winter’s Tale*, only to rearrange the weight in his lower body. At a more abstract level, Chapters One and Two examine the gendered patterns connecting the events in ancient Rome and modern Uganda. As in Plutarch, an essential comparison is advanced, and additional smaller comparisons made besides, but many details simply refuse to link up. The tendency of the analogy to leave a remainder is examined in the coda, subtitled “Solidus,” which uses Bloom, Jorge Luis Borges, and Borges’ Pierre Menard to understand the literary-mathematical effects of time on the signifiers Volumnia and Kony. Finally, a brief outro considers the similar contexts in which both *Coriolanus* and *Volumnia/Kony* were written. Each chapter deploys a methodological hodgepodge—including postcolonial, feminist, psychoanalytic, and influence theories—to support the analogical argument.

Surely any thesis that so brazenly amalgamates the old and the new in humanist scholarship runs the risk of appearing “mad north-north-west” (*Hamlet* II.ii.315). According to F. W. Bateson’s “Principle of the Semantic Gap,” the “triumph” of an analogic “synthesis” is all the sweeter if its components seem, at first flush, categorically unconnectable—and if the attempt, *ipso facto*, seems fundamentally harebrained (qtd. in Ruthven 8). *Volumnia/Kony* operates according to the Principle of the *Conceptual* Gap:

casting an eye from ancient Rome to early-modern London to twenty-first-century Uganda, and taking in major scholarly trends along the way, it erects bridges between far-flung persons, events, and ideas. But if achieving an unmitigated synthetic victory is asking too much, I defer to the wisdom of T. S. Eliot—who, incidentally, greatly admired *Coriolanus*.¹ In “Changing Our Way of Being Wrong: T. S. Eliot’s Shakespeare,” Jason Harding quotes Eliot as saying, at a 1927 meeting of the Shakespeare Association, “About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong” (1). Assuming that, on this point at least, Eliot is correct, I hope, in mishandling *Coriolanus*, that I am breaking new ground, and that *Volumnia/Kony* is wrong about Shakespeare in all the right ways.

¹ In “Coriolan II,” Eliot makes Shakespeare’s warrior-statesman a sensitive Roman Prufrock (Phillips *TCIC* 101-02). See Christos Hadjiyiannis’s *Conservative Modernists* for a transitive comparison of Eliot’s *Coriolanus* and Prufrock (91).

Volumnia/*Kony*, Movement One:
The Lord's Coriolani

“I know that I am not a terrorist”: eight fascinating words spoken by Joseph Kony in a 2006 interview with Mareike Schomerus (114). Before rejecting the label “terrorist,” however, Kony says, “What is the meaning of terrorist? [. . .] I never knew or I never heard that kind of word [terrorist], but I heard [it] from the words of some African news” (114). Several problems arise here, one of which can be generously explained away by Schomerus’s observation that Kony lacks English proficiency (114). Kony first admits semantic ignorance by asking for the definition of “terrorist”; he then claims *in the same sentence* both not to have heard the word and to have heard it; without knowing the meaning of the word (assuming that no one has interrupted him to define it, or that the definition he requests from Schomerus isn’t supplied), he asserts, emphatically, that the word does not apply to him. The second issue is probably not one of doublespeak but of grammatical ambiguity: the “but” simply functions as an “until.” The reader still struggles to pin Kony down, though: he leaps from not knowing to knowing to knowing that he is what he apparently does not know, or only knows by association. Kony namechecks the other men whom the media consider his company-in-terror: Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, John Garang (113-14). He then asks, “So terrorist is what? What kind of people?” (114). An unwillingness to extrapolate from the media-supplied examples is evident—or else a feigned ignorance concealing a well-recognized identification. But his questions resonate: So [a] terrorist is what? What kind of [person]?

The journalists who covered the rise of Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda spilled much ink sketching a terrorist *par excellence* for Western readers and, in effect, positing Kony as the answer to his own question. In *Task & Purpose*, Jared Keller likened the LRA to a "messianic Christian terror cult" and called Kony "slippery as Osama bin Laden" (pars. 1, 2). According to Schomerus, the Western media readily promulgated Ugandan "stereotypes" of the LRA as "a gang of child soldiers" and of Kony as "a Bible-quoting psychopath" (95). And Sverker Finnström tells how Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, after encountering his own government's characterization of Kony filtered through the London *Times*, rechristened the LRA "Satan's Resistance Army" (74). Already, some general features of the "terrorist" emerge. First, a propensity to terrorize, which almost goes without saying. Second, slipperiness, the ability to evade capture—a more benign version of which might be evident in the interview discussed above, in which Kony appears incoherent and lost in the weeds, all the while (perhaps) leading his interlocutor into the weeds. Third, mental derangement and paradox: the perverse disjunction between espousing moral values (i.e., Christ's teachings) and acting homicidally immoral. Finally, incarnating evil without a potentially redeeming justification: when Museveni asserts that the Lord's Resistance Army is a Satanic, and not a Christian, militia, he does not, of course, have Milton's Satan in mind. Generalized and strung together, the journalists' characterizations of Kony satisfy and reinforce a Western idea of the terrorist. For Kony, however, seeing media portraits (excluding the 2017 Keller piece) that bear little resemblance to his self-image, the circularity of using his traits to answer his question would understandably prove jarring. Allowing for the kind of Satanic rationale that could

reasonably contend with a wider-spread and more persuasively humane value system, Kony's "I know I am not a terrorist" becomes neither Viola's nor Iago's "I am not what I am" (quoted in the overture) but an echo of that line with a difference: "I am not what you say I am."

Assessing the veracity of Kony's claim requires a fuller, richer picture—a picture provided in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. In this collection, a contingent of writers, all experts on Kony, vigorously scrutinizes the image of the man and his army crafted by the Western media. Thus, for every dubious Western claim, a counterclaim is made. Where the media see a lack of cohesion in the LRA, Kristof Titeca sees a group whose perimeters and internal structure are organized spiritually as well as militarily, with Kony's "supernatural powers" suffusing the army (67, 71). Although Sam Farmar of the London *Times* ostensibly wrote a straightforward exposé of Kony in 2006, Schomerus uncovers a story that was actually manipulated from the start by both Farmar and his editors—one that "echoes familiar tales of white adventurers in brutal Africa" to appeal to a Western readership (93-94). And, most crucially, while the media branded Museveni and his government "victims" of the LRA, Andrew Mwenda details the plight of Kony's people, the Acholi, under Museveni's victimizing "army of occupation" (51, 55). Encountering such alternative points of view on Kony and his army, one cannot help remembering Susan Sontag's much-vilified meditation on the events of 9/11: "In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards" (106). Courage, *a morally neutral virtue*: if some of the points advanced in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* sound at times like terrorist apologetics—variations on the "LRA are not cowards" theme—

perhaps that impression stems from a Western perspective that, by denying the neutrality of moral courage, or of ideological ambiguity, closes the mind to opposing viewpoints and to a greater complexity of political argument. Since Hamlet, the most complex thinker in Shakespeare's canon, first reasoned that nothing is intrinsically "good or bad," the West has largely refused to entertain the idea that certain actions—for instance, kidnapping children and training them to be soldiers—are only bad because "thinking makes [them] so" (Appendix 1 II.ii.11-12).

To explore the implications of Hamlet's nihilism, an analogy can be made between Kony and a much different Shakespeare character, one whose behaviors are cognate with Kony's own: Coriolanus. The point here is not to claim that one is a terrorist because the other is—the same kind of comparison that I criticize above. Instead, the root of Kony's denialism will be explored by interpreting him in the company of a man who is not drastically different from Hussein, bin Laden, and Garang, but who, nevertheless, inspires admiration from many readers and theatergoers. The nature of my comparison is not without precedent, but the risks it poses must be addressed before proceeding. Peter Holland writes of the play's stage history, "In other times, treating Coriolanus as a portrait of a contemporary figure could be extremely effective" (102). One of the examples Holland provides is a 1988 production in which the lead actor, Byron Jennings, was a virtual doppelgänger of a notorious, timely figure: Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. The resemblance was exploited for maximum effect: the sight of Jennings evoked, in the minds of the audience, the scandal of North's "arms sales" to Iranian extremists, powerfully underscoring the play's theme of lawlessness at the upper echelons of society (102). Holland's "in other times," however, threatens to pronounce a similar

treatment in 2020—even if just a scholarly one—outmoded on arrival. Potentially undermining the freshness or utility of my comparison as well is the postcolonial rejection of Shakespeare as a globally resonant figure. Yet Shakespeare remains so pervasive a hegemonic force that even his avowedly counter-hegemonic critics sometimes write themselves into a bind: Harry Garuba observes a tendency among postcolonial theorists to “us[e] Shakespeare as the privileged site for thinking about non-Western subjectivities” (220). More productive and less problematic as a critical practice, perhaps, is the use of what Sandra Young calls the “irreverent or satirical Shakespeare, an ally in the critique of power” (Thurman 51). This Shakespeare is precisely my source; his *Coriolanus*, a play that vigorously examines the operations of political power, still gains in *literary* power when read in an up-to-the-minute context—and the context, such as the struggle between Museveni and the LRA, benefits as well. Despite Shakespeare’s apparent limitations as an exponent of late-twentieth-century Uganda—namely, his race, his situatedness in time, and his nationality—the limits of *Coriolanus* as a reservoir for associations well outside its textual borders remain unknowable.

To start, the commentary elicited by *Coriolanus* both within and outside his play reads uncannily like the commentary surrounding Kony. A unifying theme of that commentary—indeed, the major unifying theme—is the withholding of humanity from the target of the commentary’s criticism. *Coriolanus*, by virtue of his elitism, his extraordinary abilities on the battlefield, and the mythos attending those abilities and their accomplishment, often resembles more a deity than a man. In Act I, scene x, during a deliberation between Rome’s enemies, the Volscians, a soldier calls *Coriolanus* “the devil,” an epithet resonating in Museveni’s relabeling of the Lord’s Resistance Army as

Satan's (l. 16). Later, the Roman tribune Brutus, determined to protect the city's plebeians against the threat he perceives Coriolanus's consulship poses, tells Coriolanus, "You speak o'th' people as if you were a god / To punish, not a man of their infirmity" (III.i.83-84). To enemy and fellow citizen alike, Coriolanus stands apart in kind. His upbringing as a patrician-soldier keeps him poised above sullyng mortal weaknesses. But if Coriolanus is occasionally buoyed up by divine metaphors, he is as often brought low rhetorically; the play's characters make him variously animalian (he is a "viperous traitor," per Sicinius, Rome's other tribune) and inanimate (a "noble thing," per Aufidius, Coriolanus's enemy-turned-friend-turned-slayer) (III.i.288, IV.v.118). Later in the play, Coriolanus's Volscian-allied warpath toward Rome precipitates mixed rhetorical opportunities. For example, in a dizzying collision of the high and the low, Coriolanus's former general, the oratorically gifted Cominius, says in the space of one line that Coriolanus "is [the Volsci's] god. He leads them like a thing" (IV.vi.91). At every turn in the drama, Coriolanus's characteristics are exaggerated above and below a recognizably human standard.

Pick up an analysis of *Coriolanus* and the critic will almost certainly sound, at times, like the play's characters. In the tradition of high rhetorical figuration, Bruce King, interpreting Jan Kott, speaks of Coriolanus's "god-like inhumanity" (39). Conversely, Stephen Greenblatt stoops for a low rhetorical figure, writing that Coriolanus becomes "an inhuman object" to please his war-idealizing mother, Volumnia (164). Bloom aggrandizes a low rhetorical figure by making it superlative: to him, Coriolanus is "the greatest killing machine in all of Shakespeare" (*SIH* 577). This metaphor of the "killing machine" turns up time and again in *Coriolanus* scholarship. We learn in Act I, scene iii

of Coriolanus's background, that while still "tender-bodied" (i.e., a child), he was dispatched by Volumnia to "a cruel war" (ll. 5-6, 13). He returned from that war not only a hero but, to his mother's "joy," a "man" (ll. 14-17). In seeing her son as a man, however, Volumnia expresses an opinion that few share. Because Coriolanus comes of age in so many of Rome's wars, he is more often imagined by critics as a kind of specialized appliance: turn him on and watch him kill—efficiently, brutally, and relentlessly. R. A. Foakes locates the origin of Coriolanus's passage from man to machine in Act I, scene vi, where it coincides with his rechristening: Coriolanus, still known as Caius Martius, charges into Corioli unassisted and "becomes [a] war machine" (177). Afterward, when the victorious Martius receives from Cominius the new name Coriolanus, he is basically, in today's commercial parlance, rebranded (I.ix.62-64). The new name connotes the seemingly irreversible transition he has made from human to war machine. Janet Adelman also reaches for this metaphor when she argues that Coriolanus's transition to machinehood occurs much earlier, under Volumnia's "tutelage," when Coriolanus becomes "a virtual automaton" repulsed by the human residue left within him (147). Ryan Reed traces the automaton's emergence in literary history from the brass man of Apollonius's *Argonautica* to the iron man of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen*; both are "metal [men]" assembled and animated by gods (46). But Reed overlooks Coriolanus, the "thing / Made by some other deity than nature" (IV.vi.91-92). Forged in war and breathed into sub- and/or superhuman life by characters and critics, Coriolanus becomes a homophonically distinct kind of metal man: a meddle man, the product of his mother's and our officiousness. He is rhetorically constructed along a sliding scale that is all extremity. Because Coriolanus exists in a milieu that

almost never confers the characteristics of humanity upon him, he yields easily to tyrannical impulses (Greenblatt 164, 182).

“Societies, like individuals, generally protect themselves from sociopaths,” Greenblatt writes (155). Sociopathy, synonymous with psychopathy, occupies a corner of the so-called dark triad, a cluster of “maladaptive” personality types (Somma et al. 101). Narcissism and Machiavellianism occupy the other corners (101). The most salient aspects of dark triad personalities include “antagonism” and “moral disengagement,” the latter denoting a tendency to rationalize immoral behaviors (101-02). If the Western media and literary criticism are to be believed, then Kony, the Bible-quoting psychopath, and Coriolanus, the surpassingly lethal soldier with “an overgrown child’s narcissism,” are precisely the kinds of brutes society must fend off (Greenblatt 166). Kony’s moral disengagement—his recourse to scripture to justify the mass-murder of innocent Ugandans and Sudanese—admits no recognition of its abject hypocrisy or illogic. And Coriolanus, “itching,” according to Greenblatt, “to unleash a massacre,” antagonizes the Roman citizenry because he sees an older Rome—an idealized Rome—shifting into an intolerably debased, democratic register (162). Anne Barton writes that Coriolanus “refuses to accept that a new stage has been reached in the evolution of Rome,” that the full range of Rome’s virtues are not embodied in him alone but dispersed throughout the polity (143). To Coriolanus, the citizens are ill-equipped to share democratic responsibilities; they must remain firmly locked in their social strata. But the times are changing and rushing Coriolanus out of doors. When he is banished by the tribunes and the plebeians, he attempts, in turn, to banish his banishers—a “magnificent absurdity,” Barton contends, and evidence of a mindset that is removed from reality (143). Because

of his preposterous turns of mind, Barton writes, “it is possible for [Coriolanus] to betray his country [by joining forces with the Volscians] without ever admitting to himself that he is . . . a Roman traitor” (143). Another example, perhaps, of moral disengagement. Coriolanus justifies the expressions of his nascent tyrannical instincts by staunchly defending the old Rome against encroachments from the new; wounded after his banishment, but not shaken at all in his convictions, he gives those nascent instincts full potency on a mass-murdering rampage toward Rome.

Remember Hamlet’s lesson about moral neutrality—a difficult lesson to absorb, and one that for some will be repellent in the following analysis. But allow yourself now to see the Ugandan situation as Hamlet would. For if Kony is very similar to Coriolanus—their respective transformations in the crucible of political power clinch the comparison—Kony also bears undeniable resemblances to Shakespeare’s tribunes and plebeians. Is there a scenario in which Kony’s “I know that I am not a terrorist” is not the denial of a psychopath who refuses to accept reality, or the cunning feint of a scoundrel playing an evasive semantic game, but instead the genuine self-assessment of a man who sees himself as driven by a legitimate value system, and whose actions have been frustratingly misunderstood? Where Coriolanus attempts to preserve and restore Rome’s social order from above, Kony attempts to capsize and reorder Uganda’s from below. The contributors to *The Lord’s Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* detail the human rights abuses that have been perpetrated by Museveni in northern Uganda since 1986, when Museveni attained the presidency. According to Sverker Finnström, Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA), the occupying force in northern Uganda, regularly raped and tortured the Acholi (78). The LRA accuse the NRA of treating the

Acholi “like animals” (78). After insurgent groups such as the LRA began to fight back, Museveni set up “concentration camps” and left the Acholi to perish in them; Mwenda notes that the Museveni concentration-camp death toll—one-thousand people a week—far outpaced the LRA figure (55-56). Against such a little-known and frankly abhorrent backdrop, the “terrorist” label applied to Kony and the LRA loses some adhesiveness. Indeed, when Finnström conducted interviews with Uganda’s “urban young men,” he detected a common theme: the men rebuked the favoritism shown toward Museveni’s government by the media and insisted that the rebels were actually “freedom fighters” (83). “To a rebel who has a constitutional right to liberate his country,” one man told Finnström, “they don’t see that they have done anything wrong” (83). The 1995 Ugandan Constitution grants no such right; although Chapter Twelve provides for the establishment of the Uganda Peoples’ Defense Forces, it expressly forbids a “person” from raising an army irrespective of the constitution’s guidelines (208[4]). But Chapter Four guarantees the Ugandan citizenry protection from “torture and cruel[ty],” and Chapter Seven requires the president to comply with constitutional laws (44a, 99[3]). If Museveni and his government disregard their own laws ensuring basic human rights, and the world does not hold them accountable, what choice is then left to a population that has suffered unconstitutionally? In an article published on the State House of Uganda’s website in 2016 titled “Freedom Fighters’ Sacrifices Restored Uganda’s Dignity,” Museveni is quoted not just sanctioning but valorizing the actions of “those that have made a contribution to the removal of the fascist dictatorships which tried to thwart our freedom” (par. 2). After praising the NRA and honoring the fallen freedom fighters, Museveni is given the Katonga medal for his “zeal . . . under all odds to liberate the

country” (pars. 4, 5, 7). The LRA may not have the *constitutional* right to liberate their country, but they do have the unofficial sanction of their president—a precedent-setter, a freedom fighter.

“Down with him! Down with him!” Words spoken by Acholi freedom fighters about Museveni or by Roman citizens about Coriolanus? Either choice seems plausible, but these are in fact the passionate cries of Shakespeare’s plebeians in Act III, scene i of *Coriolanus* (l. 184). The starving citizens, duped by Coriolanus’s election-seeking manipulations in the marketplace, first assent to Coriolanus’s consulship and then, finessed by their tribunes into reversing the decision, call for Coriolanus to be dashed against the Tarpeian rock (III.i.214). The citizens want to believe that the powerful warrior-statesman Coriolanus has their interests at heart; that his antagonisms belie an essential fairness; that he can be, despite his reputation, a hero off, as well as on, the battlefield. But Brutus and Sicinius recall the citizens to their natural disposition. In the play’s opening scene, the “first citizen,” ready to stoke an uprising over the Roman aristocracy’s grain-hoarding, says, “Let us revenge this with our pikes” (I.i.20-21). Oppression under the Roman nobility incites calls for murderous rebellion. (The first citizen’s words echo with a difference today when internet leftists post memes on social media with the rallying cry to “eat the rich” accompanying images of French Revolution-style guillotines.) Coriolanus is not alone in his Greenblatt-diagnosed sociopathy, but he is the sociopath Roman society protects itself against: opting for permanent banishment over execution, the citizens collectively “whoop” him out of Rome (IV.v.80). For a time, the sociopath’s removal from society brings peace; the citizens and the patricians coexist without tension. Interpreted alongside the events in *Coriolanus*, with one’s judgment

suspended in a Hamletian frame of mind, the actions of Kony and his army, bad because the media's thinking made them so, begin to acquire a moral dimension. In his interview with Schomerus, Kony insists (despite facts to the contrary) that he does not kill innocent civilians: "I kill the force, the soldier of Museveni" (116). To Kony, the Ugandan government is so self-evidently wicked that he believes Schomerus, after hearing his side of the story, will agree that Kony "is right for his war" (115). The world remains unpersuaded. Thinking about Kony's rationale, and the words of the urban Ugandans interviewed by Finnström, one imagines the rebels-cum-freedom fighters, bent on freeing the Acholi from their subjugation, repeating the words of *Coriolanus*'s third citizen: "We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do" (II.iii.4-5). Exercising the unconstitutional right of the oppressed to liberate Uganda but villainized by media reports and the opinion of the world, the Lord's Resistance Army is a citizen uprising whooped out of cultural legitimacy, and cultural legitimacy confers power.

If *Coriolanus* is at times like Kony, he also invites comparisons to Museveni. Indeed, the correspondences between the LRA and the Roman plebeians have already nudged *Coriolanus* in that direction. Foakes notes that *Coriolanus* "begins his career identified as the liberator of Rome" (176). Conscripted by Shakespeare into combat against the Roman king Tarquinius Superbus, *Coriolanus*—still just a teenager named Martius—deals the battle's revolutionary blow by "[striking Tarquin] on his knee" (II.ii.92-93). The young Martius's dictator-felling move leads directly to the increasing democratization of Rome. Recounting Martius's actions in that fateful battle, Cominius says, "In that day's feats / When he might act the woman in the scene / He proved best

man i'th' field, and for his meed / Was brow-bound with the oak," a decoration awarded for valor in battle (II.ii.93-96). In the twenty-first century, Uganda decorates its favored liberators not with oak but with wreaths and Katonga medals. The example of Museveni is but one of the latest in a long and well-recorded pattern of freedom fighters overthrowing tyrants only to become tyrants themselves. An earlier cycle of the pattern unmistakably turns up in *Coriolanus*, where the man who begins his career as the liberator of Rome "affects," in the words of Brutus, "Tyrannical power" (III.iii.1-2). Coriolanus becomes a quasi-Tarquin who must be struck on his knee. His gradual self-investiture of power invites a new crop of freedom fighters: the Roman citizens who, stirred to revolution by their tribunes, run Coriolanus out of the city. Remembering the chronological liberties taken by Žižek and Eagleton, one can speculate that Coriolanus is not just aware of Museveni, but that he is actually trying to *be* Museveni. For example, Coriolanus is almost certainly imitating the Ugandan president when he calls the plebeians "curs" (I.i.163). The Acholi, you will recall, are treated like "animals"—and Finnström notes that Museveni refers to the LRA as "hyenas" (80). When Museveni gripes about northern Uganda's "backwardness," his sentiment is echoed by Coriolanus, who disparages the plebeians' "vulgar wisdoms" (80; I.i.210). And the LRA's analogy between treatment of the Acholi under Museveni's army and under nineteenth-century "Turk slave hunters" quite obviously trickled down through the ages and inspired Volumnia, who, Coriolanus reminds her, once likened the Roman plebeians to "woollen vassals"—wishful thinking for mother and son (78; III.ii.8-10). By post-structuralist reversal, then, Shakespeare did not script the language and behaviors of the tyrant—Museveni did.

That is one version of the story, a morally complicated version that presses one uneasily toward sympathy with a mass-murderer—or is that two mass-murderers, or three, or thousands? The Lord’s Resistance Army, according to Michael Phillips, at one time numbered 8,000 fighters (par. 11). It is a “beast / With many heads,” each head belonging to what Opiyo Oloya terms a “child-inducted soldier” (IV.i.1-2; 3, 20). In *Child to Soldier: Stories from Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army*, Oloya recounts and analyzes the narratives of young men and women who have fled the LRA. Their experiences tally closely with those of Coriolanus. The Acholi youth are kidnapped and forced, metonymically, to “matur[e] . . . in the bush”; Coriolanus is euphemistically “bred in broils” (8; III.ii.82). The child soldiers are “manipulat[ed] by the adults in their lives”; Coriolanus is “overmothered,” beholden to Volumnia’s powerful will (Oloya 20; Billington par. 8). The soldiers have “dual identities” as Acholi and rebels; after his banishment, Coriolanus must negotiate his dual identities as Roman and Volscian—and literary critics must reconcile the duality they’ve constructed between Coriolanus the “great man” and Coriolanus the machine (Oloya 66; Garber *SAA* 777). Although the perverse transformation of “ordinary children [in]to lethal child combatants” has understandably outraged the world, a competing narrative has been hiding in plain sight (Oloya 8). In his interviews with LRA soldiers, Ben Mergelsberg records a number of haunting admissions: for example, one combatant says, “Fighting was very good for me,” and adds that a two-week period “without firing” made him feel “something was missing” (162). One is reminded of Coriolanus’s “single-minded passion for fighting” (Foakes 180). But coercion, and not passion, is more often the driving force behind the LRA’s killing: another soldier tells Mergelsberg, “We got six people and I was told to use

the lock wire to beat these people. And I had to do it, because if you don't do it you are the next person" (159). Similar narratives appear in the 2005 documentary *Lost Children*, which follows ex-LRA soldiers as they are reabsorbed into their communities. Near the end of the film, the camera glides slowly over a field, left to right, recording a macabre tableau: three or four dead bodies, victims of the LRA, mangled and contorted amid tall grass (1:31:58-1:32:09). The image, like so much else about the LRA, evokes *Coriolanus*, specifically Volumnia's grisly vision of her son: "Forth he goes / Like to a harvestman that's tasked to mow / Or all or lose his hire" (I.iii.37-39).

In uniting these details, I am not simply demonstrating that there are, as the avowedly pre-Enlightenment Paglia believes, connections to be made everywhere. Instead, by pointing up the correspondences between Coriolanus and the child soldiers of the LRA, I hope to make clear that no matter which narrative one encounters first, Coriolanus's or the LRA's, the one subsumes the other. That matters if one is unwilling to accept the premise of Bloom's question, "Can we conceive of ourselves without Shakespeare?" (*SIH* 13). For those who believe that "the fear of Shakespeare . . . [is] the beginning of wisdom," conceiving of the self without Shakespeare is not only possible but wholly desirable (Garuba 219). Not to imply that the fear must be dispelled, but should one want to dispel it, a mere reversal of dependence would serve: make *Shakespeare* reliant on exactly the kinds of "political and ideological interpretations or even plain 'misreadings'" that, until recently, have been academically verboten (219). Thus, in rejoinder to Bloom: Can we conceive of *Coriolanus* without Kony, Museveni, the LRA, Acholi mothers? Not any longer. Reading the play today entails seeing African

subjectivities rendered in the iambs, and seeing them so vividly that they seem always to have been there.

The effect of seeing Ugandan persons in a Renaissance play about ancient Rome depends on the uneasy intimation of a very human pattern. I discussed the way literary critics deprive Coriolanus of humanity by mechanizing him. The ubiquity of the rhetorical figure of the killing machine reveals a key but unelaborated insight into the relationship between violence and the human psyche. Foakes makes that insight his focus in *Shakespeare and Violence*, where he pursues the thesis that humans “have been addicted to violence” for millennia (1). Summarizing the three major positions in the debate about the intrinsic nature of human violence, Foakes, as any sensible humanist might, avoids committing himself to either the “evolutionary view” that “aggression . . . is programmed into human DNA” or the constructivist view that aggression is learned, opting instead for a compromise between the two positions: humans—men, in particular—want to give vent to violent impulses, and society conceives of outlets for the productive expression of those impulses (3). Coriolanus is given Rome’s wars as an outlet. His son, who shares more than just his father’s name, gives us a glimpse of life at the intersection of biological impetus and constructivist sanction. When the noblewoman Valeria describes how young Martius “mammocked” a butterfly “o’ Wednesday,” Volumnia replies, “One on’s father’s moods” (I.iii.60-68). Volumnia’s satisfaction is palpable: the boy has been genetically inbruted by his father—programmed, like a killing machine—and will grow up, no doubt, with every encouragement to become a soldier. *Coriolanus*, Foakes argues, exposes “violence . . . as part of the human condition” (180). And if the play seems to be a literary prolepsis, depicting, in a disguised setting and in

disguised personae, Uganda, Kony, and the Lord's Resistance Army, that is because Shakespeare programmed into its DNA an age-old, enduring pattern. An early example of the pattern in Biblical history appears in the story of Cain and Abel, one that Kony probably knows well. Of Cain, Foakes writes, "[He] could be glimpsed as a man who affirms a principle of individuation, and a right to self-determination. He could thus be recuperated as a revolutionary or even regenerative figure, whose violence contributes to social change and a new unity" (26). Thinking makes it so. Coriolanus is not exactly revolutionary except in the war against Tarquinius, a war that "touche[s] [our] ears," not our eyes (V.ii.12). But given the counternarrative told about and by Kony—that he is a freedom fighter, a would-be liberator striving to deliver Uganda of Museveni and the oppressive national army—can a productive analogy be drawn between him and Cain, one that is not, as might be expected, damning, but redemptive?

The essential thread connecting Kony to the soldiers in his army to Coriolanus is this: that their humanity cannot be taken for granted—not by us, not by their families, not by the media nor by literary critics, not by themselves. Kony and the soldiers make emphatic assertions of humanity in the face of every attempt to revoke it. In his interview with Schomerus, Kony says, "You have now seen me, I am a human being like you. I have eyes, I have brain" (114). Eyes and a brain: eyes to see, and a brain to recognize humanity. Eyes that see the oppression of his people, a brain that, he thinks, "leads [his] use of anger / To better vantage" (III.ii.31-32). Eyes to spot vulnerable children, a brain to organize them according to, in the words of Titeca, "a (supernatural) logic of its own" (69). Kony, who thinks that to see him is to recognize his humanity, has, over the years, seen thousands of people, and has not recognized theirs. A degenerative and not a

regenerative figure, ultimately, Kony's desperate appeals for recognition ring somehow hollow. More credible, perhaps, are the LRA soldiers who, after being socialized in the bush, also cry out to be recognized as human; one ex-LRA member tells Oloya, "We are human persons like everyone else" (16). Back home, among villagers who view them as "killer[s] who committed atrocities," the ex-soldiers must remind everyone of this seemingly self-evident truth (158). In *Coriolanus*'s last act, the hero, despite his "rejection of the human," finally cries out that his mother's successful peacemaking will likely prove "mortal to him," a self-recognition of his humanity (Garber SAA 794; V.iii.189). He is right. By the end of the play, he indeed "gains humanity," Garber writes, "and he loses his life" (791). The boy who became a machine becomes a man, and dies. Exposure to these narratives—to their dissimilarities and uncanny overlaps—grant us eyes to see and a brain to recognize "the beast in each of us" (Foakes 6). But the problem remains that Kony's, the LRA soldiers', and Coriolanus's respective self-recognitions of humanity do not inspire equal confidence among those who would judge their actions.

We can return one last time to Kony's questions: So a terrorist is what? What kind of person? If one were going to answer these questions as a journalist, one might simply list the attributes alluded to above: slippery, psychopathic, self-deluded, evil, murderous. If one were going to increase the complexity of one's answer and respond as a culture critic, polemicist, or *provocateuse*, one might say, "Courageous," but qualify it by emphasizing the importance of courage as a morally neutral virtue. If, however, one wanted to do full justice to the questions' complexity, and not simply default to a simplistic caricature—even if one fundamentally believes that a terrorist flattens into

caricature, or worse, the moment he or she takes a human life—then one would need to respond like a playwright, with Shakespeare’s nimble and empathic perspective-taking, or as a reader of Shakespeare trained in such nimbleness. One might then say that no concise answer can be given, but that a play written in 1608 allows, yes, a privileged glimpse of a terrorist in his full humanity. As Foakes argued in his analysis of *Coriolanus*, whatever failings might seem to isolate Kony and the LRA from humanity in fact mark them as irreducibly human. Harold S. Wilson makes much the same point in summarizing the irony of Coriolanus’s tragic downfall: the way “common humanity defeats its own loftiest aspirations, its own finest qualities—courage, generosity, the very capacity for self-sacrifice in the cause of the state . . . all through the commonest of human failings, ignorance and pride” (111). This all-too-human irony applies equally to Kony and Museveni. The insurrectionist and the dictator-in-president’s-clothing also evince some of humanity’s finest qualities, or did. Both, at different times, play the Martius to a Tarquin; but they are both also Tarquinia and Coriolani, showing the major slippage among the constituents of the *Coriolanus*/LRA analogy, or else the breakdown, many times over, of that master analogy into many smaller ones. Connective threads criss-cross and become entangled. The only element of the analogy that escapes full culpability in a capitulation to human failings, the element that is perhaps least entangled with the others, is the child faction of the Lord’s Resistance Army—but the LRA’s exoneration is by no means unequivocal.

In her Mother’s Day sermon, Annie Downs shared a memorable visual: after multiple failed attempts to “cut the head off the snake”—i.e., to capture Kony—the United States military decided, in the words of an anonymous expert, to “cut the snake

off the head” (47:40-50:10). By recording messages of LRA soldiers’ families and playing them over the LRA camps, the United States hoped to “free [the soldier’s] humanness” (Oloya 21). Rejecting for a moment Foakes’ contention that violence and humanness cannot be separated, the many, many defections of Kony’s soldiers would seem to demonstrate a freeing from the inhumanity of violence, the scourge that “reduce[s] [the child] to nothing” (Oloya 76). The programming accomplished in the bush could be undone at the sound of a mother’s voice. It is an inspiring series of events—with a disturbing shadow. *Coriolanus* traces its shape. According to Wilson, “We cannot excuse Coriolanus completely, by any means. He himself has provoked his fate by his pride, his unmanageable impetuosity, his impractical folly” (111). No, Coriolanus cannot be excused completely—but he can be excused. He is the boy bred in broils, the liberator of Rome, a flawed man who, in the end, loves his mother enough to free his humanness at the sound of her voice. If we are inclined to forgive him his murders, we are also inclined, for many of the same reasons, to forgive the LRA soldiers theirs. The story of innocence corrupted and restored moves us to sympathy. Foakes writes of the persistent Romantic belief that “children are innocent creatures” and that “human beings are basically good,” a belief at the root of the world’s outrage over Kony and the LRA; but Foakes’ book explores an alternative belief in the naturalness of human violence (3). To test where one’s perspective falls on that duality, consider whether the following is the very picture of Romantic innocence: little Martius with a “confirmed countenance,” chasing a butterfly (I.iii.62).

*Volumnia/Kony, Movement Two:
Come Back Home, Killing Machine*

According to Philip M. Taylor, psychological operations (psyops) in ancient warfare served two major functions: boosting soldiers' morale and ensuring that wars wrapped up before "Harvest time" (197). The objective: to light under soldiers an expediting fire. Among war-strategists in the Western military tradition, Alexander the Great is the earliest mentioned by Taylor; farther East, predating Alexander, Sun Tzu succinctly encapsulates an influential psyops dictum: "To subdue the enemy without resort to force is the acme of skill" (qtd. in Taylor 196). Between Sun Tzu and Alexander, the ancient Romans pulled off an exemplary Sun-Tzuian psychological operation—one that receives no mention in Taylor's brief survey, nor in the media accounts of the United States Special Forces' military intervention in Uganda. But Volumnia's embassy to Coriolanus in the fifth century B.C.E.—as narrated by Plutarch and dramatized by Shakespeare—is, properly, the mother of all psyops missions.² The story of Coriolanus not only treats, as the previous chapter explored, a tragic characterological arc from freedom fighter to reformed terrorist; it also, more centrally, depicts the exploitable relationship between a son and his mother, and the paradigmatic "deterrence" the latter performs against the former (196). The play is psyops-saturated, and in more ways than David White realizes when, in "Shakespeare and Psychological Warfare," he too neglects to mention Volumnia's fifth-act embassy (72). Shakespeare prepares the way for that embassy with numerous prior appeals for deterrence. In the scramble to subdue Coriolanus, the tribune Sicinius tells Coriolanus's long-time friend Menenius,

² For more on the connections between Sun Tzu and *Coriolanus*, see Peter Campbell and Richard Jordan's "Forming the Grand Strategist According to Shakespeare."

“Your good tongue, / More than the instant army we can make, / Might stop our countryman” (V.i.36-38). Earlier in the play and in a different context, Menenius expresses much the same sentiment: “Temperately proceed to what you would / Thus violently redress” (III.i.220-21). If one were going to paraphrase Sun Tzu’s aphorism, one could hardly improve upon these characters.

Word of Volumnia’s petitionary achievement, after all these millennia, has evidently reached neither the war strategists devising nor the American journalists covering the anti-Kony psyops mission in Uganda. Writing for the *Wall Street Journal* in 2017, Michael M. Phillips describes the “us[e] [of] families as messengers” as “one of the most unusual U.S. special-operations missions anywhere in the world” (pars. 7, 6). Phillips’ specificity lets him slightly off the hook: the operation is not altogether unusual, although it might very well be unusual for the United States Special Forces. Other elements of the intervention in Uganda, such as the use of “personalized leaflets,” have decades of precedent behind them (par. 8). In “How the Army Decimated Joseph Kony’s Messianic Death Cult Without Firing a Shot,” Jared Keller cites, as a recent example, the dropping of leaflets in Afghanistan—a botched operation that led, in 2017, to the Taliban’s violent retaliation (par. 6). Taylor notes that the use of helicopter-dropped leaflets originated in World War I, when, in 1915, Germany sent them cascading “over British lines” (197). Militaries have been “pepper[ing] [war zones] with paper” ever since (199). Using families as messengers, though—*that* is the great breakthrough in the Kony-thwarting mission, according to Phillips and Keller. And the very greatness of that breakthrough has not been at all diminished, apparently, by the fact that audiences have watched a version of it in theaters for over four centuries. But to expect Aragon or any

army colonel to know a little Shakespeare and less Plutarch is almost certainly asking too much, as is the requirement that publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Task & Purpose* provide exhaustive backstories in political history for contemporary events. If an understanding of genre, then, bars one from faulting Phillips and Keller too severely, one might still—especially if one just happens to know about an unmentioned piece of psyops military history—desire to begin one’s study of the Special Forces mission and its media accounts with the admonition, *You have overlooked something important*.

Admittedly, given the “cultural fame” and “power” of Shakespeare’s plays, suggesting that Aragon intuited her way to the so-called psyops breakthrough, and relied not at all on Renaissance literacy, cannot be wholly innocuous—there are, of course, other ways to cultivate oneself, but perhaps none that sound the notes of learning quite so much as a deep and extensive knowledge of Shakespeare (Garber *SMC* xvi-xx). But Aragon’s inspired scheme actually puts her in rather exalted company. For, assuming that a free and open admission of her Shakespeare-indebtedness has not been scrubbed from the record by a game of media telephone (after all, what motive would journalists have for expunging such a detail?), Aragon, with her keenness on the subject of mother-son relationships, joins such luminaries as Freud and Simone de Beauvoir in the inspired transposition of Shakespearean verse. The works of Freud, Bloom writes, are “essentially prosified Shakespeare”; the psychoanalyst was “haunted” by the playwright because deeply familiar with, and so unable to think beyond, his corpus (*TWC* 345). Thus, though Freud is not exactly ignorant of Shakespeare, Bloom suggests that Freud was at least self-ignorant, perhaps willfully so, about his patrilineage: “Shakespeare . . . became . . . the father he would not acknowledge” (346). If Beauvoir was also haunted by

Shakespeare, she managed valiantly to conceal it, relegating him to one mention in her tome *The Second Sex*. Yet the persuasiveness of Beauvoir's insights into mothers and sons depends, just as our sense of the inevitable effectiveness of Aragon's psychological operations strategy depends, in part—for this literary critic, at least—on how thoroughly they seem to loot Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Beauvoir prosifies it; Aragon militarizes it. But Shakespeare, of course, did his own looting, versifying “virtually every scrap of” North's Plutarch (Holland 36). Beauvoir's prosification is therefore a re-prosification—an abstracted, gendered psychohistory emptied of Plutarch's particulars. And Aragon's militarization is actually a re-militarization—the use, in the twenty-first century, of the very psyops tactic that Plutarch prosified. Neither Beauvoir nor Aragon need necessarily have read about Volumnia. All the figures mentioned so far—Plutarch, Shakespeare, Beauvoir, Aragon—are drawing on the same essential *pattern*, and the following analysis, probing millennia for that pattern, is established on two questions: Why, ultimately, is the climactic confrontation between mother and son so affecting in Plutarch's account and in Shakespeare's dramatization? And consequently, why can one say, after the success of Aragon's scheme, that, *well, naturally*, it was destined to work all along?

The previous chapter dealt with a pattern of specifically masculine violence: idealistic young men such as Martius, Museveni, and Kony fight to overthrow an oppressor and then, when successful, become oppressors themselves. But perhaps no pattern more durably spans the millennia separating the events in Plutarch's account and Aragon's psyops mission in Uganda than that of the—remember Downs' sermon—power of a mother's voice. On twenty-first-century feminist grounds, the mere suggestion of an

essential maternal power might be repellant in the extreme—contested, risky territory especially for a male writer. Even my ascription of “intuition” to Aragon might be thought to have a whiff of essentialism. The fact remains, though, that the interventions executed by Volumnia and Aragon bear unmistakable similarities and are apparently rooted in the same deep insight into mother-son relationships—an insight that warrants investigation. A good starting point for that investigation is Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, where the author, operating on Freud’s level to map a vast psychohistory of “woman,” provides substantial grist for the mill of the present discussion. Indeed, when Beauvoir turns in her book to the twentieth-century wife and mother, she describes her in terms that work equally well for Volumnia. And if “ways of talking may link” apparently disparate phenomena—a guiding belief of this thesis, and the reason for its many specimens of direct quotation—then Beauvoir’s locutions should not only connect smoothly with Volumnia’s, but also lend an extra strength of connection to Volumnia’s and the LRA soldiers’ mothers’ ways of talking (Mody 513).

As mentioned, Beauvoir’s insights are nothing if not already thoroughly Shakespearean. Bloom finds the application of Freud’s theories to Shakespeare patently absurd; a “Shakespearean criticism of Freud” makes more sense—Shakespeare being the “prime precursor,” after all—and is therefore preferable to its inverse (350). Under Bloom’s proposed system, then, Freud had a “Hamlet complex” and psychoanalysis has a “Shakespeare complex” (350). Following Bloom, I argue that Beauvoir had a Shakespeare complex, and that she assigns to mothers, without quite meaning to, a Volumnia complex. The notion of such a complex has an antecedent in Eliot criticism: Sebastian Knowles finds in Lachlan Mackinnon’s *Eliot, Auden, Lowell: Aspects of*

the Baudelairean Inheritance the suggestion that the eponymous poets “suffered from some sort of Volumnia-complex,” a slight variation on the Oedipus complex (241). Knowles’ Volumnia complex is yet another son’s pathology; the *poets* suffer. But Beauvoir explicates a mother’s psychic condition—one that Bloom, no doubt, would have assumed that Shakespeare had invented. Beauvoir’s ways of talking about the twentieth-century mother and her relationship to the son link up seamlessly with Volumnia’s ways of talking in Plutarch and in Shakespeare about her relationship with Coriolanus—and literary, theater, and film critics’ ways of talking about the relationship as well. Independent discoveries and articulations of the same psychosexual relational pattern connect the dramatist to the philosopher to the exegetes, and to demonstrate, I present a number of exemplary tautegorical chains:

Beauvoir: “It is just as [her children] are escaping her that [a mother] passionately endeavors to survive through them.” (650)

Adelman: “The union with Aufidius is for Coriolanus a union with an alter ego; it represents a flight from the world of Rome and his mother toward a safe male world.” (156)

Adelman: “With her usual acumen, Volumnia recognizes the horror of potential mutiny in Coriolanus’s response and chooses exactly this moment to assert, once again, his dependence on her.” (160)

Here, Beauvoir’s general analysis of the mother’s inescapability appears to be directly abstracted from the Volumnia-Coriolanus dynamic. Coriolanus, the Everyson, attempts to strike out on his own, but Volumnia, the Everymother, thwarts him. Given her deep investment in Coriolanus’s heroism, Volumnia will not brook his swerve toward villainy:

Volumnia: “Thou has never in thy life
 Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
 When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
 Has clucked thee to the wars and safely home
 Loaden with honour.” (V.iii.160-64)

Volumnia: “If it be thy chance to conquer, this benefit shalt thou reap of thy goodly conquest, to be chronicled the plague and destroyer of thy countrie.” (qtd. in Plutarch 185)

Beauvoir: “Since the first wail of her newborn son, she has awaited this day when he would pour out all the treasures with which his father has been unable to shower her.” (650)

Single-mother Volumnia has relied, up to the climax of Plutarch’s account and Shakespeare’s dramatization, on Coriolanus to bear the war-won oak to her and, by virtue of his filiation, associatively crown her head with it. Coriolanus’s destruction of Rome would not only blight his name for all time, but hers as well—a narcissist’s nightmare. The golden child would become history’s scapegoat; his mother, a pitiable or vilified figure. But a last-second change of heart would clinch both Coriolanus’s and his petitioner’s apotheoses:

Beauvoir: “This man whom she carried under her heart was already one of those demigods who govern the world and control the destiny of women; now he is going to recognize her in the full glory of her motherhood.” (650)

Beauvoir: “With proud humility she recognizes the virile superiority of this man who was once her baby.” (650-51)

Volumnia: “Thou art my warrior.” (V.iii.62)

Coriolanus: “I see my self vanquished by you alone.” (186)

The petitionary scene hinges on mutual recognitions of power. Coriolanus, whose rhetorical elevation to godhood was discussed in the previous chapter, is recognized here in the full glory of his warriorhood. Volumnia possessively reminds him of his filiation: he may have become a god and a killing machine of historical significance, but he is *hers*. She still sees the baby that he was when she looks upon the giant he has become (Adelman 161). Coriolanus, in turn, recognizes in his mother the full glory of his ultimate nemesis: only she has been able to overmaster him so totally and so easily—to become

Rome's authentic "hero" (King 98). A love bordering on the incestuous catalyzes these recognitions:

Volumnia: "Even he [little Martius], your wife, this lady and myself / Are suitors to you." (V.iii.77-78)

Billington: "In a 2000 production by Jonathan Kent . . . Ralph Fiennes's hero was *partnered* by Barbara Jefford as Volumnia—who at one point held her son in a fierce, sensual embrace." (par. 6; emphasis mine)

Beauvoir: "When a mother plays in a more or less disguised manner at seeing a lover in a son, it is only a game." (651)

Is Volumnia playing a game when she uses the loaded word "suitor" to imply, on some psychosexual level, not just a petition to but also a courtship with her son? Earlier in the play, Volumnia mentally rehearses a hypothetical union with Coriolanus: "If my son were my husband . . ." (I.iii.2). The expression proves that Volumnia is willing to "[go] rather far" in her incest fantasies—as does, to a degree, Volumnia's presentation of the embassy as an ulteriorly motivated family affair (Beauvoir 651). Productions such as Kent's have enjoyed testing the boundaries of the incest taboo. Even Fiennes, when he adapted the play for the screen in 2011, underscored the psychosexual ambiguity: Vanessa Redgrave as Volumnia recalls Angela Lansbury infamously "plant[ing] a kiss on Laurence Harvey" as her war-hero son in *The Manchurian Candidate* (*Chelsea News* par. 3). In performance, some latent incestuous potential breaks out. Beauvoir, unbeknownst to herself and to Shakespeare's critics, merely grafted the Volumnia-Coriolanus relationship onto twentieth-century mothers and sons. A complex was born. Pulsating through the erotically invested mother-son dynamic is the mother's belief—in the full flowering of her Volumnia complex—that she can claim total ownership over what she has made:

Beauvoir: “The mother . . . feels that she has acquired inviolable rights through the mere fact of having given birth; she does not wait to have her son acknowledge his obligation to her, in order to regard him as her creature, her property. She is less demanding than the woman in love because she is of a more tranquil insincerity; that is, her self-abdication is less anxiety-ridden; having made a carnal being, she takes over as her own an existence: she appropriates its acts, its works, its merits. In exalting the fruit of her womb, she elevates her own person to the skies.” (651)

Volumnia: “There’s no man in the world / More bound to’s mother.”
(V.iii.158-59)

Volumnia: “Thou shalt no soner marche forward to assault thy countrie, but thy foote shall treade upon thy mothers womb, that brought thee first into this world.” (Plutarch 184)

The coincident apotheoses of son and mother depend on a certain maternal logic: when one’s son attains the heavens, he takes one with him. As if by invisible umbilical attachment, the son cannot go far without bringing his mother—he soars, and she dangles along on a rope suspension. She has earned her vicarious ascension by birthing him in the first place; his achievements should properly redound upon her. Thus, Volumnia can say with full conviction, “Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck’st it from me” (III.ii.130). Render unto Volumnia what is Volumnia’s. The reminder of Coriolanus’s gestation—the mental image of Volumnia’s womb first enhousing Coriolanus and then getting pulverized by him—clinches her “happy victory” for Rome (V.iii.186; Adelman 160). “The patria as a body politic has become a feminine body,” Ronald Knowles writes (38). But not just any feminine body. Volumnia rhetorically conjures for Coriolanus—one of those demigods who control the destiny of women—a Rome with an etiological import akin to Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du Monde*. The city’s gate—the site of his expulsion—could become a site for his manhood-proving reentry. Will the soldier unleash his “phallic aggression” in that forbidden zone and (sexually) “assault” the conflated image

of mother and home (Adelman 150, 160)? As psychological operations go, Volumnia's could not be more "masterly" (Wilson 108). Volumnia has primed Coriolanus to make the connection between herself and a vulnerable patria by calling herself Coriolanus's suitor. She is the mother as quasi-lover, at one and the same time the two most important women in her son's life. Then, by linguistic trickery, she becomes the third most important woman as well: Rome. Volumnia's destiny and the destiny of a feminized Rome are thus in Coriolanus's hands: "The child . . . becomes in effect the author of his mother" (Adelman 158). He writes for her a happy ending. "Ladies, you deserve / To have a temple built you," Coriolanus tells the embassy—a monument that will elevate Volumnia's legacy to the skies (V.iii.206-07).

Mothers elevated to the skies: can a military intervention have a Volumnia complex? Certain features of the situation created by the complex map well onto the special-operations mission in Uganda. Speaking generally, the pattern connecting *Coriolanus* to the LRA's formation and dissolution can be summarized thus: tender-bodied child is removed from home and inducted into an army; child soldier poses a threat to his homeland; mother intervenes and induces her child to come home. At this barest level, the sequence of events serves an all-purpose function: it could as easily describe Plutarch's history and Shakespeare's adaptation as it could the story of the LRA. One must ignore many important particulars, however, to map the three narratives onto each other so seamlessly. The similarities and dissimilarities between Coriolanus and the LRA soldiers were discussed in the previous chapter; import those similarities and dissimilarities into the present equation, where new similarities and dissimilarities emerge, and a definitive diagnosis of the Ugandan situation proves untenable.

Volumnia's climactic supplication depends, as Harold Wilson argues, on a fateful irony: Volumnia has "shaped" Coriolanus, but in the end, she must undo her own designs and "sacrifice . . . the son she has reared to the glory of Rome as the price of that city's safety" (107). She programmed the killing machine; only she can deprogram it. But the LRA soldiers' mothers are blameless in their sons' transformations into Coriolani. The complementation necessary for a Volumnia-Coriolanus psychodynamic—with the mother as maker and unmaker of a "worship[ful]" son who is hardened to everyone else—is simply not present, nor is the consequent irony (107). Superficially, though, Aragon's mission bears an undeniable trace of its ancient analogue: not only must the mother deradicalize her child, but she must do so by appealing to his sense of "family ties," with the hope that some remnant of that connection, however attenuated, will tug him homeward (King 81). Whether Aragon or anyone in the United States military knows *Coriolanus* is irrelevant to the fact that Aragon's mission tallies quite closely with Act V, scene iii of Shakespeare's play. How does one arrive independently at such a precedented solution if not by intuiting a basic and deep-rooted human pattern? We return once more to the gist of Annie Downs' sermon to explicate what ancient Rome knew, what Shakespeare knew, and what Aragon knew: viz. in order to cut a snake (or an automaton) off its head, one must weaponize the power of a mother's voice.

"Are you all resolved to give your voices?" the third citizen asks his fellow plebeians before the consular election (II.iii.35). Garber discusses the way "voice" as suffrage, "rumor[,] or report" is "a central trope for *Coriolanus*" (SAA 780). The citizens' democratic endowment, their ability to decide Coriolanus's professional fate, is, to Coriolanus, a calamitous development for Rome. One can imagine the LRA soldiers'

mothers being asked the same question, and their resolution to give their voices enkindling a Coriolanus-sized rage in Kony. The United States' special-operations mission has proven disastrous for his army: as of 2017, the total number of soldiers had fallen precipitously from 400 at the start of the decade to "fewer than 100" (Cakaj and Titeca par. 2). "Cold ways" can indeed be "prudent helps" and not at all "poisonous / Where the disease is violent"—such is the lesson of Volumnia's embassy and Aragon's military intervention (III.i.221-23). Phillips opens his *Wall Street Journal* piece with a novelistic rendering of a successful psychological operation:

Obira Julius was stretched out on the ground, taking a breather on a slog from one jungle hideout to another, when he heard the voice in the sky. It was disembodied but familiar, a voice from his lost childhood, suddenly floating down to him from a loudspeaker on a passing American helicopter . . . It was his mother, calling him home. (pars. 1, 3)

The scene is surreal. A voice wafts toward Obira from an unusual height. It triggers, in quasi-Proustian fashion, memories from an earlier age, when that same voice wafted down many times a day. The voice has changed vessels—has been thrown, as if by ventriloquy, into the body of helicopter—and towers over him again, even though he's now, at nineteen, a grown man (par. 10). When Coriolanus, ever the "boy," beholds his mother bowing to him, he sees her as a child would: she is a colossus crouching to his level, "Olympus" genuflecting before "a molehill" (V.vi.103, V.iii.29-31). The helicopter serves more than a practical purpose. Despite its "vulnerab[ility] to ground fire," it can bear a mother's message into a potentially lethal zone (Wessel 45). But elevating the mother's voice to the sky also restores the original mother-son height disparity. Rotors hack through thickets of "bush-mindedness" to free the child tangled within (*Lost Children* 1:11:01-1:11:16).

Coriolanus is not concerned only with voice; the *authenticity* of a voice's message also matters. "Words that are but roted in / [One's] tongue" may be acceptable to the patricians and politicians in *Coriolanus*'s life, but *Coriolanus* is troubled by the "dishonest[y]" (III.ii.56-57; Garber *SAA* 792). One should say what one really feels. Obira, between jungle hideouts, hears words that have been rotered into his vicinity. Whether those words have been coerced into the helicopter's sound system does not seem to matter, or even occur, to him. Despite the manipulations inherent in psyops missions—they do, after all, have a reputation for being "dirty tricks"—only a cynic, it seems, could wring his or her hands over a military operation's use of mothers' voices (Taylor 204). Phillips writes about a woman mononymously named Eloise (her last name is withheld for her protection) whom he identifies as the leader of the psyops mission in Uganda (pars. 24, 26). (Interestingly, Phillips does not mention Aragon, and Keller does not mention Eloise. An authorship question hovers, helicopter-like, over the special-operations mission.) Eloise is the "rebel whisperer," the woman who is "trying to tug at [the LRA's] heartstrings" (pars. 24, 26). She is aided in this mission by Ocitti David, a Ugandan responsible for acquiring the recordings that Eloise requests (pars. 28, 42). A system of giving follows a single, well-organized loop: Eloise "gives [Ocitti] the names" of LRA soldiers' family members, the family members give their voices to Ocitti, Ocitti "give[s] [Eloise] the voices" (par. 42). Any hint of qualms or resistance appears not to disrupt the voices' smooth progress through that loop; indeed, Eloise's requisitions have an almost omnipotent authority. Let there be voices, and there are voices.

The embassy that appears before *Coriolanus* presents to him three strong familial bonds, and, in the skies over the LRA camps, the voices and leaflets issuing from the

helicopters remind the child soldiers of their own multiple kinships. Fathers, aunts, uncles, and siblings—in addition to mothers—give their voices to the psyops mission. To examine the similarities in their petitionary language, I link together one last linguistic chain:

Obira's mother: "I am asking you to be strong and not to worry about anything . . . Please come home." (qtd. in Phillips par. 4)

Anonymous father: "I want you to come find me, pay your last respects and receive my blessings before I die." (par. 43)

Alanyo Magret, Omona Michael's aunt: "All your friends are here . . . They're being well cared for, and others are in school. It's time for you to come home . . . What I'm going to ask you is to please come home, my son." (par. 53, marginal audio caption)

As in the Volumnia complex, a relational flexibility can be seen and heard. Alanyo's materteral supplication becomes maternal: she plays at seeing a son in her nephew. The reference to friends succeeds with Omona, but similar appeals do not move Coriolanus. Cominius, after "offer[ing] to awaken [Coriolanus's] regard / For's private friends," is shocked to discover that Coriolanus holds them in no special regard: "He said 'twas folly, / For one poor grain or two, to leave unburnt / And still to nose th'offence" (V.i.23-28). Coriolanus will slaughter indiscriminately, sparing no one. Whatever kith-directed goodwill he harbored at the time of his banishment is gone; Holland notes that "Coriolanus's attitude to his 'friends of noble touch' (4.1.49) has swung a long way during his journey to Antium" (338n77). The LRA's "walking in the bush" is similarly purgative, "break[ing]" the soldiers of their "attachment . . . to their homes" (Oloya 131). Thus, there is no guarantee that a supplication such as the father's quoted above will recover a soldier's attachments—even if paying last respects to and burying a father are "sacred" rituals to the Acholi (par. 43). And "I want you to come find me" is, of course,

quite different from “Please come home.” Rhetorically, Volumnia’s petition to Coriolanus bears the same urgency and forcefulness as the dying father’s to his son. Volumnia never uses the word “please”; her speech is filled with commands: “Stand up,” “Hear us” (V.iii.52, 91). Bruce King argues that her kneeling and her verbiage send mixed messages; although she bows before Coriolanus in supplication, her “words are not those of a supplicant” (81). “The visual and the aural offer contrasting images,” he writes (81). The psyops mission in Uganda also exploits a visual-aural mismatch: an apocalyptic war machine appears in the sky over a soldier’s hideout, but instead of strafing the ground or dropping a bomb, it says, tenderly, “My son.”

Helicopters become uncanny when used strictly for psychological warfare. In 1915, when General Ludendorff, Hitler’s commanding officer, beheld a torrent of leaflets spewing from a helicopter, he claimed to be “hypnotised [*sic*] as a rabbit is by a snake” (Taylor 198). “The fear freezing an animal in its tracks,” Paglia writes, “is an emanation of the cruel hierarchy of biology” (*Sexual Personae* 339). When a snake “immobilize[s] its prey by fixing its eyes upon it,” that snake is merely exhibiting an evolutionary bequest: the ability to pause nature’s flux by “sudden hierarchic assertion” (339). An essential feature of the Volumnia complex is the assertion of a familial hierarchy. When Volumnia “warn[s]” Coriolanus about the trampling of her womb, she makes “yet another assertion of his dependence on her” (Adelman 160). The mother never relinquishes her feelings of ownership over her son and attempts, through a battery of psychological stratagems, to stand recognized in the full glory of her womanhood—to loom large, to freeze him mid-escape, to draw him back to her. She sinks her teeth into her son, “most dangerously . . . prevail[ing]” with him (V.iii.188). Helicopters, of

course, are emanations of a technological hierarchy. Resource-strapped rebel groups generally cannot compete with such weaponry, even if, in the case of the special-operations mission in Uganda, the weapons used are no more dangerous collectively than a trick gun that fires a “Bang!” flag. By “fascination,” “the black magic of art, love, and politics,” the psyops helicopter, with its cataracts of propaganda leaflets, or its coaxing mother’s voice, hypnotizes its targets (339). A giant imago flies into view; bladelike wings “tear with thunder the wide cheeks o’th’ air” (V.iii.151). It is an intimidating sight, to be sure—one that would test the sturdiness of any “rock,” or “oak,” or thing “not to be wind-shaken” (V.ii.107-08). Naturally, then, when the behemoth speaks, the effect is completely bewitching. In Kony’s LRA camps, entranced child soldiers, one by one, heed the talking machine’s words and head home.

A little disenchantment is in order, though, lest this chapter conclude with too rosy a picture of the LRA defections. For, despite the happy ending implied by Downs’ upbeat sermon, home life after child-induction is fraught with psychic and interpersonal complications. I hinted at the suspicious efficiency of Eloise’s loop, which admits no bumps in the familial voice-giving circuit. The possibilities of manipulation and coercion are sanitized out of official accounts of the special-operations mission. But Oloya’s interviews with LRA deserters, and *Lost Children*’s presentment of their reassimilation into village life—despite taking place pre-psyops intervention—show the turbulence that typically awaits ex-soldiers in their communities. “The return home is always dangerous,” Adelman writes (2). She is talking about *Henry VI, Part 3*, but she could just as easily be describing *Coriolanus* and the Lord’s Resistance Army. Volumnia’s petition coaxes the Coriolanus complex to the fulfillment of its self-destructive potential. The

ductile son willingly submits to annihilation for the threefold Mother Proper, Mother Lover, and Mother Patria. “Most dangerously you have prevailed with [your son],” Coriolanus says, “If not most mortal to him. But let it come”—“it” being at once peace between the Romans and Volscians and his own death (V.iii.188-89). And it does come: the peace *and* the death. When the LRA soldiers return home, they, at least in the minds of their families and neighbors, bring the bush with them: according to Oloya, each of her interviewees “was confronted by a civilian population that viewed him [or her] not as a returning child survivor and hero but as a killer who committed atrocities” (158). In *Lost Children*, a young woman deserter mulls the potential consequences that perceptions of bush-mindedness could have on her romantic life (01:17:58-01:18:52). Foakes writes of the “inability of the warrior to adapt to peace” (158). Coriolanus’s “choleric,” for example, makes adaptation to civilian life difficult (III.i.85). The LRA soldiers *want* to adapt, but their neighbors wish that they had rather “remain[ed] a poison / Where [they were]” than risk “poison[ing] any further” (III.i.88-89). Uncurl and lengthen Eloise’s loop and its end sticks like a briar. The Downs version of the LRA story clears the brush. If one still desired, after seeing the reality on the other side of “Please come home,” to share Downs’ enthusiasm for the anti-Kony psyops mission, one might praise Aragon, Eloise, and the other minds behind the mission’s development by repeating Coriolanus’s exultant (ambivalent?) words: “Be blest / For making up this peace!” (V.iii.139-40).

Coda:
Solidus

Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote* is an echo with a colossal difference. Jorge Luis Borges subjects Cervantes and Menard to the kind of side-by-side comparatist analysis I've brought to bear on *Coriolanus* and the Lord's Resistance Army, only Borges, cunning interpreter that he is, divines radical dissimilitude from apparently identical texts:

It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes'. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

. . . truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

. . . truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. (43)

The idea is astounding because centuries of incident ("deeds") have filled the interim between the Cervantean and Menardian texts. Menard has recourse to historical resonances unavailable to Cervantes—a significant advantage to the former, a rather unfortunate handicap for the latter. Writing the same sentence two centuries later utterly transfigures the original meaning; Menard's words must stoop under an additional weight that Cervantes' words (the same words) need not shoulder. Paul Fry, in a discussion of Bloomian influence theory, performs a stratigraphy of irony to show how Menard's copy supersedes Cervantes' original: "Whereas Cervantes thinks he's being

ironic about his own historical moment—chronicling the death of chivalry and so on—think how ironic one can be about that historical moment when writing several centuries later, with everything that one knows now a sort of layering of second thoughts” (184). Measure the coatings of irony and assign priority to the work with the thickest encrustation. If only johnny-come-early Cervantes had the good sense to write *Don Quixote* in the twenty-first century, his work would, doubtless, strike us as an even greater revelation. The acceleration of incident-recording and sharing made possible by the internet would, in turn, enable the accumulation of many more layers of third, fourth, and fifth thoughts.

Draw your eye fifteen lines up and you see that I’ve labeled Menard the “former” and Cervantes the “latter.” The mere fact of my having done so seems unremarkable; rules of grammar require it. Menard comes earlier in the sentence, Cervantes later. But what if my designation is not just grammatical—indeed, what if, during the act of labeling, grammar was far from my mind, and I instead chose the labels to be polemical or perversely achronological, revisionist? In Bloom’s theoretical system, “strong poets” (or strong writers of any genre) must contend with “precursors” who boast the advantage of having written further back in time; “past strength,” the wealth of great writings looming large over the aspiring poet, can only be coped with and overcome through an elaborate series of defenses called the “revisionary ratios” (*Anxiety* 9-10, 14-16). A newcomer who successfully “emerges from” the ratios not only dislodges a precursor from his or her pride of place in the literary canon but also seems to usurp that precursor’s chronological position; thus Bloom can say, with irony, that a writer like Thomas Pynchon, whose “best work can be said to marry S. J. Perelman and Nathanael

West,” seems, nevertheless, to have reversed the roles between influencer and influencee: “The canonical potential of *The Crying of Lot 49* depends more on our uncanny sense that it is being imitated by *Miss Lonelyhearts*” (*Anxiety* 14, *TWC* 486). But Borgesian “past strength” is not Bloomian “past strength.” For Bloom, past strength is the advantage past writers have that present, unproven aspirants can’t have; for Borges, past strength is the opposite—the advantage present aspirants have over past writers precisely because the present has more past to work with. If Fry concedes that the relation between Cervantes’ *Quixote* and Menard’s *Quixote* is “far from the most Bloomian,” that is because Menard’s rewrite evinces no anxiety and no misreading (since it is, of course, an *echotype*); instead, Menard projects a full and expansive confidence in his “virtuoso performance” (Fry 184). As with Pynchon, so with Menard; the latter writer in a precursor-successor relationship becomes the former writer. If there *is* an argument to be made that Menard misreads Cervantes—and it would, admittedly, be a very whimsical argument indeed—then the misreading could only be located in the historical resonances—the anachronisms—with which Menard gluts his reproduction. How did those resonances get into his supposedly plagiarized *Quixote* unless he misread them as already present in the original text?

We must backtrack once more. The Borgesian master-irony that encompasses the Cervantean and Menardian mini-(many-)ironies hinges on the question of whether resonance can be applied to a work retroactively. If Cervantes had no knowledge of the nineteenth century (remember Eagleton speculating that Shakespeare was well-versed in Marx), can the nineteenth century be read (or misread) in Cervantes’ seventeenth-century text (Harris 4)? Is there a hermeneutic that not only allows for but enthusiastically

embraces such an anachronism? In answer, let us recap Borges' puzzle. The Cervantean and Menardian texts are *apparently* identical, I wrote. They share the same words and the same punctuation in the same order. Yet they are only apparently identical. Picking up Cervantes' *Quixote*, Borges, as best as he can, drops his mindset into into the seventeenth century and blocks the events of the succeeding years from his memory; only pre-seventeenth-century resonances need apply. Assuming Borges has a mind well-stocked with pre-Renaissance trivia, his experience of reading the Cervantean *Quixote* must depend on the stimulation of recognizing medievalism's values ironized. And if literary enjoyment depends on the stimulation of recognizing ironic treatments of the past, then Menard's *Quixote*, because it taps so thirstily into a Borgesian past strength, proves more stimulating than its prototype. Thus, when Borges' attention turns to the Menardian *Quixote*, the bung in Borges' memory is removed and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rush in.

How can one determine, then, whether the two texts are actually, as opposed to apparently, identical? The solution is as much mathematical as it is literary. All this time, the forward slash in my thesis title has acted as a virgule; now, in the final act, it changes roles and struts its hour upon the stage as a solidus. Inserting itself between Cervantes' *Quixote* (CQ) and Menard's *Quixote* (MQ), the solidus reveals the texts' fundamental relation:

1) $CQ/MQ \neq 1$. A reader might be tempted to collapse the two texts into each other, to assume that, given the direct correspondences of word, punctuation, syntax, etc., CQ and MQ are the same. Borges shows, by pointing up the historically allusive differential between the two *Quixotes*, that such a temptation should be avoided.

2) $CQ/MQ = 0.X$. Given the texts' different loadings of historical import, dividing MQ into CQ results in a less-than-whole, and so a less-than-ideal, relation.

3) $MQ/CQ = Y \text{ r } Z$. Here, the direct correspondences between the texts collapse into each other and the additional historical resonances in MQ are left behind as a remainder. This remainder, like the residua at the bottom of a sifter, can now be examined in isolation as the property of MQ but *not* of CQ.

The third relation is the one Borges touts in his "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." To believe in the truth of this relation is to believe in history as the *mother* of truth; i.e., in the assumption that more history engenders more stimulating textual resonances and multiplied opportunities for truth-making, so that Cervantes' *Quixote*, because it misses out on the majority of the seventeenth and all of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is fundamentally deficient. But to overlook the absurdity of Borges' performance as an exponent of Menard's *Quixote* is really to overlook the truth entirely. Whatever additional resonances Menard's text is said to possess—whatever he supposedly misread in the Cervantean original, or subtly insinuated in the only ostensibly identical verbiage—can already be read in the seventeenth-century *Don Quixote*. A Menardian update is superfluous ("Cervantes has *already performed* Menard's feat," Fry writes [185]). To read works of past strength is to imbue them with the strength of an additional past that they did not have access to, but which we do.

The position of the two names in *Volumnia/Kony* gives away my ultimate conceit. If I had missed the irony in Borges, I would have titled my thesis *Kony/Volumnia*. The events in late-twentieth- to early twenty-first-century Uganda—encompassing Kony, the Lord's Resistance Army, and the West's psyops intervention—have the power to recall

Shakespeare and Plutarch, and, no doubt, much besides, but Shakespeare and Plutarch do not have the power to recall Kony. Applying Borges' "logic" unironically, the relations between different pairs of texts—the incident-rich "text" and texts (such as newspaper and magazine articles, books, films) that coalesce around the signifier Kony—can be represented thus:

1) $V/K \neq 1$. The signifiers Volumnia and Kony and all that they signify are analogically similar but not identical. They cannot collapse into each other.

2) $PV/SV = 0.X$. Plutarch's Volumnia and Shakespeare's Volumnia—and all that they signify, respectively—do not correspond in every detail.³ Because Shakespeare's play comes later—later even than North's translation, though just barely—the mathematical operation yields a less-than-whole, and so a less-than-ideal, relation.

3) K/PV or $K/SV = Y \text{ r } Z$. The signifier Kony bears significantly more past strength than either denominator. Z represents the centuries of incident following PV and/or SV .

The literary-mathematical operation is not so clean this time around. According to a literal interpretation of the Borgesian-Menardian logic, the recent events in Uganda can easily absorb Volumnia, Coriolanus, and *Coriolanus* (both the Noble Life and the Shakespeare play) because strength gathered in the number of past years resides on the Ugandan side of the solidus. But a Shakespeare play, by virtue of the playwright's ongoing popularity and dominance of the theatrical world, goes on accumulating more past. A twenty-first century production of *Coriolanus*, whether experimental or not, is

³ For example, Act I, scene iii, in which Volumnia and her daughter-in-law Virgilia sew and discuss Caius Martius, "has no precedent in North[']s Plutarch]" (Holland 415-16n1.3.0.3).

subject to every association an audience can throw at it—and most associations, such as the ones I’ve lobbed throughout this thesis, will stick.

Staging experimental or revisionist productions of Shakespeare has long been standard practice.⁴ Although the vogue for experimenting with Shakespeare is one that I detest, I appreciate the flexibility of Shakespeare’s dramas, which seem always to bend readily whenever a director and theatrical troupe impose a post-Renaissance design on them. In *Hamlet’s Arab Journey*, for example, Litvin provides a by-no-means-exhaustive roll call of repurposed Hamlets through the ages: “Wilting Romantic Hamlets, nationalist hero Hamlets, humanist dissident Hamlets, Puritan Hamlets, disenchanting philosopher Hamlets, existentialist Hamlets, *yeshiva-bokher* Hamlets, and so on” (3). To trust that an educated audience will read Romanticism or Puritanism in a traditional production of *Hamlet* is, I suppose, a Borgesian tall order; the play must force the association by wearing the costume and stage dressing of the association. *Coriolanus*, like *Hamlet*, has proven adaptable to different times, places, and ideologies. Garber shows in *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* how *Coriolanus* was a favorite of National Socialists in Germany before swinging to the left and becoming a favorite of the Communists (63). Ralph Fiennes’ adaptation of *Coriolanus* (2011), which appears, in Holland’s estimation, “precisely modern,” orients the viewer in “A Place Calling Itself Rome”—a place that more closely resembles a “Balkan state” and that conjures, through its clever use of “news media,” a twenty-first century layering of thoughts (135, 139). If I am skeptical about the necessity of moving the play across time and space to gather additional layers

⁴ In June 2007, *The Onion* parodied the experimental-Shakespeare trend with an article titled “Unconventional Director Sets Shakespeare Play in Time, Place Shakespeare Intended.”

of thought, it is because I believe in the truth concealed behind Borges' irony and would propose that a traditional *Coriolanus* is already susceptible to retroactive resonances.

Imagine, for a moment, a production of *Coriolanus* set in early twenty-first-century Uganda. The actor who portrays Coriolanus studies videos of Joseph Kony to learn the Ugandan tyrant's mannerisms, vocal idiosyncrasies, gait, and bearing. A good deal of the production's budget goes into Act V, scene iii, in which an actual helicopter is rigged to hover over the stage, and Volumnia's voice is piped in through a stereo system. (Garber writes of an adaptation penned by John Osborne in the 1970s that had "a helicopter for denouement" [*SMC* 62-63].) Such a production would imply that Kony is not already in *Coriolanus*, that a helicopter bearing a mother's voice doesn't appear in the play's climactic scene—but readers or spectators with knowledge of the Lord's Resistance Army will observe these anachronistic presences in the original text. In such an anachronistic reading, one becomes aware of the "relation . . . of prior host and belated foreign body," *belated* and *prior* being very Bloomian—and not at all Borgesian—adjectives (Harris 4). If, as Bloom writes, "Shakespeare . . . continues to contain us," then *Coriolanus* is spacious enough to host the foreign bodies—Uganda the nation, the Ugandans of the Lord's Resistance Army and their families—that we see in it (*Anxiety* xvi).

Defining the relation between prior host and belated foreign body has been my project, and I owe much to Holland's analysis of the mathematics of *Coriolanus*. The catalytic passage is worth quoting in full:

We can praise [Shakespeare] for the brilliance with which he recognizes that a play of three cities, divided perhaps into two parts, shaped in five acts, was a mathematical problem incapable of comfortable solution, that

two into five won't go and that the unevenness, the inexactitude, the sense of fascinatingly disrupted rhythms, is a central element in the way the play argues for the imprecision, the impossibility of Coriolanus being either a Roman or a Volscian and/or both at once; the equal impossibility of the inversion of the city in Caius' being able to say 'I banish you'; of the spatial movement across the play's fictive spaces being articulated in this transitional passage in 4.3 in ways that depend on a formal structure of act-break which the action cannot and should not comfortably accommodate. The problem of pre-fractional mathematics—two goes into five with the answer two, remainder one—is then exactly the point. *This is the play of remainders*, of what is left over when divisions are made, of the social difficulties of superfluity and inequitable division, of the class and wealth basis structured into Roman society that leaves most people as the remainder. (Holland 111; my emphasis)

Holland hits on precisely the conundrum that most excites me about *Coriolanus*—the conundrum that brought Borges' ironic theory of reading to mind in the first place and that has helped me clarify the relation between *Coriolanus* and the “text” of the recent events in Uganda. Following Shakespeare, or, rather, Holland *on* Shakespeare, the work you now hold is *the thesis of remainders*: a scholarly work of many more than three cities, divided into and shaped in five chapters, attempting to fit the signifier on one side of the Volumnia/Kony pairing into the other, and interpreting both the overlap and the “unevenness” without any particular anxiety about the “inequitable division,” since inequitable division is, as Holland points out, an indispensable component of the play. It is also, for that matter, an unavoidable and often unfortunate component of life.

But there is reason for hope. I will not be so indelicate as to allege that Aragon or Eloise or anyone else is the Pierre Menard to Shakespeare or to Plutarch. As a leader in the effort to dissolve Kony's army, Aragon probably devised her plan without reference to or knowledge of a mother named Volumnia (Keller par. 4). Still, the correspondences between the events in Uganda and the events in both Plutarch's history

and in Shakespeare's play, as I have attempted to show, cannot be written off as merely coincidental or unworthy of comparative analysis. On the contrary, these correspondences point to what I hope is an essential, though abstract and potentially mind-bending, truth. Harding quotes T. S. Eliot as saying, "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (1). In literary-critical terms, then, *Coriolanus* should be altered by the international events that climaxed in the disbandment of the Lord's Resistance Army as much as Aragon's supposedly novel idea, by the laws of Eliotic time, can be shown to be directed, as if on a stage, by *Coriolanus*, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, and the historical events that inspired them. The resonances travel both ways. While my thesis has focused as much on remainders as on seemingly direct correspondences between *Coriolanus* and Uganda's recent history, I attempt to perform a version of the literary-mathematical operation Volumnia/Kony once more, this time disregarding the remainder and seeing the single harmonized readout. Reconcile the events in *Coriolanus* Act V, scene iii with the events in the skies over the camps of the Lord's Resistance Army, and behold:

Mother, the *voice* of truth; Mother, the *beckoner* of sons; Mother, the *bringer* of peace; Mother, the *savior* of the nation.

The idea is astounding.

Outro:
1608/2020

A plague, an election, a populist movement, a political tyrant. Compare the events in and surrounding *Coriolanus* with the events of today—in only the most general way—and they might seem as indistinguishable as Cervantes' and Menard's respective *Quixotes*.

By 1608, the year Shakespeare is believed to have completed *Coriolanus*, a plague had settled into London, “clos[ing] public theatres like the Globe for long periods between mid-1606 and the end of 1609” (Holland 71-72). At its worst, this affliction, which, according to James Shapiro, caused “breathlessness,” “swellings,” and “heart failure,” especially among the young, carried off an average of 141 lives a week (pars. 2, 4). The “rodent-borne” pestilence forced most Londoners, including Shakespeare, to quarantine themselves (par. 11). London’s clergy, Andrew Dickson writes, blamed sin for the epidemic (par. 3). While in isolation, Shakespeare—a major purveyor of sin on London’s stages—made great use of his time and talents, even if “isolation wasn’t his preferred mode,” and despite the catastrophic toll that theatre closures would have had on his company’s profits (pars. 3, 11). According to lore, Shakespeare’s quill was mightier for the playwright than the hazelnut, a Globe favorite that “repel[led] plague-carrying fleas” (par. 4). Indeed, an afflatus became for Shakespeare a kind of force field, protecting him while he wrote a plethora of masterpieces, including (allegedly) *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and, notably, *Coriolanus* (pars. 5, 12).

At the same time, starvation forced the English lower classes to risk exposure to the plague. Grain shortages and hoarding prompted the Midlands Revolt of 1607

(Holland 67). Lauren Shook writes of Charles Fitz-Geffrey, a seventeenth-century preacher whose sermon *The Curse of the Corne-horders* rails against “enemies of commoners, England, and Christ” (par. 7). The title and the contents of Fitz-Geffrey’s sermon express a religious belief of the period: that selfish grain-hoarders had to contend not only with insurrectionist violence but with the imprecations of the famished (par. 8). This hunger-driven class warfare broke out during Shakespeare’s productive isolation in quarantine.⁵ If *Coriolanus*, the play about an office-seeking patrician with no sympathy for his city’s hungry plebeians, is therefore a “plague text,” it merits the designation by “respon[ding]” to the metaphorical plague of “famine” and not to the bubonic plague directly (Dickson par. 7; Shook par. 1). Whether through “divine” or wholly secular “retribution,” Coriolanus, one of Rome’s more despicable patricians, first feels and then is unable to appease the wrath of the commoners he abhors (Shook par. 9).

In early 2020 as in 1606, humanity was struck by a planet. While *Volumnia/Kony* slowly developed, a twenty-first-century plague created widespread panic, infected thousands, moved university classes into virtual spaces (including at Middle Tennessee State University), and, yes, closed theaters (Romine et al. par. 1). Religious leaders blamed the outbreak on the “sinful behavior” of homosexuality (*Times of Israel* par. 12). The apparently bat-born novel coronavirus causes breathlessness like its seventeenth-century parallel, but it largely affects an older demographic and is, reportedly, less “agonising” (Scripps par. 15; Shapiro par. 2). Still, conscientiousness keeps people all over the world indoors, where social media provides an illusion of

⁵ Greenblatt notes that Shakespeare “in a modest way . . . had himself been hoarding grain” (156).

company in isolation. Internet culture took an interest in the 1606-1609 plague and the possibilities for creative expression under quarantine. (Shapiro's and Dickson's pieces were shared online by many.) On Twitter, singer-songwriter Roseanne Cash offered this singularly intimidating encouragement: "Just a reminder that when Shakespeare was quarantined because of the plague, he wrote *King Lear*." Two days later, game developer Dan Marshall tweeted a screenshot of his progress rewriting, word for word, Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Would that Borges had the prescience to imagine such an irony.

As the coronavirus rampaged, American politics wheezed along. After the March 3rd Super Tuesday vote, the United States Democratic primary became a two-person race, pitting former vice-president Joe Biden, the so-called establishment figure, against Bernie Sanders, the outsider man with the "populist message" (Hopkins par. 8). By mid-March, when states began rescheduling their elections, Biden had already left Bernie and his "progressive," "diehard supporters" far behind; the summons to eat the rich simply spoiled too many appetites, even if the outrage over a health-care shortage was justified (Karson par. 2; Hopkins par. 8). One plutocrat, however, certainly appears to be on the verge of getting devoured: President Trump. Come November, will America strike its Tarquin on the knee? Asked by YouTuber Aryeh Cohen-Wade whether the book *Tyrant* could be summed up as "What Shakespeare would have thought about Trump," Stephen Greenblatt admitted that such a characterization is "not altogether a misreading" (2:08-3:44). Does Coriolanus parallel Trump closely enough to warrant a direct comparison? Certainly there are differences: unlike Coriolanus, Trump is no killing machine (he managed to avoid the Vietnam war while still tender-bodied), but his rhetoric has often

been blamed for turning others into killing machines (Shane par. 3; Schenck par. 3). And Trump enjoys “entreat[ing]” his followers to “give their sufferage,” whereas Coriolanus harasses and provokes the Roman electorate (II.ii.136-37). But there is a conspicuous temperamental affinity between Trump and Coriolanus: they brook no opposition, and, “ill-schooled / In bolted language,” conduct themselves rather more like “dog[s] to the commonalty” than proper statesmen (III.i.323-24, I.i.26).

These days, interpreting Trump through Shakespearean paradigms has become a veritable cliché: Peter Conrad writes in *The Guardian*, for example, that Trump is “as titanically tetchy as Coriolanus” (Conrad par. 7). Among literate global citizens, there is evidently a shared impression that, at a molecular level, Trump, like everyone else, is composed of Shakespeare’s iambs. “The idea that Shakespeare writes us,” Garber says, “is, if taken seriously, both exciting and disconcerting” (*SMC* xiii). As should be clear by now, *Volumnia/Kony* takes that idea very seriously and is not at all disconcerted by it. Reading deeply in the Shakespearean canon makes figures like Kony and Trump—figures who may seem to frustrate all attempts to explain them—as scannable as lines of verse. Once one realizes that Trump has already been written in *Coriolanus* and elsewhere in Shakespeare’s corpus—and that the early-modern vogue for analogical thinking has only increased post-Shakespeare, with linkages to the playwright’s work giving maximum cogency to one’s analogies—the scriptedness of everyday existence comes into stunning relief.

Volumnia/Kony, without doubt the work of a crackpot, consorts with a literary-critical tradition that views Shakespeare as more demiurge than mere playwright. Bloom believes that Shakespeare, by endowing humans with a brilliance of “personality” that

they lacked prior to the early-modern period, essentially won an agon with God (SIH 4). In his Foreword to *Living with Shakespeare*, Bloom proclaims the ultimate supplanting of precursor by successor: “There is no God but God, and his name is William Shakespeare” (vii). Garber, perhaps thinking of Bloom, adds post-Renaissance matters of world-historical import to Shakespeare’s creation: “Whenever we speak of Shakespeare as anticipating issues and character types in the eras that came after him, we should remind ourselves that the plays, and the high regard for Shakespeare in the centuries following his death, have created these ‘modern’ types as much as they have paralleled or predicted them” (SAA 776). Garber’s reminder serves equally as bardolatrous gospel and as apt summary of *Volumnia/Kony*’s abiding faith. Immersed in *Coriolanus* during the early months of 2020, I witnessed the play’s strange magic. Like a Pandora’s box that releases a simulacrum of itself whenever opened, *Coriolanus* keeps altering—or is that authoring?—the subsequential years.

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