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A Very Modern Tragedy: Ralph Fiennes' Adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (2011)¹

Соколова Бойка. Дуже сучасна трагедія: адаптація шекспірівського «Коріолана» (2011) Ральфа Файнса.

У статті розглядається екранізація шекспірівської п'єси «Коріолан», здійснена Ральфом Файнсом, а також вплив на неї історичної спадщини тих місцевостей, де відбувалися зйомки. Аналізуються аспекти, пов'язані з часом і місцем дії, підбором акторів, гендерними відносинами та змінами в п'єсі Шекспіра, внесеними в процесі осучаснення. Особлива увага приділяється тому, яким чином у фільмі створюється атмосфера воєнізованого світу, як представлений політичний процес і як у цьому контексті зображена сім'я військового. Відзначається, що візуальні ефекти у фільмі Файнса образно відсилають до впізнаваних образів сучасних європейських катаклізмів у багатовимірному вихорі історичних змін.

Ключові слова: Коріолан, Ральф Файнс, Ванесса Редгрейв, Джеральд Батлер, Балканські війни, політичний переворот, Шекспір, сім'я військового.

The first decade of the 21st century saw the big screen debut of two of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies. In 1999, Julie Taymor's *Titus* translated *Titus Andronicus*' baroque atrocities into an expressionistic stylized narrative set at old

¹ Special thanks are due to several people from Notre Dame Global Gateway programme, who helped with this project: to Alice Tyrell, for providing a library lifeline and much else, to Christina Pehlivanos, who makes the world a better place and who helped with the translation of Mikis Theodorakis' 'Sta Pervolia', to Steve Whitnall, who has seen battle and who watched the film for me with the eye and wisdom of a professional soldier.

and new historical sites of violence, its events observed through the eyes of a modern child.² In 2011, Ralph Fiennes produced, directed and acted the principal part in the first big-screen version of *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare's most political text. Unlike Taymor's, his Rome is set in a recognizable present, shot at times with the gritty immediacy of a documentary, splicing genuine and created TV footage, and letting rip visuals of violence familiar to the viewer from daily exposure to the media. As Samuel Cowl notes, it is a daring film and one that needs to attract more attention.³ Speaking on a Canadian TV channel, the director expressed what *Coriolanus* means to him: "Shakespeare asks hard questions of us as a civic society, about our own social political dysfunction. He doesn't deliver any nice, compact, reassuring message. The play shows us the pain and the waste of what it is to be human tribes. It is a tragedy, as tragedies end in a sense of waste".⁴ Tribalism and political dysfunction as products of and breeding grounds for violence are major lines of exploration in the film.⁵ We watch a conflict in a

² In the following decade, the stage life of the play considerably intensified, with major productions by state-funded and pocket-sized British companies, as well as with productions in countries where it hadn't been shown before. In 2013, the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival was dedicated to it, with productions from across the world, workshops and discussions. Violence, inhumanity, the collapse of civilized behaviour, tribalism, are major concerns which this Shakespearean text seems to bear out with a particular strength. The critical discourse around *Titus*, too, is considerable. See: Judith Buchannan, *Shakespeare on Film*, Longman, 2005; Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, eds., *The Roman Plays*. Shakespeare on Film, PRUH, 2009.

³ Samuel Cowl, *Coriolanus*. Film review, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 30. 2, 2012, pp. 145-147. Reference on p. 145.

⁴ Richard Crouse in conversation with Ralph Fiennes, '*Coriolanus*' at the Toronto Film Festival, 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixhpllg3jCU>.

⁵ For the composition of the crowd scenes and for the transformation of the Volscis into freedom fighters Fiennes reached back to Gillo Pontecorvo's 1965 *Battle of Algiers*, a devastating narrative about the Arab liberation movement against the French. According to Philip French, that "film was screened in 2003 at the Pentagon to instruct senior military men and their civilian advisers how

reeling empire, destabilized by economic unrest and paralysed by internal strife. On what appears to be its fringes, ethnic opposition is fomenting war. Violence goes both ways with ever increasing intensity, in a world suffused with arms and media ratcheting up tension. Rome is a political system in flux, breaking, slowly and bloodily under the push of powerful forces coming from below and from abroad, of political realignments, demagoguery, personal ambitions and sheer chance. We are in a modern place where everyone is a player-plaything of history and reviewers point to relevances with various contemporary conflicts.

Appearing as it did in 2011, and shot in two of the countries which comprised former Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, the film breathes with the legacy of two decades of shifts in the political landscape of Europe. In 1991, the chiliastic communist project, born of Russia's defeat in the First World War, came to an inglorious end. In its wake, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left a trail of bloody conflicts, of which, the ongoing dismembering of Ukraine is only the latest. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, not only the Communist political system propped up by it, but the territorial settlements of the first half of the 20th century were challenged: between 1991 and 1999 Yugoslavia fell apart making the supposedly unthinkable – a war in Europe – a grim reality. Czechoslovakia quietly disappeared from the map. Currently, other places are in the throes of forces dismantling maps drawn nearly a century ago by former imperial powers – Sudan split in 2011, Iraq and Syria are on the verge. Almost everywhere, new-found freedoms have been drowned in conflict, often giving rise to militaristic and totalitarian regimes. Burgeoning nationalisms have engaged millions of people in public displays of zeal, while small elites have

you could 'win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas'.", Philip French, *Battle of Algiers*, theguardian.com, Sunday 13 May 2007.

ridden their momentum for their own advantage. The positive energies of the *vox populi*, raised in claims for justice, freedom and better life, have often been diffused, abused and squandered by the self-interest of old and new political groups. The histories of the European transitions from Communism provide multiple examples. Artificially created food crises, (like the Bulgarian 1991 winter-long one), were some of the realities behind the re-gearing to a free market. They called to the streets people who had never imagined being in the position of hungry “plebeians”, drumming on empty pots and shouting “Bread!”. Sometimes, as happened in the early 1990s in Yugoslavia, the popular protests against the establishment were high-jacked by political demagogues and fed into violently divisive nationalistic agendas. Images of heavily armed police surrounding parliament buildings against peacefully protesting citizens, sometimes meeting them with bullets, like the hundreds of Ukrainians who were mowed down during the civic protests in 2014, have become all too familiar.

Many visuals in Fiennes’ film take their cue from recognizable images of modern European cataclysms in a multi-dimensional analysis of historical change. In this paper I am interested in the way location, casting and ambience inflect the narrative, in the dynamic of Coriolanus’ family and on the linking of the different elements of the film together.

I. Places and Faces

The filmic transition from ancient Rome to a modern place requires a re-imagining Rome, Corioli and Antium. Another element is the necessity to create them as both distinct and comparable places.⁶ From the start, the credits demarcate a distancing by spelling out that the film is *based*

⁶ See: Peter Holland, *ed.*, *Coriolanus*, The Arden Shakespeare, 2013. Introduction, pp. 90-93. All quotations from this edition.

on the play by William Shakespeare;⁷ an opening frame introduces Rome as 'A Place Calling Itself Rome', a gesture of re-fictionalising Shakespeare's already fictional city for the purposes of the new adaptation.⁸

John Logan's screenplay unambiguously tropes the events as occurring in "our world right now", while trying to diffuse the concreteness of geographical location by suggesting that this might be either "Mexico City. Or Chechnya. Or Detroit. Or Baghdad. Or London".⁹ Various other allusions point this way: Cominius is a general with a "West Point bearing", the Senate is a sweeping space, resembling "the Israeli Knesset or the UN General Assembly", etc.¹⁰ The attempt at a global positioning of the narrative is strengthened by the international casting redolent with histories of past performances. John Kani's level-headed General Cominius, ready to compromise in the name of peace, gestures towards Nelson Mandela. Paul Jesson, who played First Citizen in Elija Moshinsky's 1983 BBC *Coriolanus*, has risen in the world to a be-suited, brazen Brutus.¹¹ In tandem with James Nesbitt's Sicinius, whose role in *Bloody Sunday* (2002) awakens memories of a tragic tribal confrontation, they make a toxic pair of manipulative *nouveaux politiciens*. Lubna Azabal's and Ashraf Barhoum's First and Second Citizen, named respectively Tamora and Cassius, have a touch

⁷ Script, p 124.

⁸ Philp French, *The Observer*, Sunday 22 January 2012, and Peter Holland in his Introduction, Op. Cit. 2013, pp. 130-133, offer comments on the connection between the film's subtitle and John Osborne's unproduced 1972 play, *A Place Calling Itself Rome*, based on Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*.

⁹ *Coriolanus*, Screenplay by John Logan. The Shooting Script (newmarket press for itbooks: 2011), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 11, 35.

¹¹ For an interesting discussion of the representation of the people in previous filmed versions of *Coriolanus*, see Russell Jackson, "Salus populi: Shakespeare's Roman plebeians on screen" and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, "The 'rougher accents' in the BBC *Coriolanus*", in Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, eds., *The Roman Plays*, pp. 143-176 and pp. 295-304.

of uncompromising radicalism with a whiff of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from *Paradise Now* (2005),¹² while Ralph Fiennes's introverted, self-/destructive soldier lives behind a mask recalling his performance in *Schindler's List* (1993).

However, the film, shot on location in Serbia and Montenegro, has a distinct Balkan flavour and irresistibly calls up memories of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and of post-communist collapse.¹³ The attempt to create a sense of a multi-ethnic imperial Rome, in spite of John Kani's presence and an odd black and Asian actor, is relatively weak. But the film compensates for this by quasi/documentary TV footage showing food shortages, rioting and wars, experienced by diverse populations and suggestive of the vastness of empire. In addition, the camera carefully picks out individual faces and creates a sense of the diversity of people's views and reactions, of which the scene at the marketplace is an excellent example where speaking parts are also thoughtfully distributed. What unobtrusively turns the attention to the place of shooting is the casting of local actors well beyond the crowd and battle scenes and providing them with larger parts. This move increases the sense of a particular place and balances the usually lopsided combination of western film stars and silently operating, almost invisible locally recruited actors, something which is important, not just for the politics of production, but for the allusiveness of the film. In writing about *Titus*, Judith Buchannan notes that the presence of hundreds of Croatian supernumeraries in the final scene, shot

¹² *Paradise Now*, directed by Hani Abu-Assad.

¹³ J.R. Jones, 'Soldier of misfortune. Ralph Fiennes revives Shakespeare's military tragedy *Coriolanus*, *Chicago Reader*, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/ralph-fiennes-stars-as-shakespeares-coriolanus/Content?oid=5542220>). It is curious that the script doesn't make a single reference to that particular place, nor to that moment in history, which might, perhaps, be explained by the diplomacy around negotiating with the Serbian side which provided, among much else, access to the main chamber of its Parliament and the use of members of their armed forces.

in the Roman arena in Pula, just a few years after the Bosnian war, added “a disturbing topicality to the catalogue of horrors the film depicts”.¹⁴ Similarly, in *Coriolanus*, the palpable presence of local actors, “remembers” the recent past and adds to the anti-war animus of the film.

Belgrade gives Fiennes' Rome a distinct post-communist flavour of tall 1970s apartment blocks, concrete silos, bombed buildings – industrially-produced, battered remains of a defunct project of greatness. Graffiti-covered passages lead to the sites of popular dissent. A conspicuous “Heroes 1994” dates the action. However, unlike Shakespeare's citizens who convene in the open to discuss their grievances and rejoice at the election of their Tribunes, the modern Romans are hidden in a secret apartment, away from the authorities. While in Shakespeare they directly speak with the aristocrats and mock Coriolanus in front of Menenius, here, the elected politicians communicate from TV screens or appear among the populace surrounded by bodyguards only when campaigning. The modern Romans are much more exposed to state violence – as they move towards the grain silos, rattling pots and shouting “Bread!”, they are met by riot police in full gear with Marcius in command, which suggests a state of martial law. There is nothing specifically *plebeian* about them either; rather, we see middle class people who do not *look* starved, but are angered by a dramatic change in their status. Brian Cox' Menenius – Belly speech cut – makes a televised appearance, appealing for clam and reason from those who are most affected by the new line drawn between haves and have-nots. Nor are the citizens, at this stage, prone to mindless violence. Rather, Barry Ackroyd's camera perceptively comments on how their demands are high-jacked by the selfish political interests of the Tribunes. In the sequence showing the preparation for the march on the grain depot one becomes aware of an underhand

¹⁴ Judith Buchannan, *Shakespeare on Film*, Longman, 2005, p. 252.

game played by Tamora and Cassius. The low camera angle positions the soft-spoken Cassius above the people in the room. As Azabal's extremist Tamora enters, the camera reports the alarmed reaction on a face at her "Let's kill" him, while Cassius, as if without noticing, gently continues to talk pointing to some sticks and crowbars lying next to images of Martius, daubed with red crosses, (an image characteristic of early anti-communist protests against hated leaders). In an establishing shot of the marches, taken from above, the viewer sees an orderly silent civilian multitude. However, the level shot of the front lines reveals activists armed with crowbars and sticks who actively provoke a skirmish. Tamora is observantly alert to any sign of appeasement and ready to disrupt it. The shocked citizen from the earlier frame does his best to stop rioting, but fails; the police advances. Shown from different angles, the eruption of violence has a snappiness which, in the overall grammar of the film, marks moments of loss of control. The photography also suggests an unexpected parity between the two sides. Martius' "dissentious rogues" speech is hissed quietly in Cassius' face, while the camera shows them eyeballing each other as equals. Another, silent, but visible power is out there, too – the media and the people recording every syllable spoken by Martius on their mobile phones. Late, media power will manifest itself to a lethal effect. In a televised debate, Coriolanus' unrestrained reaction, concertedly provoked by Scinus and his supporters, goes viral, as many a vicious political engagement of the post-Communist 1990s.¹⁵

¹⁵ One of the earliest examples comes from the 1990 protests in Sofia, which led to the resignation of the first democratically elected President, Petar Mladenov (a Communist Party 'patrician'), who was supposed to have said "Bring in the tanks". The statement which was caught by a TV camera rolling with the sound switched off was deciphered by lip readers as the above statement. He denied having said this to the end of his life (2000), but was forced to resign, because of the political hysteria which broke out. The situation bears uncanny similarity

The well-oiled collusion between the protest leaders and the Tribunes is also made apparent at the market place where Coriolanus comes to claim his right to be Consul. Every time he gets a positive response from someone, the camera swerves to one of the Tribunes, revealing their non verbal communication. The reversal of the vote is a moment of great political consequence, as the genuinely given support by the wider group of people, is reversed by the political demagogues. A grey marble plaque reading, "Rome knows the value of its own", a bitterly ironic mis-en-scene. Standing in front of it, Coriolanus, in mufti, clumsily claims, and obtains, the title of Consul. Immediately after his departure, his place is taken by a Sicinius who masterfully reverses the meaning of "value" and, with the active help of his sidekicks, overturns the popular vote. From here to the ugly crowd scenes at the TV studio and the rioting in front of the Senate, the camera provides views of now *faceless* multitudes, braying for Coriolanus' blood. Brisk photography, crowded frames, fragmented visibility, edgy editing and increased sound level characterise the style of these scenes. At moments like this the film makes some of its most disturbing political points about squandered opportunities and manipulation. There is something profoundly dispiriting in watching how a brace of shameless intrigue mongers, interested only in their own power, carry the day. These modern politicians are more sinister figures than Shakespeare's and affect their city even more profoundly.

The world outside of Rome is also familiar. Corioles, as seen through the sights of Martius' gun, offers glimpses of low houses and shabby domesticity. Massive graffiti cry in Latin (unlike those in the outskirts of 'Rome') "Non illegitimus (what?)" and it is not clear whether they are

to the way Coriolanus is manipulated to explode his chances, though there are hardly any similarities of character.

protests against the Romans, or vestiges of earlier invasions. In Shakespeare, the battle for Corioli involves two equally organised, strong enemies sent against each other by their respective governments; the Roman citizens turn looters and few Volscis are in sight. In the film, a highly trained Roman army clears streets and buildings, and those, in whose name the war is waged, are not part of it. On their part, the Volscis are an ethnic group, fighting for territory. Aufidius' men are guerrilla-type freedom fighters and Gerald Butler's character swears to kill Marcius not only because of personal ambition, but because of the atrocities perpetrated by the Romans. "Nor sleep, nor sanctuary, being naked, / Sick, the payers of priests, Nor times of sacrifice – shall lift up their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst / My hate for Martius" (*Coriolanus*, 1.10. 19-24) are the words of a pledge made before the bodies of a family, shot dead in their car.¹⁶ In the final frames this moment will be recalled as Aufidius kneels by Coriolanus' corpse.

As in Rome, so in Corioli, the camera is interested in the nameless individual and the "collateral damage": an old woman shaking with shock, a crazed mother holding a dead body in a room, an old man, trembling on a sofa amid the bullets, bodies lying in the streets.

The screenplay requires a type of blood that looks darker red, "like oil", a striking visual, which metaphorically connects it to reasons for recent wars, and is effectively used on the hero's gore-covered face. Here, it seems, Fiennes takes his cue from another Shakespeare play. One can hardly think of a better description of his Martius in battle than that of "rugged Pyrrhus" (*Hamlet*, 2.2. 387)¹⁷. The modern soldier literally "o'ersized with coagulate gore" and heavy battle gear, is "horridly tricked / With blood", "baked and impasted

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷ References to *Hamlet* are to Q2, *The Arden Shakespeare*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 2006.

with the parching streets”, his eyes, like the sights of his automatic rifle, glaring red, “like carbuncles” (*Hamlet*, 2.2. 400, 397, 401). This battle sequence has its Hecuba moment, too, when the camera pans on an old woman with the “alarm of fear caught up” (*Hamlet* 2.2. 448), sitting helplessly among rubble; further, it explores the momentary stillness before Pyrrhus’ onslaught on Priam. POVs are constantly reversed. Though we see the action, through the sights of Coriolanus’ gun, when he comes across an old man trembling with horror, a reverse POV shot makes us experience the man’s anguish. A shaking hand offers water in a plastic bottle. In resounding quietness, the super-human Roman killing machine, has a profoundly human moment – his parched lips take the proffered water – one human to another; he drinks and moves on. Such sequences provide graphic statements of the indiscriminate devastation caused by war, through images which “milch”, if not quite “the eye of heaven” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.455), surely that of the audience.

At a first glance, Antium, the seat of Volscis, is a place very different from Rome.¹⁸ Ochre and green hills, low houses, cascading down towards the sea, it has a Mediterranean feel, some greenery, cafes, muzak. Women and children mill about while Aufidius in fatigues, though heavily guarded, walks casually in the street, greeted warmly by passersby. It is a clannish sort of life, introverted and suspicious, where allegiance to the warlord is absolute, men in khakis predominate, while women and children are a background presence. Volscian politicians inhabit underground candlelit vaults decorated with vestiges of communist statuary and Orthodox icons. The religious underbelly of the conflict is also visible in Aufidius’ tattoo of the Virgin Mary and his conspicuously worn cross. Christian they might be, fighting the Roman Eagle, but they are no less vicious. Indeed,

¹⁸ These parts of the film were shot in Montenegro.

the very first image in the film shows Aufidius whetting a knife with a tribal pattern, an object used as a framing device to Fiennes' narrative. Conspicuously present through all scenes involving Aufidius/Coriolanus, it finally finds its sheath in Marcius' body. The moment is powerfully underscored by the sound track – the rasp of the knife against the whetstone is reprised as the whoosh of Coriolanus' body against the back of a truck in the final frame.

Both Rome and the Volscis are dangerously militaristic, with armies which obliterate the individual and turn men into machines. The high-tech Roman android-like soldiers are as horrifying as the Volscian “dragons”, a gang of inebriated goons, who, like members of a cult, undergo a shaving and tattooing ritual.

Spatial and temporal adjustment of the distance between Rome and Antium which takes Fiennes' hero two seasons to cross, suggests a huge expanse of empire. What also catches the eye, are the desolate landscapes of scorched earth that lie between the cities – black wintry deserts of upturned soil, bare trees, heaps of filth, dotted with miserable dwellings, with grimy children and barking stray dogs. Anyone with experience of the part of the world where the film was made would immediately recognize Romany villages: thus, the visuals, probably inadvertently, revealing the life of another population, marginalised by both Romans and Volscians, subsisting on the mess left by their histories.

II. “Bred i' th' wars”: Men, Women, Children and the Eros of Destruction

In an interview accompanying the published script of *Coriolanus*, as elsewhere, Ralph Fiennes states his belief that “Shakespeare wanted to touch on the homoeroticism of combatants, of the warriors who are embraced in combat”.¹⁹ In

¹⁹ Logan, Op. cit., p. 119.

line with 20th century Oedipal readings of the play, the film additionally creates moments of intense, and un-Shakespearean, intimacy between mother and son, placing Vanessa Redgrave's Volumnia in contact with her son's naked body, which she lovingly and expertly bandages, (according to the script, a "disturbing, intimate image").²⁰ The film sustains a nuanced and complex relationship between Redgrave's Volumnia and Fiennes' Coriolanus, fraught with psychological twists and ferocious emotion. Here, however, I would like to leave some of these complications aside and look at the larger picture of the contemporary military family, which emerges, which also illuminates the role of Virgilia.

It is true that the language of Shakespeare's characters upstages their relationships with women, compared to those with men, a parallel darkly threatening gendered hierarchy. Aufidius' is enraptured more than "when [he] first [his] wedded mistress saw/ Bestride [his] threshold" (4.5.118-119) at the very moment when his enemy stands at his mercy. Coriolanus, translates the sweetness of Virgilia's kiss into the sweetness of revenge, (5.3.45); Volumnia blurs the lines between mother/son/wife/husband when she speaks of heroic death (1.3) and dangers to the body politic (3.1., 5.3). The Eros that moves the play is an Eros of destruction, the adrenalin rush that comes in battle, the release of tension as the enemy's body slumps against the blade, the interpellation of the political over the personal.

The back story which the film creates goes some way to explain Coriolanus' irascible behaviour and the complex relationship with his mother. He is the ideal army product, a son of a military family in a militaristic world, a professional soldier, conditioned to fight, serve and obey the bidding of the state. A number of deep shots reveal a story of militarism, inculcated into him from his childhood – by a mother who is

²⁰ Logan, Op. cit., p. 33.

herself a member of the armed forces, perhaps by a military father (?) whose weapons decorate the walls, by an academy training (traceable in a range of photographs showing him in uniform from an early age), by the political establishment to which his family belongs, wherewith his service to the state is entwined with the conservative ideologies of his class. His entire life is conditioned by the soldierly values of self-sacrifice, courage and honour, to which critic Jennifer G. Mathers has added subordination, a “quality associated more with women than men” – the disciplined obedience of a soldier.²¹

It is one of the film’s masterstrokes to turn Volumnia into a believable modern military woman, which – especially if higher in rank, (tough this is not clear) – partly explains her grip over her son at critical moments. In the supremely nuanced performances of Redgrave and Fiennes the interaction between mother and son is not overshadowed by that of army officers, but provides an additional dimension. Before us is a military family of a relatively recent type, where both women and men are army people. In itself, this poses questions about the effect of militarization in a world where “fathers, mothers, daughters, sons” (*Hamlet*, 2.2. 396) are soldiers.²² Bound together by deep loyalty, controlled emotion, codified public and domestic behaviour, belief in absolute values, this family is the locus of more than one tragedy.

Their pillared villa, with a highly formal garden of statuesque topiaries, speaks of the extreme subjugation of the natural by the required. For the establishing shot, the frame is calculated so as to sustain perfect symmetries and hierarchies:

²¹ Jennifer G. Mathers, ‘Women and State Military Forces’, in Carol Cohn, ed., *Women and Wars*, Polity, 2013, pp. 124-145. See p. 127.

²² See CIA website on conscription which reveals that women are either conscripted or allowed to serve in many places in the world. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2024.html>. Lately, the effect of military service on a woman officer, was brilliantly presented in George Brant’s *Grounded*.

against the background of a neo-classical portico, centrally positioned Young Martius (Harry Fenn) shoots cans with an air rifle, with the viewer in the line of fire, as in the scenes involving his father. Behind him on the terrace, irrelevant to the action before her, Jessica Chastain's Virgilia worriedly watches her son, her hands busy with a useless piece of embroidery. Inside, militarized domesticity is visible in the heavy bronzes striking heroic poses, the maps decorating the walls, the tanks and guns scattered on the floor of the son's room, in the way the boy is raised.

In discussing the importance of women to the military, Jennifer Mathers remarks on the latter's dependence on women to encourage their men to become soldiers. She lists the roles soldier's wives are expected to perform, among them, giving the soldier emotional support, gracefully accepting his long absences on duty, looking after him when injured, while receiving as their reward a raise in status, as he advances through the ranks. Importantly, a military wife is not supposed to question the way things are done in the army and it is considered a problem, if she does.²³ In the film, these "wifely" roles are performed by Volumnia, while Virgilia is reduced to an observer. Volumnia's appropriation of care for her son's wounds (a duty which she has performed all his life), is an assertion of her seniority, but also a statement of Virgilia's otherness, her distance from the military ethos, and her objectification as a mere tool for procreation. Volumnia's wish that her son becomes Consul is a part of the logic of military promotion, a reward for good service. While her powers are fully harnessed in helping her son's career and the raising of a new generation of soldiers, Virgilia's tears and unwillingness to be seen outside become signs of her inadequacy as a military wife. Gently but firmly, she is

²³ Jennifer G. Mathers, 'Women and State Military Forces', in Carol Cohn, ed., *Op. cit.*, pp. 127-8.

reprimanded by Volumnia and delicately ironized by Menenius to the delight of her son. Young Martius' extended presence in the film underlines the processes of handing down Rome's militaristic ethos. Like his father, he is surrounded by weapons, locked out of motherly gentleness as she can only kiss him while he is asleep – a moment underscored by the trumpet call associated with Coriolanus. Virgilia's tragic isolation inside her family is captured as she passes by a picture of the Roman eagle holding a hare in its claws when she silently crosses from the ambulatory where Volumnia bandages her husband's wounds to her son's bedroom, neither a space where she is allowed to leave a mark.²⁴

In studies of women in war, critics, like Carol Cohn, have shown the diversity of women's experiences, covering the spectrum from victims, to instigators,²⁵ all of which feature in Fiennes' film. The editing invites significant connections: a distressed old woman in Corioli appears in a medium shot in the bottom left-hand corner of a frame in the exactly same position as Volumnia as she first appears. The physical and visual similarity between the two faces, underscores the different female experiences: one shaking with horror, the other, jubilant at her son's victory. (Fig.1, a/b).

In one of its most dramatic and visually complex moments, corresponding to Act Three, Scene Two, the film works out another multi-layered sense of the relationships in the family. In addition to Menenius, the film includes in the scene the head of the Senate, Cominius, and several Senators. This heightens the sense of political urgency and external

²⁴ The narrative of Virgilia's difference is consistent. Her mildness and her conspicuously white dresses strongly contrast with the surrounding uniforms. When we first see her, she seems to be part of the architectural facade, a necessary element in the overall structure of familial propriety and success.

²⁵ Carol Cohn, 'Women and Wars: Towards a Conceptual Framework', in *Women & Wars*, edited by Carol Cohn, Polity, 2013, pp. 1-2.

pressure on Coriolanus. When Volumnia appeals to him to go back and limit the damage, she is voicing the concerns of the Senate, not merely her personal ambitions. The scene begins in a room, connected through a set of glass doors to a study, where Virgilia tries to calm down her raging husband. Through the glass, we see Volumnia seated at a desk worthy of a statesman. The camera captures the violence with which Coriolanus, breaking away from Virgilia, crashes through the door to where his mother and the Senators busily converse. The blocking and mise-en-scene, map out subtle histories. The POV is reversed and through the closed door we see Valeria (the chaste virgin of Rome / here a nameless companion), standing demurely by a sculpted female head on a plinth, remote in its classical aloofness. Virgilia watches events standing next to a fertility figure, a female torso, without a head. In a moment repetitive of her earlier exclusion, she sees her husband's body, which has just slipped her embrace, enfolded by his mother's arms. An identical composition is used in the scene of Coriolanus' death in Aufidius' arms. The scene delves deep into the emotional landscape of the military mind: as Coriolanus denies his mother's request she pulls out an old, tattered flag, an object which visibly shakes him. Whether a proud memory of his/her battles, or his father's battles), it is a sign to which Fiennes's character is conditioned to react to unequivocally.²⁶ The effect is immediate, "Why urge you this?" (3.2. 52), asks Coriolanus in dismay. The flag, which is not mentioned in the script, gives the scene a particular emotional twist, connecting the son to his mother's (?) martial past and stirring his duty to the flag. Even then, he refuses to go back and is forced to do so, by the maternal blackmail that goes to the depths of history – guilt transfer: "At thy choice then! / To beg of thee it is my more dishonour/ Than thou of them."

²⁶ It next appears in Young Marcius' hands in 5.3.

(3.2. 125-126). As Coriolanus leaves the room, his internal division is visualized through his positioning between two counterpointed images – an etching of Durrer’s armoured-vehicle-like ‘Rhinoceros’ and a very domestic still life. From there he goes to the TV studio where the Tribunes frame his downfall.

All scenes involving Aufidius’ close proximity to Coriolanus’ body are cannily repetitive of those with Volumnia and Virgilia. In the hand-to-hand fight in Corioli, the two men are locked in a lethal embrace, their mouths open, “more rapt”, than in the embrace of any imaginable “wedded mistress”. Counterpointed to it is the gentle remoteness of husband and wife in their bedroom, a scene cut at the moment when Virgilia fearfully touches her husband’s chest.

Heavily scarred, like a contested map of the empire,²⁷ Coriolanus’ body is a battleground, literally and metaphorically, a contested territory between Rome and the Volscians, which in the end demarcates the frontier between the two countries. The final images show as a choreographed hand fight, a dance of death accompanied with the thrust of a knife, the rapturous embrace of a sagging body, the rasping noise of a corpse flung on a truck bed.

The end of Fiennes’ *Coriolanus* is much more pessimistic than Shakespeare’s. Modern Rome is in the hands of slippery self-serving politicians, while Menenius’ suicide signals the end of an old order. The demands of the people of Rome disappear from view. One thing is clear: the Tribunes are there to stay. And there is no end to the wars ahead. The Volscian treaty is torn up, the “dragon” army ready to prey. Rome has assisted the birth of a monstrous power and the conflict is handed down to Young Marcius and the nameless children sitting by the roads of the empire. The musical coda in an overall soundscape of alienating harsh sounds, is a very

²⁷ Logan, Op. cit, p. 33.

Balkan threnody, by Mikis Theodorakis, a plea to Death to release a soldier for a night, to let him embrace his mother and dance in the orchard.

We tend to think of Europe as a civilized place, and the Yugoslav wars, which are less than two decades behind us, of a past which has been laid to rest.²⁸ But the story of territorial conflict is not over: tribalism and militarism are alive and well though the geographies of conflict have migrated.

Only a year ago, on June 28, as Sarajevo remembered the beginning of The First World War whose fuse was set off there, a large group of Bosnians expressed their hope for a peaceful future by standing up at the sounds of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, performed by the visiting Vienna Philharmonic. They had gathered at the iconic building of the City Hall and Library, which were shelled to smithereens by Serb artillery during the 1992–1995 siege of the city. During the same day, their Serb neighbours unveiled a monument to Gavrilo Princip, the man who fired the fatal shot a hundred years before.²⁹ In an eroticised expression of patriotic zeal, an award-winning European filmmaker was caught on camera smacking a loving kiss on Princip's cheek.³⁰

²⁸ *During one of the shooting sessions, the Serbian Defense Minister visited the set. After grabbing some photo opportunities with the actors, he gave an interview in which, if the translation is correct, he praised Fiennes' decision to work in Serbia, because such undertakings help raise the country's profile and ... encourages army recruitment.*

²⁹ The film team would have been rather surprised to learn that such might be the effect of their anti-war film.

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/arts/music/the-vienna-philharmonic-recalls-world-war-i-in-sarajevo.html?_r=0

³⁰ The Sofia Globe, <http://sofiaglobe.com/2014/04/23/kusturica-reveals-monument-to-gavrilo-princip/>. Independent Balkan News Agency, April 23, 2014.

V. Перекладацькі та інтермедіальні проєкції ренесансних творів



The legacy of past wars, collapsing empires and militaristic regimes is all around us. Fiennes' *Coriolanus* is a passionate reminder of its dangers.