**‘[T]he stamp of Martius’:**

**Commoditized Character and the Technology of Theatrical Impression in *Coriolanus***

Who’s yonder

That does appear as he were flayed? O gods,

He has the stamp of Martius, and I have

Beforetime seen him thus. (I.vi.21-4)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Speaking in response to the spectacular entrance of Martius during the battle of Corioles, the amazed General Cominius recognises the enigmatic anti-hero of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*—so bloody that he appears ‘flayed’—because of his ‘stamp’. Here ‘stamp’ could mean ‘physical or outward form’,[[2]](#footnote-2) or it may be a reference to Coriolanus’ characteristic stamping of his feet (I.iii.34).[[3]](#footnote-3) The word, however, also evokes the image of an imprint, casting his wounds as newly stamped impressions.[[4]](#footnote-4) Coriolanus’ identifiable ‘stamp’ is the blood that covers him: earlier he enters ‘*bleeding, assaulted by the enemy*’ (I.iv.65SD). The analogy between wounding and imprinting persists in the play, encouraging the idea that Coriolanus is a kind of technological entity.[[5]](#footnote-5) In his tribute to Coriolanus following the battle, Cominius refers to ‘His sword, death’s stamp, / Where it did mark, it took’ (II.ii.105-6), representing a warrior who efficiently imprints his victims with death. The image corresponds with the protagonist’s later boast that Aufidius ‘wears my stripes impressed upon him’ (V.vi.109). But Cominius’ recognition of the ‘stamp of Martius’ indicates Coriolanus also has wounds impressed upon him, violent imprints which mark Martius out as Martius, apparently rendering legible a character that often seems more machine than man.

Cominius’ on-stage reading of the wounded Coriolanus’ ‘stamp’ provokes questions about what makes a character ‘impressive’ in early modern theatre. Largely ignored in criticism, the play’s persistent language of impression—invoking technologies of sealing, coining, medal-making and printing—urges a re-assessment of the tragedy and especially its dominant main character, whose power to impress in the theatre rests heavily on the fleshly imprints he later refuses to show the people in the market-place. Critics have traditionally focused on Coriolanus’ wounds as interpretable (if unstable) signs of his elusive identity and humanity as a character, whether analysing the protagonist in psycho-sexual, socio-political or theatrical terms.[[6]](#footnote-6) In an influential essay, Cynthia Marshall focuses on Coriolanus’ wounds to analyse ‘the specifically theatrical effects that produce an impression of subjective identity and of its fullest dramatic achievement, character depth’.[[7]](#footnote-7) For Marshall ‘subjective identity’ is the operative term, but how might we theorize and historicize the enduring idea that theatre works to produce in audiences an ‘impression’ of subjectivity, interiority or character depth? What is the relationship between Coriolanus’ identity as an inhuman killing machine who stamps and is stamped with wounds, and his theatrical impressiveness as a character capable of conveying an internal as well as an external ‘stamp of Martius’ to audiences? And what might focusing on the transmission of this imprint in the playhouse tell us about the commoditized emotional and cognitive transactions involved in the early modern commercial theatre?

This article investigates how *Coriolanus* negotiates the value of the characterological imprint, focusing on its protagonist and his wounded body in order to analyse the technology of theatrical impression in the early modern commercial theatre. I argue that the technological concept of the imprint in *Coriolanus*, inflected by its connections to discourses of ‘character’, psycho-physiology and Plutarchan narrative, is integral to the play’s metatheatrical self-reflection on the commoditized human transactions involved in commercial theatre, and the formative pressures exerted on dramatic characters by market forces. Through violent resistance to his identity as a reproducible and marketable product of the theatre, Coriolanus’ characterological value in performance is paradoxically generated by his refusal to participate in forms of imprinting, exchange and transaction that gesture towards the theatrical processes necessary for his very existence as a character in the theatrical market-place. In making these arguments, I show that the play sheds light on critical language surrounding characterization—a term etymologically linked to technologies of engraving, imprinting or inscription[[8]](#footnote-8)—and the widespread belief that Shakespearean ‘character’ is a unique brand which both takes and gives the universal imprint of humanity.

The article is divided into two parts. The first demonstrates that the play’s engagement with ‘character’ as a word and concept—despite its modern associations with humanity and interiority—is inextricably tied to the impressions involved in material, technological and commoditized transactions. My argument that *Coriolanus* participated in a complex discourse of imprinting and character in the seventeenth century sets up the second part of the article, where—focusing on the role of Richard Burbage—I show that the play’s metatheatrical elements force the audience to reflect on an economy of theatrical impression that depends on both Coriolanus’ resistance to characterization and the performance of that resistance by the actor playing him. Looking first at the technology of wounds, and then at the functions of silence during the intercession scene, I suggest Coriolanus’ impressiveness as a character lies not in the revelation of his humanity, but in the play’s metatheatrical negotiation of our knowledge that he is a creature marked by his cultural production, an artificial entity crafted to make an impression on audiences conditioned to think they are paying to receive the ‘stamp of Martius’ as part of a contracted transaction.

**I**

**Valuing the imprint of ‘character’: Theatre, charactery, criticism**

In this section, I investigate the treatment of character in *Coriolanus*, by both critics and the play itself, in relation to the historical intersection between the discourses of character and impression. My focus is on the moment of the play’s inception in the early seventeenth century, when—I suggest—character was a new technology of impression in a theatrical culture still coming to terms with its commodification. But that moment needs to be analysed in light of the larger, on-going history of character and its relationship to ideas of impression, which started long before the rise of English commercial theatre and continues today as critics locate the value of Shakespearean characterization in its capacity to ‘imprint’ minds, hearts and souls. Addressing critical attitudes to characterization in *Coriolanus* before turning to the philology of ‘character’ as a term that connects theatre to imprinting technologies, psycho-physiology and Theophrastan charactery, I show that the play challenges modern definitions and valuations of character in relation to humanity and subjectivity, and in opposition to materiality, technology and commodification. This contextualisation of character in *Coriolanus* will later be crucial to my argument about what makes the play’s protagonist and his wounds ‘impressive’ in the theatre. In particular, it lays the foundations for my claim that Coriolanus’ wounds are not—as is so often claimed—signs of a universal humanity lying just beneath the surface,[[9]](#footnote-9) but rather signs of his identity as something other than human, a ‘character’ conspicuously subject to market forces of early modern commercial theatre and especially the imperative to make an impression on paying audience members.

All dramatic characters are something other than human in that they are not people but heavily mediated representations, collaborative products (often lucrative ones at that) brought about not just through the technical labour of dramatists and actors, but also ‘the emotional, cognitive, and political transactions … between actors and playgoers’.[[10]](#footnote-10) While it would be a mistake to say that dramatic character has nothing to do with being human, certain scholars have conceptualized characterization in early modern theatre as a material and technological phenomenon. Douglas Lanier has argued that in performance character depended on ‘the mechanics of exteriority’ as the actor worked ‘to craft and display a set of physical marks … legible to an audience’, and Justin Kolb has addressed ‘the technical and quasi-scientific process of character creation … as text, properties, and actors were combined in theatrical space to create an automaton, a complex, quasi-human artefact that performs humanity’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Our understanding of *Coriolanus* needs re-assessing in light of these ideas, and more broadly the emergence of ‘new character criticism’, whose productive attention to the philology and historical contingency of character has started to re-establish it as a useful critical concept.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The way in which Coriolanus ‘performs humanity’ has long failed to impress traditional character critics. Strongly influenced by A.C. Bradley, Harold Bloom laments that ‘[i]nwardness … vanishes in Coriolanus, and never quite makes it back in later Shakespeare’.[[13]](#footnote-13) A few critics have suggested, however, that what Coriolanus seems to lack as a character (whether ‘inwardness’ or something else) is essential to a play which—as Emma Smith puts it—‘subjects the notion of character itself to sustained, ironic analysis’.[[14]](#footnote-14) Michael Goldman and Cynthia Marshall have interpreted Coriolanus’ inscrutability and unlikability as engaging with questions about how far a character’s ‘inner dimensions’ can be known or accessed by an audience in performance, and Stephen Orgel has shown the protagonist’s relevance to our understanding of the extent to which a character—whether or not he expresses a desire to be ‘author of himself’ (V.iii.36)—is bound by his play-text.[[15]](#footnote-15) Like Marshall’s concern with the ‘impression of subjective identity’, Goldman’s conclusion unintentionally brings into play *Coriolanus*’ language of impression and character’s etymological origins in the imprint: ‘The communicability of character—as an internal imprint we can carry away with us from the theater, something which possesses us, in mind and in body, as an actor’s body possesses us—this is the basic currency of all great drama’.[[16]](#footnote-16) Goldman’s metaphors of impression and currency are part of a long, on-going history of critical efforts to articulate what is impressive about Shakespearean characterization: since at least the Romantics, Shakespeare’s *dramatis personae* have been identified as making ‘impressions’ on audiences or readers, and even as bearing the ‘stamp’ or ‘hallmark’ of the people and frameworks involved in their creation or enactment.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Ironically, this kind of language may have its roots in anti-theatricalists’ descriptions of the effects of performance following the rise of commercial theatre in the 1570s, as they decried poetry’s transformation ‘into a commodity to be traded on the market’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Alert to the ‘psycho-physiology’ of playgoing,[[19]](#footnote-19) anti-theatrical tracts represented actors as ‘characters’ in a very literal sense: players perpetrated and suffered moral corruption because—like Coriolanus on the battlefield—they had the capacity to impress and be impressed, to wound and to be wounded. In *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) Philip Stubbes observes that plays influence audiences because ‘what thing we do see opposite before our eyes, do pierce further, and print deeper into our hearts and minds, than the thing, which is heard only with the ears’.[[20]](#footnote-20) Stephen Gosson’s *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) links two kinds of counterfeiting in the ‘markets of bawdry’ that were theatres, acting and producing false impressions: ‘[V]ice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on the stage’.[[21]](#footnote-21) John Rainolds’ *Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (1599) asserts that actors were also at risk of wounding and imprinting themselves: playing immoral parts ‘worketh in the actors a marvelous impression of being like the persons whose qualities they expresse and imitate’, and ‘often repetition and representation of the parts … engrave[s] the things in their mind with a pen of iron, or with the point of a diamond’.[[22]](#footnote-22) In other words, actors are characterized by the parts they play as well as vice versa, and all for the profit of theatrical ‘markets of bawdry’.

Whether celebrated or condemned, the technology of impression in the early modern commercial theatre is best understood in relation to the history of ‘character’ as a word and a concept, which also illuminates *Coriolanus*’ remarkable uses of the term in around 1608 when it was first performed. In the early seventeenth century, the figures represented on stage were not ‘characters’ but ‘speakers’ or ‘persons’, a word derived from the Latin *persona*, literally a mask used by a player.[[23]](#footnote-23) It was not until the 1660s that John Dryden explicitly used ‘character’ to mean a ‘personality invested with distinctive attributes and qualities, by a … dramatist’, although—as I will show—this sense had been gradually emerging for a long time.[[24]](#footnote-24) For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, ‘characters’ were things created through technologies of inscription, engraving and impression.[[25]](#footnote-25) These senses were rooted in the ancient Greek *kharaktêr* (χαρακτήρ), variously used to mean an instrument for engraving, stamping or branding, the distinctive marks stamped onto coins or seals (and sometimes wax tablets) to identify types or values, or—by metaphorical extension—distinguishing marks or features of human bodies and language that signified morals and attitudes.[[26]](#footnote-26) The term was applied to the literary genre of character-writing, pioneered in the fourth century BC by Theophrastus.[[27]](#footnote-27) Theophrastus’ *Kharaktíres* (Χαρακτήρες) was a collection of brief sketches (or ‘impressions’) of inappropriate social behaviour embodied by human examples, such as ‘the miserly man’ or ‘the flatterer’, not individuals but—like stamps on seals or coins—reproducible types whose ‘actions are infinitely repeatable, their stories iterative narrations’.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The various meanings of *kharaktêr* were eventually carried forward into the English ‘character’, although the word was by no means semantically stable in the early modern period, not least because writers—including Shakespeare—were experimenting with its figurative potential.[[29]](#footnote-29) Sensitive to performance’s ‘mechanics of exteriority’, dramatists used the word to explore concepts of personhood, particularly the notion that outer marks can signify inner qualities. Early commercial playwrights made much of what could be impressively ‘charactered’ in faces through a combination of verbal description and the actor’s countenance and expression.[[30]](#footnote-30) Thus in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine Part 1*, Tamburlaine reads Theridamus’ valiantness in ‘Characters grauen in thy browes’.[[31]](#footnote-31) At first sight, the shipwrecked Viola’s use of ‘character’ in *Twelfth Night* has a similar function. She makes a moral judgement of a sea captain based on his appearance and behaviour: ‘I will believe thou hast a mind that suits / With this thy fair and outward character’ (I.ii.46-7). Apparently tautological, ‘outward character’ posits the concept of ‘inward character’, the invisible imprints made on the mind, heart and soul by God, nature, experience and education, like the ‘precepts’ Polonius instructs his son Laertes to ‘character’ in his memory (*Hamlet* I.iii.57-8), or indeed the ‘forms’ and ‘pressures’ impressed upon the ‘table of [Hamlet’s] memory’ (I.v.98-101).[[32]](#footnote-32) The use of ‘character’ as a metaphor to negotiate between legible external marks and veiled internal impressions suited the theatrical project, a commercial enterprise which often involved projecting psychological depth through a play of verbal and physical surfaces.

When *Coriolanus* was first performed in c.1608 ‘character’ was already being used to mean a ‘the face or features as identifying a person; personal appearance as indicative of something’.[[33]](#footnote-33) According to *OED*, the word is used in this sense in *Coriolanus*. ‘I paint him in the character’ (V.iv.26) Menenius assures Sicinius after his description of the vengeful Coriolanus as a god-like war machine:

The tartness of his face sours grapes. When he walks, he moves like an engine and the ground shrinks before his treading. He is able to pierce a corslet with his eye, talks like a knell and his hum is a battery. (V.iv.17-21)

As Karen Newman observes, however, Menenius’ prose description is also an allusion to the newly revived literary genre of character-writing.[[34]](#footnote-34) Early modern character-sketches generally consisted of ‘witty epitomes of representative individuals in relation to their professions, nationalities, idiosyncratic beliefs or presiding temperaments’ (e.g. the courtier, the puritan).[[35]](#footnote-35) ‘Characters’ were distinctly printed commodities, both because they were viewed as reproducible impressions of human identity and behaviour (‘*stampes* or *impressures*, noting such an especiall place, person, or office’),[[36]](#footnote-36) and because they owed their commercial success to the technology of printing. *Overbury’s Characters* went through four editions in 1614 alone,[[37]](#footnote-37) but it was the publication in 1608 (the year *Coriolanus* was probably first performed) of *Characters of Vertues and Vices*, Joseph Hall’s translation of Theophrastus’ *Kharaktíres*, that rejuvenated the ancient genre and diversified the lexicon of ‘character’. In his preface, Hall styles this kind of writing as ‘charactery’ as he reflects on the moralistic nature of character-sketches or ‘characterisms’ composed by other ancient character-writers (soon to be known as ‘characterists’): ‘[They] bestowed their time in drawing out the true lineaments of euery vertue and vice, so liuely, that who saw the medals, might know the face’.[[38]](#footnote-38) The metaphor of forging portraits in medals (a relatively new technology in England) re-inforces charactery’s etymological connections to engraving and imprinting,[[39]](#footnote-39) but it also engages with the concept—essential to dramatists as well as characterists—of what is revealed by features charactered in faces.

Faces, however, can be difficult to read. Aufidius fails to recognise the shabbily dressed Coriolanus in Antium, although he sees ‘a command’ in his face, and the point is reinforced by the comic exchange that follows between servants who claim they ‘knew by his face that there was something in him’ (IV.v.62-3, 156-61). Menenius mocks the idea that a face can be read for character when rebuffing Brutus and Sicinius’ claim that he is ‘known well enough’ (II.i.44):

I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine, with not a drop of allaying Tiber in’t; said to be something imperfect in favouring the first complaint, hasty and tinder-like upon too trivial motion; one that converses more with the buttock of the night than with the forehead of the morning. What I think, I utter, and spend my malice in my breath. … And though I must be content to bear with those that say you are reverend grave men, yet they lie deadly that tell you you have good faces. If you see this in the map of my microcosm, follows it that I am known well enough too? What harm can your bisson conspectuities [blind sight] glean out of this character, if I be known well enough too? (II.i.45-63)

Here ‘character’ refers both to Menenius’ own face, the supposed ‘map of my microcosm’, and to his provocative character-sketch of himself as ‘a humorous patrician’.[[40]](#footnote-40) Whatever an audience can ‘glean’ from either of these characters—the actor’s face and his spoken characterism—will inevitably fall short of the unknowable true nature of Menenius’ identity. However, something emerges from their combination, and his embodied performances of charactery (both here and when he ‘paints’ a ‘character’ of Coriolanus) translate ‘character’ to the stage in a way that participates in the semantic re-shaping of the word in dramatic contexts.

Scholars debate the etymological and conceptual relationship between Theophrastan charactery and dramatic characterization,[[41]](#footnote-41) but it is clear that early modern dramatists were influenced by the work of characterists. The most obvious place for charactery in drama was the comedy of humours because it dealt in stock types with fixed physiological and psychological dispositions.[[42]](#footnote-42) *Coriolanus*, however, is one of a generically diverse cluster of plays from c.1606-1614 (i.e. before the publication of *Overbury’s Characters*) which seem to link charactery, satire and on-stage personation through variants of the word ‘character’, contributing to its development both linguistically and conceptually.[[43]](#footnote-43) John Webster, himself a characterist, is particularly notable for the way he creatively incorporates charactery into his plays (in prose and verse) with great sensitivity to the semantic range of ‘character’.[[44]](#footnote-44) Shakespeare, Webster and others show awareness of the differences—often noted by critics—between charactery (seen in terms of fixity, reproducibility and reducibility) and characterization (depth, development and uniqueness),[[45]](#footnote-45) but they also suggest a degree of fluidity between the rhetorical performances of characterists and those of dramatists and actors as they worked collaboratively to inscribe legible *dramatis personae* through authoritative semiotic acts. First performed during the rise of English charactery and the attendant diversification of the language of character, *Coriolanus* participated in the re-coinage of ‘character’ in the theatrical market-place, helping to give it currency in the playhouse. Underlying this process, however, was an acute and shared awareness amongst dramatists of the word’s material and technological meanings. Despite the term’s post-Romantic association with humanity and what A.C. Bradley called ‘the stuff we find within ourselves’,[[46]](#footnote-46) dramatists’ metaphorical application of ‘character’ to *dramatis personae* had the potential to highlight their status as technological entities or inhuman automata designed to make money.

Although critics have highlighted conceptual advantages to investigating the philology of ‘character’ and related terms,[[47]](#footnote-47) the widespread use of the language of impression in critical discussions (whether or not in response to the etymological link to *kharaktêr*) is rarely in service of the concepts which this section has shown lie at the heart of the history of ‘character’ and its appropriation by early commercial dramatists: materiality, technology and—most significantly—commodification. The ‘currency’ of Goldman’s ‘internal imprint’ may have value in a critical market that privileges the ‘impression of subjective identity’. However, we need to recognise that—from their inception—early modern dramatic characters were commodities, things inscribed by their exchange value in the theatrical market-place and—as entities inextricable from the form and content of commercial drama—thoroughly ‘conditioned’ by what Douglas Bruster calls the ‘representation market’ of early modern England.[[48]](#footnote-48) Characters’ inexhaustible value—economic and aesthetic—rests in their technological capacity to mark and be marked through transactions, as they are stamped by those who bring them into being (dramatists, actors, editors, and—of course—printers) and make ever-new impressions on those that encounter them (audiences, readers, critics). In order to demonstrate that Coriolanus is an emblem of this process, and to anticipate my analysis of the character’s value within the play’s economy of impression, I want now to consider his ‘coinage’ in and from translations of Plutarch’s *Lives*.

**Translating Plutarch, coining Coriolanus**

*Coriolanus*’ participation in a discourse of character and impression sheds light on the play’s relationship to Plutarchan narrative, which—I want to show—has played an important role in the perceived value of the characterological imprint in Shakespeare, and in the theatrical market-place that *Coriolanus* self-reflexively represents. If, as I have been suggesting, Coriolanus’ status as a ‘character’ is reinforced by his identity as one who stamps and is stamped, then it can also be linked to the play’s primary source-text, Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (1579), which—as Peter Holland observes—Shakespeare probably consulted in its second edition of 1595.[[49]](#footnote-49) Marshall posits Plutarch’s *Lives* as crucial to ‘the evolution of the early modern concept of character or subjectivity’, claiming that Shakespeare’s dramatization of Plutarchan narrative established ‘our culture’s prevailing model of character as one that is at once intensely performative and putatively interiorized’.[[50]](#footnote-50) However, if our ‘prevailing model of character’ is not only performative and interiorized but also impressive, then linguistic and visual manifestations of ‘character’ in early modern translations of Plutarch’s *Lives* are revealing.

Plutarch’s figures were not identified as being or having ‘characters’ in Shakespeare’s lifetime: for North, Coriolanus and the others are rather ‘persones’ or ‘personages’, terms which suggested theatrical potential. But North’s translation of Plutarch’s reflection on the nature of his project at the beginning of the life of Alexander the Great returns us to ideas of character:

[M]y intent is not to write histories, but onely liues. For, the noblest deedes do not alwayes shew mens vertues & vices, but oftentimes a light occasion, a word, or some sporte makes mens naturall dispositions [*êthos*] & manners appeare more plaine, then the famous battels wonne …. For like as painters or drawers of pictures, which make no account of other partes of the body, do take resemblances of the face and fauour of the countenance, in the which consisteth the iudgement of their manners and disposition: euen so they must giue vs leaue to seeke out the signes and tokens of the minde onely[[51]](#footnote-51)

The term North translates as ‘naturall dispositions’, *êthos*, did not come to be translated as ‘characters’ until much later. But the stated mission of seeking out ‘the signes and tokens of the minde’ resonates with plays that negotiate the relationship between inward and outward ‘character’ on the stage, and the analogy of painting or drawing portraits with special attention to ‘the face and fauour of the countenance’ anticipates the project of characterists.[[52]](#footnote-52) In John Evelyn’s 1693 translation of the life of Alexander, Plutarch’s aim lies not in seeking the mind’s signs and tokens, but ‘penetrating into, and describing the secret Recesses, and Images of the Soul’.[[53]](#footnote-53) Plutarch here sounds like the Shakespeare being groomed by Dryden in the late seventeenth century, a dramatist with privileged access to the depths of human nature: ‘Shakespear had an Vniversal mind, which comprehended all Characters and Passions’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Shortly before Dryden may have provided editorial services for Henry Herringman during the production of Shakespeare’s Fourth Folio (1685),[[55]](#footnote-55) he was involved in Jacob Tonson’s collaborative translation of *Plutarch’s Lives*, the first volume of which was prefaced by Dryden’s own “Life of Plutarch” (1683). This prefatory biography highlights the powerful effects or ‘impressions’ Plutarch’s penetrative characterizations could produce in the minds of readers. Dryden explains that biography is superior to historiography because ‘the vertues and actions of one Man … strike upon our minds a stronger and more lively impression, than the scatter’d Relations of many Men, and many actions’. For Dryden, Plutarch’s way of writing sets a moral stamp on readers that they take pleasure in receiving. And the pleasure lies in the intimacy of the encounter: ‘[H]ere you are led into the private Lodgings of the Heroe: you see him in his undress, and are made Familiar with his most private actions and conversations … you see the poor reasonable Animal, as naked as ever nature made him’.[[56]](#footnote-56) Plutarch’s method of character construction, he suggests, is in fact a stripping away, a voyeuristic intimation of knowledge that oversteps the bounds of privacy, and this is what makes it impressive. It is no coincidence that this process of laying bare an inner or private life is what Shakespeare became celebrated for in the eighteenth century and beyond, or indeed that the Coriolanus of Shakespeare’s play seems so passionately to resist that process. The ‘stamp of Martius’ should emerge and make its mark on us through a process of penetrative characterization, and yet this is not the case.

The language of impression found in Shakespeare’s play is absent from the “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus”, but like each of the lives featured in North’s book, it is ‘prefaced by a coin-like portrait’.[[57]](#footnote-57) Printed below the title is an elaborately framed numismatic profile of an armoured man encircled by the legend ‘CORIOLANVS PA[TRICIVS] RO[MANVS]’, ‘Coriolanus the noble Roman’ (see Figure 1).

D:\Coriolanus article - North 1595 cropped, p. 235, UMI reel no. 383 01, Huntington, RB 21400.tif

**Figure 1:** An image of Coriolanus at the beginning of the “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus” in the second edition of Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (London, 1595), 235. RB 21400, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Image produced by ProQuest as part of *Early English Books Online*. <[www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)> Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

This printed wood-cut of a coin or medal stamp—what Plutarch and his contemporaries would call a *kharaktêr*—provides a visual context for the character Cominius recognises as having the ‘stamp of Martius’, and indeed for Menenius’ performance of charactery as he forges Coriolanus’ face into an inhuman and unresponsive profile through his prose description. We cannot know what kind of impression this *kharaktêr* made on Shakespeare, but it urges us to consider the ways in which characters are circulated between different literary contexts and incorporated into different value systems through source-work and adaptation. Shakespeare’s wide-ranging and—in the case of North’s translation—extensive use of source materials in this play makes apparent his awareness that Coriolanus, first coined as a character in antiquity, had passed through many hands before his own (Livy, Dionysius, Plutarch and William Painter, to name but a few).

In Shakespeare’s play, however, the coined becomes the coiner. ‘As for my country I have shed my blood, / Not fearing outward force’, Coriolanus roars, ‘so shall my lungs / Coin words till their decay’ (III.i.78-80). This character apparently stamps words as well as wounds, minting language with each disdainful breath as if he were—in Zvi Jagendorf’s words—‘the hero of a one-man economy that boldly distinguishes itself from the market and the getting, spending, exchanging of ordinary men’.[[58]](#footnote-58) But to whose profit does Coriolanus ‘Coin words’? Every syllable uttered by Coriolanus, however assertive of his autonomy, contributes to the linguistic economy of a play whose commercial success was partly dependent on its verbal riches, including the protagonist’s inventive insults and his many coinages, such as ‘under-crest’ (I.ix.70), ‘unaching’ (II.ii.147), ‘bewitchment’ (II.iii.99), ‘interjoin’ (IV.iv.22), ‘unmusical’ (IV.v.60), ‘virgined’ (V.iii.48), ‘unvulnerable’ (V.iii.73) and ‘counter-sealed’ (V.iii.205).[[59]](#footnote-59) The representation of Coriolanus as a coin in North’s book is apt considering Shakespeare’s dramatization must have earned the King’s Men a pretty penny, especially given that it may well have been staged at Blackfriars, their expensive new indoor playhouse.[[60]](#footnote-60) Although Plutarch’s life of Coriolanus provided Shakespeare with the raw materials for his dramatic character, it was the dramatist and his company that transformed him into a money-maker in the theatre.

First performed at around the same time Thomas Dekker dubbed the theatre ‘your poets’ Royal Exchange’,[[61]](#footnote-61) *Coriolanus* poses important questions about the impact of theatre’s commercialization on characterological identity and value. By seeking to exclude himself from a theatrical economy of impression on which the value of character depends, Coriolanus effectively marks himself out as a character who does not want to be a character, denying his parasitical dependency on the actor paid to play him. After the battle of Corioles, much of the play’s action is driven by Coriolanus’ desire to avoid having his noble worth circulated and judged in the ‘market-place’, a space which somehow doubles as the Roman *forum* and the early modern commercial stage itself. In order to analyse Coriolanus’ resistance to commodification and his unstable relationship with the actor playing him (who must, ironically, perform that resistance), I will now consider his theatrical impressiveness in relation to the metatheatrical representation of his wounds, the ‘marks of merit’ (II.iii.161) he is obliged to show in exchange for the ‘voices’ or votes of citizens he believes were ‘created / To buy and sell with groats’ (III.ii.9-10).

**II**

**Metatheatrical impressions: Burbage’s**

**‘painting’ and the technology of wounds**

With its connections to discourses of ‘character’, psycho-physiology and Plutarchan narrative, the technological language of impression in *Coriolanus* helps us to understand the significance of the long-established critical idea that character is—in Goldman’s words—‘an internal imprint we can carry away with us from the theater’, or—as Marshall puts it—‘an impression of subjective identity’. It is important to consider, however, exactly what makes Coriolanus and his wounds impressive in the theatre. In what remains of this article, I build on my contextualization of the relationship between character and imprinting by analysing how *Coriolanus* self-reflexively interrogates the processes by which the value of the characterological imprint is communicated in commercial theatre. Focusing on wounds and then silence as metatheatrical devices available to Richard Burbage, whose celebrity has a role in the economy of impression, I show that the play both advertises and seems to withhold the ‘stamp of Martius’ in order to inflate its dramatic value for paying audience members, who are encouraged to believe they have a contractual right to access Coriolanus’ character and feel the imprint of humanity. In its focus on impressions made and denied in theatricalized spaces, the play not only makes impressions on audiences, but gives them impressions of the manner in which those impressions are given. As such, the play has the potential to make its mark on audiences not by exposing a universal humanity beneath Coriolanus’ resistant surface, but rather by exposing the technology of theatrical impression essential to the production and marketing of ‘character’ in the early modern commercial theatre.

So often central to analyses of *Coriolanus*, the protagonist’s wounds have made their mark on critics, who tend to see them as key to understanding his character. In particular, psychoanalytical critics have read the injuries as tokens of repressed or concealed shame, vulnerability, dependence and femininity.[[62]](#footnote-62) Whether or not we agree with these readings, the importance of the wounds cannot be denied. Shakespeare conspicuously departs from Plutarch in having Coriolanus refuse to show his scars in the market-place,[[63]](#footnote-63) and the wounds are spoken about obsessively (even fetishistically) by Volumnia, Menenius and the people, as exemplified by the third citizen’s graphic image: ‘[I]f he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues in those wounds and speak for them’ (II.iii.5-7). Marshall argues that Coriolanus’ attempt to ‘halt the process of signification’ by resisting the wounds’ exposure enables audiences and critics to recognise his ‘characterological presence and plenitude’, as they speculatively ‘assign Martius’ motivation for his refusal, granting him an inner dimension of considered action’.[[64]](#footnote-64) However, thinking beyond Marshall’s semiotic investigation into how Coriolanus’ wounds (and the interiority they suggest) signify in the theatre, we need to consider how the play uses wounds to ask questions about the *commercial* theatre of the early seventeenth century, and more specifically the commercial theatre’s technology of impression. In the theatrical market-place, value for money depended on audiences’ experience of psycho-physiological impressions, the imprints of heart and mind condemned by Gosson and Stubbes and celebrated by defenders of theatre: ‘What can sooner print modesty in the souls of the wanton’, asks Thomas Heywood in *An Apology for Actors* (1612), ‘than by discovering unto them the monstrousness of their sin?’[[65]](#footnote-65) If the imprint of character (‘the internal imprint we can carry away with us … the basic currency of all great drama’) is now the most highly valued in commercial theatre, in *Coriolanus* it cannot be separated from the protagonist’s bodily imprints, whose worth depends on their capacity to impress an internal audience of citizens in the Roman market-place and—by implication—external audiences in a theatrical market-place sustained by an economy of impression. Although often read as signs which threaten to reveal ‘that he too is human, a creature of flesh and blood’,[[66]](#footnote-66) or even as ‘tokens’ or ‘gateways’ to ‘the mysterious inner self’,[[67]](#footnote-67) the play frames the wounds as a theatrical technology. They are a metatheatrical device which urges contemplation not of what makes us human, but of what makes a character impressive in a commercial theatre that trades in humanity as a technological product.

Coriolanus’ imprinted wounds are central to the metatheatricality of a play which repeatedly urges the audience to think about the relationship between Coriolanus and the actor playing him, and more specifically the actor for whom the part was almost certainly written, Richard Burbage. Coriolanus’ disgust at the idea of pretending to be someone he is not often manifests itself in theatrical language, which casts the market-place as a kind of stage. ‘It is a part / That I shall blush in acting’ (II.ii.143-4) he says of the ritual of showing his wounds to the people in the market-place. And when he is later told by his mother to return and apologise to the people, he declares: ‘You have put me now to such a part which never / I shall discharge to th’ life’ (III.ii.107-8). The irony that these words were spoken by Burbage, widely celebrated as the most talented and recognisable actor of his day, would not have been lost on early seventeenth-century audiences. All the more so if we accept Eve Rachele Sanders’ argument that, in denouncing role-playing, Coriolanus ‘rehearses all the stock arguments of the anti-theatrical pamphleteers in order to defend an essentialist stance’.[[68]](#footnote-68) He objects to acting on the grounds that he might be somehow contaminated by the part he plays, or ‘surcease to honour mine own truth, / And by my body’s action teach my mind / A most inherent baseness’ (III.ii.123-5). Coriolanus believes that acting will feminise, infantilise and debase him, causing him to experience an irreversible transformation (see especially III.ii.112-21). ‘Would you have me / False to my nature?’ he asks Volumnia, ‘Rather say I play / The man I am’ (III.ii.14-6). Here Coriolanus means he wishes only to be his true self, but the lines suggest that his entire identity and in particular his masculinity is nothing more than a performance.[[69]](#footnote-69) Such language plays with the audience’s consciousness of the permeable or penetrable boundary that separates character and actor, and the protectiveness that Coriolanus/Burbage shows towards his wounds relates to anxiety about the integrity of that boundary. For Marshall, Coriolanus’ theatrical metaphors suggest that ‘[t]he splitting off of the theatrical other, the “part” to be played or rejected, defines the characterological self’,[[70]](#footnote-70) but from another perspective the commercial success of Burbage’s ‘part’ lay in his ability to negotiate between his theatrical self and the characterological other. The protagonist’s body is the site of this tension and confusion between actor and character. While actors are often said to ‘inhabit’ or ‘embody’ characters, the play’s complex representation of corporeal agency and ownership urges us to question who is inhabiting whom. And indeed who is imprinting whom: we might think of Burbage as making his transformative mark on Hieronimo, Hamlet and other popular characters, but *Coriolanus* also highlights Burbage’s vulnerability to—in Rainolds’ phrase—the ‘marvelous impression’ that imitating characters makes on actors. In response to questions it raises about the relationship between actor and character, the play encourages us to look for answers in the wounds imprinted on the body they share.

The impressiveness of Coriolanus’ wounds, as experienced by the audience both visually and linguistically, is mediated by what Paul Menzer calls ‘the technology of the actor’s body’.[[71]](#footnote-71) The representation of the body shared by actor and character as pierced or wounded disrupts the relationship between an actor’s knowable outside and a character’s unknowable inside, and the technological status of Coriolanus’ wounds as imprints suggests their potential to reveal his internal impressions, the inner ‘stamp of Martius’. Blood would seem to be a powerful agent of transmission for this stamp: for Cominius on the battlefield, the ‘stamp of Martius’ is—in part at least—the blood that covers him. We might see on-stage bleeding as impressive because of what it implies about identity leakage between actor and character in a play whose protagonist could be said to haemorrhage character despite himself. The body which seems to bleed, or to have bled, is indicative of a fluidity or rupture between the identities of actor and character. For actors, this meant stage blood could facilitate convincing personation. If contemporary tributes are anything to go by, Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage were—among other things—great bleeders. When Thomas Nashe in *Pierce Penniless* (1592) celebrated that playgoers could watch the wounded Talbot on the stage and, ‘in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding’,[[72]](#footnote-72) he was probably indirectly praising Alleyn, lead actor of the Strange’s Men when they performed *1 Henry VI* (c.1592).[[73]](#footnote-73) Similarly, Burbage was described in an anonymous elegy on his death in 1619 as being able to play a part ‘So lively that spectators … / …, whilst he but seem’d to bleed, / Amazed, thought even then he died in deed’.[[74]](#footnote-74) While the illusion would have been largely produced by the speech, gesture and expression of Alleyn and Burbage, the accounts identify stage blood as a medium of characterological representation, and therefore something essential to the cognitive transaction and exchange of impressions that took place between actor and playgoer. To put it another way, the technology of the stage facilitated the artistic processes or techniques by which the actors brought characters to life (ironically, in these cases, by killing those characters off).

The metatheatrical framing of Coriolanus’ blood, however, demarcates the ‘stamp of Martius’ as perfomative in nature, exposing the impact of stage blood on audiences as a counterfeit impression indebted to the machinery and special effects of commercial theatre. The blood that covers Coriolanus is described as a vizard that has ‘masked’ him (I.viii.11) and a cloak that has ‘mantled’ him (I.vi.29). Perhaps most strangely, Coriolanus himself calls the blood ‘this painting / Wherein you see me smeared’ (I.vi.68-9). While Marshall has argued that the character’s bloody exhibitionism grants the audience ‘visual intimacy and hence … a knowledge of Martius that is subsequently denied to the plebeians in the marketplace’, Andrea Stevens has shown that Coriolanus is actually represented as wearing his blood as a kind of costume that conceals rather than reveals. For Stevens, Coriolanus’ reference to his blood as ‘painting’ alludes to use of paint or water-soluble pigments to represent blood on the early modern stage. Thus, Coriolanus undermines stage blood’s association with realism and thus ‘severs [it] from its relationship to vulnerability and … sympathetic identification’. Despite their disagreement, both Marshall and Stevens implicitly suggest Coriolanus’ blood is instrumental to how he makes his mark on audiences in search of the imprint of character. Unconsciously echoing Marshall’s ‘impression of subjective identity’, Stevens works toward the conclusion that the language and spectacle of the bloody protagonist produce ‘the theatrical impression of interiority’, gesturing towards the man behind the painted mask.[[75]](#footnote-75)

From a certain perspective, the man behind the painted mask (both the *persona* and the bloody vizard) was Richard Burbage, and—as a portraitist as well as an actor—painting was Burbage’s thing. Burbage seems to have been the model for Webster’s famous character-sketch of “An Excellent Actor”, included in the sixth edition of *Overbury’s Characters* (1615), which celebrates the illusion of the player’s artistry (‘what we see him personate, we think truly done before us’), but also alludes to Burbage’s talent for painting (with an additional suggestion of cosmetics): ‘He is much affected to painting, and ’tis a question whether that make him an excellent player or his playing an exquisite painter.’[[76]](#footnote-76) If Burbage’s mimetic skill of personation is like the art of painting, then so too is Webster’s verbal portraiture.[[77]](#footnote-77) Webster was not necessarily thinking of Burbage as Coriolanus, but the painting reference resonates with both Menenius’ characterism of Coriolanus as the merciless conquerer (‘I paint him in the character’) and the gruesome warrior at the battle of Corioli, who uses stage blood to paint himself in the character, communicating ‘the theatrical impression of interiority’ on the stage of the battlefield.

Whether or not Coriolanus’ reference to his blood as ‘painting’ gestures towards the painter/actor Burbage’s personation of him, it is apparent that for the protagonist blood (as mask and mantle) facilitates theatrical agency, enabling him to perform his hyper-masculine identity as ‘a thing of blood’ (II.ii.107). For Lois Potter the blood can be read as a protective disguise: ‘Dressed in his own blood as in a costume, he does not show his wounds to the audience any more than to the Roman populace, and, in this double-bluff, it is his refusal to show them that makes them real.’[[78]](#footnote-78) But to what extent can we say that Coriolanus’ wounds are ‘real’? Whereas the protagonist revels in the theatrical agency of his blood on the battlefield, he is horrified at the thought that he must treat his wounds in the same way in the market-place to make a commoditized impression on the ‘many-headed multitude’ (II.iii.15-16). The ‘price o’th’ consulship’ (II.iii.72-3) is to perform two tasks for the citizens: he must show them his wounds and speak them fair, theatrically supplementing wounds with words. Having declared to the senate that ‘It is a part / That I shall blush in acting’, Coriolanus snarls at the thought that he is obliged

To brag unto them “Thus I did, and thus”,

Show them th’ unaching scars which I should hide,

As if I had received them for the hire

Of their breath only! (II.ii.146-9)

Here Coriolanus performs his performance, as it were, anticipating Volumnia’s later ‘Action is eloquence’ speech: ‘Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand, / And thus far having stretched it…’, etc. (III.ii.74-87). Sanders contends that with the deictic expression ‘“Thus I did, and thus”’, Coriolanus ‘imagines an exchange in which he uses those marks as a visual aid to accompany a sales pitch about himself to the crowd’, a scenario in which ‘the scars are no longer the sign of something real (his deeds in war) but of something unreal (feats the audience is deceived into believing he performed “for the hire / Of their breath”)’.[[79]](#footnote-79) Coriolanus fears that showing his wounds and talking about them publicly in return for the people’s voices or ‘breath’ (we might remember that the commercial success of dramatists and actors depended on the ‘breath’ of audiences)[[80]](#footnote-80) will somehow make the wounds unreal, transforming them into stage properties and debasing the ‘stamp of Martius’.

The irony is that if Burbage did show ‘unaching scars’, they would have to be props. Although it is not clear how wounds and scars were staged, it is evident that they were. The prologue to the Folio text of Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (1616) even indicates that scars were staged differently to wounds. During a critique of playwrights who over-rely on the technology of the stage to entertain audiences (rolling cannonballs, rumbling drums, exploding fireworks, etc.), the prologue mocks actors who

with three rusty swords,

And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,

Fight over York and Lancaster’s long jars,

And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars. (Prolgue.9-12)

In this reference to plays about the War of the Roses (including Shakespeare’s), the prologue alludes to back-stage methods by which actors create an illusion of cicatrisation. The technology of the stage parallels the technology of actual wound-healing techniques, through which real wounds could be ‘brought to’ (i.e. transformed into) scars.[[81]](#footnote-81) Relying on not medicine but artifice, actors functioned as their own physicians as they transformed wounds into scars, and—as Jonson laments—such illusions provided entertainment for audiences of plays written to ‘purchase’ their ‘delight’ (Prologue.5).

*Coriolanus* withholds this type of entertainment. While the protagonist is clearly concerned about his wounds’ transformation into scars, he has a private sense of healing and bodily self-ownership that conflicts with a public or even commercial desire for ‘large cicatrices to show the people’ (II.i.144), as Volumnia puts it. Crucially, Coriolanus also resists a public desire for talk of his scars, telling the senate ‘I had rather have my wounds to heal again / Than hear say how I got them’ (II.ii.67-8). His anxieties about public ceremonies and displays that might in some way interrupt the transformation of his open, bleeding wounds into closed, unbleeding scars reflect the potential anxieties of playwrights and actors about exhibiting wounds to audiences. Because the play was likely staged at Blackfriars, a smaller theatre than outdoor playhouses like the Globe, and one where audience members paid extra for proximity, any fake scars would probably have been highly visible to many spectators. If gallants sitting on the stage at indoor performances were—as Thomas Dekker claimed—close enough to ‘examine the play-suits lace, and perhaps win wagers upon laying tis copper [rather than gold]’,[[82]](#footnote-82) they would have had ample opportunity to inspect (and mock) counterfeit scars. But because Coriolanus refuses to exhibit what he claims are ‘Scars to move laughter only’ (III.iii.50), Burbage would not have given himself fake scars in the tiring-house. Just as the citizens and the audience share an identity because they are both denied visual proof that Coriolanus is really wounded, the character and actor are bound by the fact that they cannot show their wounds. ‘I cannot’, declares the protagonist, ‘Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them / For my wounds’ sake to give their suffrage’ (II.ii.135-7). Neither can Burbage, for he lacks physically what the character lacks psychologically: the ability to show wounds. Appropriating W.B. Worthen’s term, Marshall suggests that Coriolanus’ injuries present a ‘seam’ between actor and character, ‘testifying at once to the artifice of the stage and to the felt subjectivity of the character’,[[83]](#footnote-83) but it is the absence of wounds on Burbage’s body that threatens to expose the artificiality of his transformation into Coriolanus. The play urges us to view the wounds not as a ‘seam’ but a ‘stamp’, a mark which—despite its potential signification of authenticity—suggests the possibility that Coriolanus is an authorized and reproducible product, a hallmarked commodity created by external agencies for the theatrical market-place. Coriolanus’ resistance to the exposure of this ‘stamp’ in order to retain a sense of his own agency complicates his impressiveness as a character. Paradoxically, Burbage’s performance as the character, which impresses the audience, is sustained by the character’s refusal to put on an act that will impress the citizens.

**Sealing knowledge: The theatrical contract and the imprint of silence**

What is at stake in Coriolanus’ failed performance in the market-place, and Burbage’s performance of that failure, is the contract or bond—between consul and voting citizens, actor and paying audience—that depends on knowledge-exchange and cognitive impressions. In this final section, I show that Coriolanus’ stamp-like wounds manipulate the audience’s contractual expectation of those impressions, before investigating the role of silence in the intercession scene (V.iii), in which the audience’s experience of the characterological imprint is once again mediated by ideas of failed performance and resistance to transactions promised by the theatrical contract. Like Coriolanus’ wounds, I argue, his silences are metatheatrical devices used to expose the technology of theatrical impression and negotiate the value of the ‘stamp of Martius’ in the theatrical market-place.

Coriolanus’ scars have the capacity to impress the citizens in a manner comparable to how—according to contemporary writings—actors’ personations made psycho-physiological impressions on audiences. Once cicatrised into a scar, perhaps even one that stands out from the body’s surface, a wound is not just an impression but also a stamp that can make impressions of its own. But Coriolanus, unwilling to circulate the ‘stamp of Martius’, declines to impress the citizens by displaying his wounds:

CITIZEN. You have received many wounds for your country.

CORIOLANUS. I will not seal your knowledge with showing them. I will make much of your voices, and so trouble you no farther. (II.iii.102-6)

Here ‘seal’ means ‘confirm’ (as at III.i.143), but it retains its literal meaning of ‘place a seal upon (a document) as evidence of genuineness, or as a mark of authoritative ratification or approval’.[[84]](#footnote-84) The word anticipates the literal seal-impressions of contract and confirmation that Coriolanus will refer to later in the play: the ‘counter-seal[]’ (V.iii.206) that ratifies his pledge not to attack Rome and the staged ‘seal o’th’ Senate’ (V.vi.83) on the peace treaty he orchestrates between the Romans and the Volscians. Indeed, the seal Coriolanus refuses to make in the market-place is not necessarily metaphorical. By showing his wounds, Coriolanus would—according to a physiological belief in the early modern period—be making a literal impression on the minds of the citizens. In *The Art of Rhetoric* (1553; reprinted into the 1580s), for example, Thomas Wilson’s states that sight ‘printeth things in a man’s memory as a seal doth print a man’s name in wax’.[[85]](#footnote-85) It was believed that ‘knowledge’ actually could be impressed, and the scars’ technological status as stamps reinforces this idea.

Coriolanus is content to aggressively stamp wounds and words that assert his masculine dominance and autonomy as a technological entity, but sealing the citizens’ knowledge by showing his wounds and theatrically ‘counterfeit[ing] the bewitchment of some popular man’ (II.iii.99-100) is something he cannot do. To use his wounds as seal- or coin-like tokens of value in the market-place would involve forming a perverse economic bond or contract, pledging a loyalty that does not exist. Unlike Menenius, who claims he has ‘almost stamped the leasing [falsehood]’ (V.ii.23) in praise of the protagonist, Coriolanus is not willing to make a counterfeit impression. Of course, making counterfeit impressions is exactly what audiences expected actors to do, and denying that expectation jeopardizes the value of cognitive transactions promised by the actor-audience contract of commercial theatre, a contract which playgoers—as the Scrivener reminds us in the induction to Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1631; first performed 1614)—had to ‘put to [their] seals’ by handing over money before the play began (Induction.114-15). The wounds’ concealment frustrates the citizens’ desires (‘no man saw ’em’ (II.iii.162) they shout in unison), but the audience is also frustrated, left wanting more. Just as the citizens feel cheated at not being shown the wounds in exchange for their ‘voices’, paying spectators might well have felt cheated at not being shown artificial wounds. In the Roman market-place, the wounds are ‘currency in a political/economic exchange that breeds votes in return for a certain amount of nakedness and verbal display’.[[86]](#footnote-86) In the theatrical market-place, they are tokens of interiority whose exposure and exposition has been anticipated as sealing the audience’s knowledge of a man cast as an unattainable and impenetrable object of desire, a character who is not ‘known well enough’. The audience is denied not only the chance to view the semiotic markings that denote his character, but also the opportunity to have their hearts and minds—in the words of Philip Stubbes—‘pierce[d]’ and ‘print[ed]’ by that character. Paradoxically, the audience’s impression of the character is a response to language and action which mark him out as unwilling to commit to a characterological transaction, as unwilling to make an impression.

The protagonist, then, is prepared to give and receive wound-impressions while fighting on the battlefield, but not while acting in the market-place. However, Coriolanus does eventually yield to impressions in a context that he recognises as theatrical. During the highly metatheatrical intercession scene, in which Coriolanus is persuaded not to destroy Rome by his mother, his wife, his son and Valeria, the protagonist takes on the role of both actor and spectator.[[87]](#footnote-87) Having greeted his wife Virgilia, the moved Coriolanus represents himself as an actor who cannot remember his lines: ‘Like a dull actor now / I have forgot my part, and I am out / Even to a full disgrace.’ (V.iii.40-2) And following his capitulation, he declares that ‘the heavens do ope, / The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at’ (V.iii.184-6). In between these two moments, however, Coriolanus gives Volumnia audience in a public forum (alongside Aufidius and other Volscians), watching as she theatrically ‘delivers a powerful series of formal speeches, and guides the movements of the supplicants to achieve maximum effect’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Coriolanus is an on-stage spectator, and the audience sees his heart deeply pierced and printed by the performance put on for him. Whereas before Coriolanus has received impressions only in order to reinforce his identity as an invulnerable machine, this theatrical experience apparently causes him to soften and receive impressions in sign of his humanity, behaving like the earth on which he kneels to make an ‘impression’ in sign of ‘deep duty’ to his mother at the beginning of the scene (V.iii.50-2) and the wax of ‘the seal o’th’ Senate’ that later confirms his capitulation. He yields to these impressions primarily because of Volumnia, who in making her plea performs ‘a mother’s part’ (V.iii.169) with great effectiveness, transforming Coriolanus from hard-hearted warrior to a tender-hearted ‘boy of tears’ (V.vi.103).

What Coriolanus’ seeming transformation and emotional impressionability does to an audience’s perception of his character depends to a large extent on the actor’s performance, and particularly his actions, gestures and expressions during Volumnia’s long speeches. While this is often read as a scene in which Coriolanus discovers or reveals his humanity,[[89]](#footnote-89) our experience as an audience is determined by the technology of the actor’s body as it performs that humanity, and the metatheatricality of the scene does not allow us to forget how instrumental the actor is. If the ‘stamp of Martius’ makes its mark, it is a stamp conspicuously wielded by Burbage as he artfully lets his mask slip, exposing characterization as an impressive technology of commercial theatre, and as central to the transactions promised by the theatrical contract. The imprint of Coriolanus’ character in this scene is textured not just by metatheatre, but also by charactery. The hard-hearted character that Burbage personates at the beginning of the scene is also represented by the character-sketch Menenius ‘paints’ in the following scene. ‘When he walks,’ says Menenius, ‘he moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before his treading’ (V.iv.18-20). Burbage also had to behave ‘like an engine’, not just because the protagonist has been represented as a war-machine throughout the play, but also because the actor’s body is an elaborate mechanism expected to move and speak in the right way and at the right moment in order to achieve dramatic effects. The character Menenius paints—that of the merciless conqueror—is unperformable (how does an actor make his face so ‘tart’ that it ‘sours ripe grapes’?), but so too is the part Coriolanus has given himself as he prepares to ‘stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin’ (V.iii.35-37). Herein lies the paradox of the scene: as in II.iii, the actor must deliver an impression of Coriolanus’ character to the audience by skilfully performing a botched performance.

Crucial to this process are two apparently scripted silences that may not have been immediately interpreted in the theatre as scripted. The first is during Coriolanus’ first exchange with his wife Virgilia, referred to earlier in the play as his ‘gracious silence’ (II.i.170):

CORIOLANUS. These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.

VIRGILIA. The sorrow that delivers us thus changed

Makes you think so.

CORIOLANUS. Like a dull actor now

I have forgot my part, and I am out

Even to a full disgrace. Best of my flesh,

Forgive my tyranny but… (V.iii.38-44)

In most modern editions, Virgilia and Coriolanus share a line. The First Folio, however, starts a new line with ‘Like a dull actor now…’, stressing the likelihood of a significant pause in performance. Coriolanus’ statement about being ‘out’ is quite possibly an aside,[[90]](#footnote-90) and therefore a rare example of the protagonist directly addressing the audience. If held long enough, the pause has the potential to prompt audience members to think that the actor may have forgotten his lines before he turns to them and speaks as the character about exactly that scenario.[[91]](#footnote-91) The moment is theatrically impressive both because it gives us what Ros King calls an ‘excruciating silence between husband and wife’,[[92]](#footnote-92) and because it opens up a traumatic space between speechless character and apparently ‘dried up’ actor. The audience form an impression of a man in the real-life situation of forgetting his lines until—speaking directly to the audience as Coriolanus—he forces them to recognise that impression as applicable to the character’s situation in the world of the play. Their experience of the character’s apparent introspection, in effect, is an impression of an impression.

The silence between Coriolanus and Virgilia anticipates the silence between him and his mother when he finally capitulates, which is marked in the Folio by an unusual stage direction:

VOLUMNIA. I am hushed until our city be afire

And then I’ll speak a little.

([*He*] *holds her by the hand, silent.*)

CORIOLANUS. O, mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,

The gods look down and this unnatural scene

They laugh at. (V.iii.181-5)

Again, we have a scripted silence followed by theatrical language, this time referring to an audience of Homeric laughing gods. The actual audience are forced to actively read Coriolanus’ private thoughts in the actor’s physical gestures (especially his holding of Volumnia’s hand) and facial expressions. At Blackfriars, Burbage’s illuminated and perhaps tear-stained[[93]](#footnote-93) face could have functioned as a legible ‘character’ and—in Menenius’ phrase—a seeming map of Coriolanus’ microcosm. For many, the moment of capitulation serves as emotional pay-off for an audience who have long been starved of signs of sympathetic vulnerability and humanity.[[94]](#footnote-94) For those in search of a characterological imprint, the silence and emotional outburst can deliver a potent impression, a sense that Coriolanus is finally opening up and showing—in Bradley’s phrase—‘the stuff we find within ourselves’. But there is a question as to whether the character they are given access to is the same as the character that has shut them out over the course of the play, especially given Coriolanus’ earlier comparison of his wavering resolution to the uncertainty of an actor ‘out’ of his ‘part’. The silence after Volumnia’s final speech is an opportunity for the actor both to communicate characterological ‘depth’ and to heighten the audience’s awareness of his own presence. Prompted to perform the vulnerability and impressionability of a character whose identity has been largely constructed by concealed woundedness, the actor is able to seal the audience’s knowledge of the character with authority, but he can also do so through an apparent loss of control which aligns him with the character’s vulnerability. The longer the silence (Alan Howard usually held it for over thirty seconds in the 1977 RSC production),[[95]](#footnote-95) the more likely audience members are to think the man they are looking at is not Coriolanus but a fallible actor who is ‘out / Even to a full disgrace’. It is a metatheatrical silence that facilitates the audience’s engagement with both the concealed humanity of the character, and the technical skill (or perceived incompetence) of the actor performing that humanity. If the audience finally has their knowledge sealed by the inner ‘stamp of Martius’ as he melts into a ‘boy of tears’, the moment does not erase the identity of the actor who makes that impression, a point reinforced by Coriolanus’ metatheatrical reference to ‘this unnatural scene’. It is a moment in which the audience might feel the characterological impression many of them have paid for as part of a theatrical contract, what Goldman calls ‘the internal imprint we can carry away with us from the theater’, but it is also a moment that shows them the stamp which makes characterization possible.

In investigating how the ‘stamp of Martius’ is valued, withheld and transmitted in *Coriolanus*, this article has argued that the technological language of impression is central to the play’s self-reflexive interrogation of theatrical affect and characterological identity in the early modern commercial theatre. Coriolanus’ imprinted wounds are not so much signs of humanity as stamps with the technological capacity to deliver an *impression* of humanity. In communicating the value of the characterological imprint, the wounds mark him out as a theatrical commodity to be consumed in a contracted economic transaction by the audience, who are repeatedly urged to contemplate their own impressions by the play’s metatheatrical devices. Although it continues to be marginalized by character criticism, *Coriolanus* participated in the formation of discourses that are still crucial to how audiences and critics understand characterization, a process inflected by both its technological and material origins in the imprint. Today, ‘character’ is associated more with humanity than technology, but *Coriolanus* uses the concept of the imprint to connect the craft of play-making and the machinery of the stage to what Charles Lamb in the early nineteenth century—dismissing the materiality of performance—called the ‘internal machinery of the character’.[[96]](#footnote-96) The game *Coriolanus* plays with the exposure of imprinted wounds, and later with silence, critiques the very processes by which audiences try to procure an impression of character depth and seal their knowledge of a universal humanity. That these concepts remain central to the cultural value of the Shakespeare ‘brand’, another term rooted in concepts of impression,[[97]](#footnote-97) makes the character who stamps and is stamped in the theatre a poignant figure for understanding Shakespeare’s perceived impressiveness and impressionability as a cultural phenomenon.

1. I wish to thank those people who generously offered advice on this essay at various stages of composition, including John Jowett, Tom Lockwood, Tom Healy, Ewan Fernie, Edward Gieskes, Sarah Dustagheer, Eoin Price, Victoria Yeoman, Will West and an anonymous reader at *Renaissance Drama*.

   All citations refer to *Coriolanus*, ed. Peter Holland (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2013). Quotations from other Shakespeare plays refer to *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Stanley Wells et al., 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is the definition of ‘stamp’ for which these lines are cited in *OED* (n.3 13f), *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed 15 June 2016 <http://www.oed.com>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. B. Parker, ed., *Coriolanus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 193n. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Holland notes that ‘stamp’ is used in such a way that ‘the image shifts across the word from being a flayed figure who may have suffered at the hands of Martius, bearing his stamp, to Martius himself who carries his own impress’ (*Coriolanus*, 198n). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Coriolanus as a technological entity, see Jonathan Sawday, “‘Forms as Never Were in Nature’: The Renaissance Cyborg,” in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*,ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 171-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See respectively: Janet Adelman, “‘Anger’s My Meat’: Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*,” in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature: Shakespearean Criticism in Honor of America's Bicentennial*, ed. David M. Bevington and Jay L. Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), 108-24; Zvi Jagendorf, “*Coriolanus*: Body Politic and Private Parts,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.4 (1990): 455-69; Eve Rachele Sanders, “The Body of the Actor in *Coriolanus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.4 (2006): 387-412. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cynthia Marshall, “Wound-Man: *Coriolanus*, Gender, and the Theatrical Construction of Interiority,” in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 93-118, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *OED* characterize v. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Andrew Mousley, for example, argues that the wounds are central to a ‘universalising effect’ in which the play ‘brings Coriolanus down to earth and forces him to recognise his “only human” needs and vulnerabilities’ (*Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 115, 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights, “Introduction,” in *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, ed. Yachnin and Slights (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-18, 7. ‘Transaction’ is also a key term for Edward Burns, who defines character as a ‘transaction’ or ‘creative perception, which constructs both observer and observed as its subjects’ (*Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Douglas Lanier, “‘Stigmatical in the Making’: The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 23.1 (December 1993): 81-112, 83; Justin Kolb, “‘To Me Comes a Creature’: Recognition, Agency, and the Properties of Character in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 45-60, 46-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On the key figures and priorities of new character criticism, see Yachnin and Slights, “Introduction,” and Yu Jin Ko, “Introduction,” in *Shakespeare’s Sense of Character: On the Page and from the Stage*, ed. Ko and Michael W. Shurgot (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 1-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 583. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Emma Smith, “Character in Shakespearean Tragedy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 89-103, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Michael Goldman, “Characterizing Coriolanus,” *Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 140-68; Cynthia Marshall, “Wound-Man”; Stephen Orgel, “What is a Character?” *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship* 8 (1995): 101-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Goldman, “Characterizing Coriolanus,” 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On Maurice Morgann’s combination of the language of character with the language of impression in his *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (London, 1777), see Burns, *Character*, 193-98. For A.C. Bradley, the ‘greatness of the tragic hero’ has a distinct connection to ‘the centre of the tragic impression’ (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, 4th ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 14). In the 1970s E.A.J. Honigmann championed Shakespeare’s ‘impressionistic devices’ of characterization (*Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies, The Dramatist’s Manipulation of Response* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 4). A more recent example is Yu Kin Ko’s reference to the ‘hallmarks of Hamlet’s singular character’ (“Introduction,” 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Allison P. Hobgood, “Introduction: Pondering Playgoers,” *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Tanya Pollard, *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 109, 107-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *OED* person n. 1, Etymology. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *OED* n. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *OED* n. 1, 3a. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. My explanation of *kharaktêr* as a term is primarily informed by *OED* character n. Etymology; Burns, *Character*, especially 5-6, 30-4; and James Diggle, ed., *Theophrastus: “Characters”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. On Theophrastan character-writing, see Diggle’s edition, and J.W. Smeed, *The “Theophrastan” Character: The History of a Literary Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare’s Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For a detailed discussion of the semantic shifts of ‘character’, see Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, “A Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals,” in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 301-23. On Shakespeare and his contemporaries’ use of ‘character’ and related terms, and the implications for how we think about character today, see Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*, 2nd ed (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 240-9; and Jonathan Goldberg, “Shakespearean Characters: The Generation of Silvia,” *Shakespeare’s Hand* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 10-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Michael Neill, “‘A book where one may read strange matters’: En-Visaging Character and Emotion on the Shakespearean Stage,” *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013): 246-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great* (London, 1590), sig. B1r. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. On the language of character and impression in *Hamlet*, see Burns, *Character*, 8-10 and 132-55 passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *OED* n. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *OED* character n. 12a, supposedly 1645+; Karen Newman, “Charactery,” *Essaying Shakespeare* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 111-22, 118-20. Also see Lynne Magnusson, “‘I paint him in the character’: Prose Portraits in *Coriolanus*,” *English Language Notes* 25.2 (December 1987): 33-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Donald Beecher, “Introduction,” in Thomas Overbury and others, *Characters*, ed. Beecher (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 2003), 11-103, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Richard Brathwait, *Whimzies: or, a new cast of characters* (London, 1631), A5v. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Thomas Overbury and others, *A Wife now the Widow of Sir Thomas Ouerburie … Whereunto are added Many Witty Characters, and Conceyted Newes; Written by Himselfe, and Other Learned Gentlemen his Friendes* (London, 1614). See Beecher, “Introduction,” 11-15, 104-8, 395 on the print history of the volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *OED* charactery n. 2; characterism n. 3; characterist n. 1. Joseph Hall, *Characters of Vertues and Vices* (London, 1608), sig. A5r. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Newman, “Charactery,” 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Holland (*Coriolanus*, 219n) and Neill (“En-Visaging Character,” 251) respectively interpret ‘character’ as meaning character-sketch and face, but the word evidently signifies both of these. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Newman, “Charactery”; Desmet, “Persistence,” 50-2; and Beecher, *Characters*, 49-50, 51-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See Richard A. McCabe, “Ben Jonson, Theophrastus, and the Comedy of Humours,” *Hermathena* 146 (1989): 25-37. The published play-texts of Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600) and *The New Inn* (1631) are prefaced by lists of *dramatis personae* which introduce the ‘persons’ and ‘actors’ of the plays through short, satirical prose sketches identified as ‘character[s]’ and ‘characterism[s]’. All citations of Ben Jonson refer to *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington et al., 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. They include John Day’s *Isle of Gulls* (first performed 1606; London, 1606) Induction, sig. A2v, Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (first performed 1606 and published 1607) I.i.5, and Middleton and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* (first performed and published 1611) Prologue.26, as well as the Webster examples that follow in the next note. References to *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *The Roaring Girl* are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington et al. (London: Norton, 2002). First performance dates are taken from *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*, ed. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, created 2007, accessed 15 June 2016 <http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. It is generally accepted that Webster authored over thirty characters for the sixth edition of *Overbury’s Characters* in 1615. See *New Characters* in *The Works of John Webster: An Old-Spelling Critical Edition*, ed. David Gunby et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995-2007), vol. 3, 439-533. Antonio’s characterisms of the Duchess and her brothers towards the beginning of *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623; first performed 1612-4, I.i.142-97), which delineate each sibling’s ‘inward Character’ (I.ii.147), are framed by the image of ‘three fair Medalls / Cast in one figure, of so different temper’ (I.ii.176-77). The description recalls Joseph Hall’s medal metaphor (‘who saw the medals, might know the face’), although the point is that the stamped form of the human face—an ‘outward character’—can actually disguise one’s true nature or ‘temper’. Also see *The White Devil* III.ii.78-102 (first performed and published 1612). Citations of Webster’s plays refer to Gunby et al., vol. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Critics have been particularly eager to distance Shakespearean characterization from early seventeenth-century charactery. See, for example, Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*, 241-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See, for example, André Bourassa, “Personnage: History, Philology, Performance,” in Yachnin and Slights (eds), *Shakespeare and Character*, 83-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Douglas Bruster, “The Representation Market of Early Modern England,” *Renaissance Drama* 41.1 (Fall 2013): 1-23, 2. My definition of characters as commodities inscribed by their exchange value is influenced by Arjun Appadurai’s anthropological theory of ‘the social life of things’ (“Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63). A recent exception to the critical neglect of the concept of character as theatrical commodity or commoditized theatrical process is Richard Preiss, “Interiority,” in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 47-70. Preiss explores the idea that dramatic interiority was ‘a site-specific technology’ (48) closely related to the use of enclosed playhouses charging standard admission from the 1570s onwards. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Holland, *Coriolanus*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Cynthia Marshall, “Shakespeare, Crossing the Rubicon,” *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000): 73-88, 74, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Plutarch, *The Liues of the Noble Grecians and Romanes, Compared Together by that Graue Learned Philosopher and Historiographer, Plutarke of Chaeronea*, trans. Thomas North, 2nd ed (London, 1595), 717. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The claim that Plutarch was familiar with Theophrastus’ *Kharaktíres* ‘cannot be substantiated’ (Diggle, *Theophrastus*, 26 and n77), but Plutarch’s historical characters bear some resemblance to Theophrastan characters, and his interest in *êthos* is significant given that—as Burns notes—‘Diogenes Laertius labelled the Theophrastan ‘characters’ *ethikoi characteres*, that is, characters dealing with *ethos*’ (*Character*, 34). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *The Fourth Volume of Plutarch's Lives Translated from the Greek, by Several Hands* (London, 1693), 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. John Dryden, “The Preface to the Play,” *Troilus and Cressida, or, Truth Found Too Late A Tragedy* (London, 1679), sig. b3v. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Sonia Massai, “‘Taking just care of the impression’: Editorial Intervention in Shakespeare’s Fourth Folio, 1685,” *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2007): 257-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. John Dryden, “The Life of Plutarch,” in *Plutarch's Lives: Translated from the Greek by Several Hands; to which is Prefixt the Life of Plutarch* (London, 1683), vol. 1, 90, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton, *Shakespeare: Staging the World* (London: British Museum, 2012), 132. On the bibliographical tradition of using numismatic images to illustrate the lives of Roman emperors, empresses and their families, or kings, queens and other great personages, see John Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious: The Numismatic Presence in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), and Christian Dekesel, *Bibliotheca Nummaria: A Bibliography of 16th Century Numismatic Books* (Crestline, CA: Kolbe, 1997). I would like to thank Barrie Cook, Curator of Medieval and Early Modern Coinage at the British Museum, for bringing this tradition to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Jagendorf, “*Coriolanus*,” 464. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See *OED* undercrest v.; unaching adj.; bewitchment n. 1; interjoin v.; unmusical adj. 2; virgin n. and adj., Derivatives v.; unvulnerable adj.; counterseal v. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. On the cases for and against *Coriolanus* being a Blackfriars play, see the introduction to Holland’s edition (*Coriolanus*, 73-77). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Horne-booke* (London, 1609), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See especially Adelman, “‘Anger’s My Meat’,” and Madelon Sprengnether, “Annihilating Intimacy in *Coriolanus*,”in *“Coriolanus”: Critical Essays*, ed. David Wheeler (London: Garland, 1995), 179-202. Readings of the wounds as tokens of femininity rest in part on the bawdy connotations of words like ‘cut’, ‘sore’ and ‘wound’, and thus while Coriolanus’ wounds should be signs of masculine dominance and strength (‘Every gash was an enemy’s grave’ (II.i.152) proclaims Menenius), they have the potential to ‘evoke the female aperture’ (Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. North, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Marshall, “Wound-Man,” 96, 95, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Pollard, *Shakespeare’s Theater*, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Burton Hatlen, “The ‘Noble Thing’ and the ‘Boy of Tears’: *Coriolanus* and the Embarrassments of Identity,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27.3 (1997): 393-420, 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Marshall, “Wound-man,” 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Sanders, “The Body of the Actor,” 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See, for example, Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare*, 154-5. It is not just the political arena that is theatricalized. General Cominius’ eulogy before the senate represents the battlefield as a stage on which Coriolanus has always confidently acted out his role as a manly warrior. He describes Coriolanus during his first battle at the age of sixteen as if he were a boy actor: ‘In that day’s feats, / When he might act the woman in the scene / He proved the best man i’th’ field’ (II.ii.93-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Marshall, “Wound-Man,” 104-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Paul Menzer, “Character Acting,” in *Shakespeare’s Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2013), 141-67, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller, and Other Works*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. R.A. Foakes,“Shakespeare’s Elizabethan Stages,” in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10-22, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Glynne Wickham et al., eds, *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Marshall, “Wound-man,” 107; Andrea Ria Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 52, 64. For more on how blood may have been staged in the early modern period, see Lucy Munro, “‘*They eat each other’s arms*’: Stage Blood and Body Parts,” in *Shakespeare’s Theatres*, ed. Karim-Cooper and Stern, 73-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Beecher, *Characters*, 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. On portraiture as a common analogy for acting, rhetoric and charactery, see Burns, *Character*, 123-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Lois Potter, “Seeing and Believing,” in *The Arts of Performance in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama: Essays for G.K. Hunter*, ed. Murray Biggs et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 113-23, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Sanders, “The Body of the Actor,” 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See, for example, Prospero’s solicitation of the audience’s ‘Gentle breath’ at the end of *The Tempest* (Epilogue.11-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Konrad Gesner’s *The Newe Jewell of Health* (London, 1576), for example, recommends an oil compound ‘which auayleth & cureth by a marueylous maner woundes, … in that it closeth them, and bringeth those to a scarre’(sig. V5r). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Dekker, *The Guls Horne-booke*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Marshall, “Wound-man,” 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *OED* v.1 1a. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric (1560)*, ed. Peter E. Medine (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Jagendorf, “*Coriolanus*,” 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Sanders, “The Body of the Actor,” 406-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibid., 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See, for example, Jonathan Sawday, “‘Forms as Never Were in Nature’,” 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Philip Brockbank, ed., *Coriolanus* (London: Methuen, 1976), 288n. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. For Glenn Arbery, the silence means that ‘the audience’s identification wavers for a moment between the character and the actor who plays him’ (“A Motley to the View: Staging Tragic Honor,” in *Souls with Longing: Representations of Honor and Love in Shakespeare*, ed. Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin A. Gish (Plymouth: Lexington, 2011), 261-82, 276). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ros King, *Shakespeare: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2011), 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Coriolanus later tells Aufidius ‘it is no little thing to make / Mine eyes to sweat compassion’ (V.iii.195-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. This is how Brockbank seems to interpret the silence (*Coriolanus*, 59-60). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Holland, *Coriolanus*, 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Charles Lamb, *Charles Lamb on Shakespeare*, ed. Joan Coldwell (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. In her exploration of the significance of applying the term ‘brand’ to Shakespeare, Kate Rumbold observes that the word allows us to recognise ‘Shakespeare as marker and mark’ in modern culture (“Brand Shakespeare?” *Shakespeare Survey* 64 (2011), 25-37, 37; *OED* brand n. 4a, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)