

2007

## "Twinned Brothers": the Parallel Personalities of Timon and Hamlet

Amanda Machado

*Rhode Island College*, [Starrynight8487@aol.com](mailto:Starrynight8487@aol.com)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors\\_projects](http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects)

 Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Machado, Amanda, ""Twinned Brothers": the Parallel Personalities of Timon and Hamlet" (2007). *Honors Projects Overview*. 11. [http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors\\_projects/11](http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects/11)

This Honors is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Projects at Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects Overview by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact [kayton@ric.edu](mailto:kayton@ric.edu).

“TWINNED BROTHERS”: THE PARALLEL  
PERSONALITIES OF TIMON  
AND HAMLET

By

Amanda Machado

An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Honors

in

The Department of English

The School of Arts and Sciences

Rhode Island College

2007

*Timon of Athens* is one of the most unpopular and neglected of all of William Shakespeare's plays. Written sometime between 1607 and 1608, in close proximity to such tragedies as *Hamlet* (c. 1600), *Othello* (c. 1603-1604), and *King Lear* (c. 1605), it has been routinely excluded from both school curricula and "general studies of [the] tragedies" (Charney 306) and received so little attention compared to more famous works that many people may well be unaware of its existence. Literary critics who have studied the play appear to have been largely disappointed with it, perhaps after attempting to judge it against the other tragedies and finding it simply too different to measure up. For instance, Frank Kermode mentioned that the "diatribes against whoredom and greed, against nature itself" in *Timon* "lack the depth of passages in *King Lear* which they inevitably recall" and that "there is no relief from the necessity to express without remission a hatred of humanity," and called the play itself "a bitter, loveless exercise" (Age 165, 167-8).

Indeed, it seems that encountering *Timon*, when they were expecting another *Lear* or *Hamlet*, must have put many critics and audiences off since its first publication in the First Folio of 1623. It has become generally accepted that the play is unfinished, abandoned by Shakespeare with its plot still sharply divided into two distinct halves, its characters seriously underdeveloped, and its text terribly irregular, perhaps as a result of its being a collaboration (Kermode, *Language* 231). I will not endeavor to retrieve a "correct" text here and do not intend to argue with its confused state. However, in light of a few of the more recent articles dealing with *Timon*, I would contest the conclusion that the play deserves to be ignored. While Francelia Butler's account of *Timon*'s critical history revealed readers who could not move beyond the incoherence of the text itself and therefore gave up their study of it, as well as others who

concentrated on meaning and character but did not delve very deeply into them, I have come across some who have taken an entirely different approach in examining the play, one, in fact, which shows that it has a level of comparability to some of the great tragedies – specifically, and especially, to *Hamlet*. The two plays are usually discussed separately, yet when one considers some newer studies, significant connections can be drawn between *Timon* and *Hamlet*.

Perhaps if Shakespeare had continued to work on *Timon* longer, it might have come to resemble *Hamlet* in many noticeable ways; even as it is, certain theoretical viewpoints illuminate elements in the plays that suggest that *Timon* is an attempt at a more Jacobean reimagining of the earlier Elizabethan drama. *Timon* may clearly lack *Hamlet*'s richness and complexity of plot and character, as well as the ability to draw the reader or viewer into the story, but the glaring differences between these tragedies, along with what similarities can be found, are very useful in providing new angles from which to explore *Timon*. In this essay, I will examine the plays by focusing on their respective protagonists, using *Hamlet* as a critical tool for studying *Timon* via a comparative analysis of their personalities, and on the historical and political issues that have influenced these works. Identifying and supporting the similarities and differences between the plays with theoretical evidence will likely help those who have struggled with or ignored *Timon* to better focus on the play by taking it out of the critical limbo it has long inhabited and placing it in a psychological, political, and historical context.

Critical responses to *Timon*, both as a play and as a character, have shifted many times over the centuries as different ways of reading and interpreting it have come into prominence. It has always proved difficult to develop a satisfactory understanding of the play, and it has, therefore, always been problematic even when critiques were generally positive. However, they have been negative more often than not and have seldom consisted of anything more than a

surface evaluation. According to Butler, a great deal of work has been done on *Timon's* structure, and many early critics who found the development of the action incoherent concluded that without "causal interrelation," there could be no consistent meaning in the piece at all (75). Those who were primarily interested in meaning, such as William Dodd and Lawrence Babb, either studied *Timon* in terms of "the 'beauties' or moral aphorisms, or the special studies," which usually traced some element such as melancholy through a number of additional plays, or looked at the characters' personalities only insofar as they represent "moral instruction" (75-76). The most widespread interpretation of *Timon* by neoclassical critics, including Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, was that it served as a warning against the type of "ostentatious liberality" exhibited by the protagonist (76). In their estimation, the character himself seemed unsympathetic, foolish, and sometimes rather annoying. Soellner asserts that the rampant cynicism of *Timon* and the play in general, without any completely honest or redeeming characters to relieve its weight on the audience/reader, has played a large role in turning people away from *Timon*. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it was not uncommon to alter pessimistic plays, as was done with *King Lear*, and many lighter versions of *Timon* were produced by other playwrights during the period (Soellner 5).

Methods of criticism changed in the nineteenth century. The character of *Timon* was then "glorified as the Noble Spirit," idealized and admired for being an idealist (Nuttall xx). He was seen by many critics, including Samuel Singer, as a man who "thinks more of the pleasure of his guests than of his own pleasure; who is principally interested in kind and good actions; who is neither dissolute nor intemperate," and so one could feel sympathy toward him when he was forced to face harsh reality and suffer the ingratitude of those he had treated with such beneficence (Butler 80). Some Romantic critics also endeavored to connect *Timon* to

Shakespeare, portraying the character as “an ideal projection of Shakespeare himself confronting the real world” (79). Not everyone agreed with these assessments, but such notions apparently had some staying power; there are modern critics, such as G. Wilson Knight, who still subscribe to them in one form or another, even though twentieth-century criticism has largely returned to a more skeptical view of *Timon* (85). Today’s editors and critics who consider this play at all often give it only a brief, cursory overview with little character analysis and, sometimes as bluntly as Kermode does (“Of *Timon of Athens* I shall say little”), express how little they think of it (Age 165).

A fair amount of the most recent criticism, however, has taken a much more psychoanalytical look at the character of *Timon*, an approach which provides a perfect opportunity to compare this apparently flat, shallow character with one who would seem to be his polar opposite, *Hamlet*. Janet Adelman has written several articles about the role of women, particularly mothers, in Shakespeare’s plays, and illustrated the importance of the relationship with the female to the psychological state of various protagonists. With *Hamlet*, she emphasizes the internal conflict that arises when a man is forced to confront what he perceives as the horrific realities of female sexuality, an issue that is also fundamental to *Timon*; and in *Timon*, she examines the “defensive function of the fantasy of male bounty” (Adelman 166). Her work, along with an article by Coppelia Kahn on maternal power and betrayal and the idea of endless male bounty, sheds light on the nature of *Timon*’s illusions and his response to having them irrevocably destroyed.

Avi Erlich explores yet another facet of psychology that is common to both *Hamlet* and *Timon*: narcissism. Narcissism is linked to maternal relations and usually involves a mindset that causes one to live in a self-centered fantasy, seriously inhibiting one’s ability to function

successfully in the world of reality. This condition is described as stemming from a sense of betrayal by the mother and is traced extensively through *Timon* by Erlich, corresponding amazingly well to the protagonist's personality and building upon the writings of Adelman and Kahn. Erlich's article also bears a connection to a different sort of personality study, Piotr Sadowski's dynamic character analysis. This method is not as comprehensive as psychoanalysis, but it can be understood in such a way that, especially where narcissism is concerned, it seems to have psychoanalytical implications. For example, the exostatic character type, under which Sadowski places Hamlet, exhibits dramatic and self-centered behavior that recalls the characteristics of narcissism and could be applied to Timon's behavior as well. The psychoanalytical criticism of these plays helps corroborate the claim by L.C. Knights that "[w]hat we have in *Hamlet* – as in *Othello* and, less successfully, in *Timon* – is the exploration and implicit criticism of a particular state of mind or consciousness. It is an extremely complex state of mind, in which reason and emotion, attitudes towards the self and toward other persons and the world at large, are revealed both directly and through a series of encounters" (49).

In addition to the preceding theories, I will also study *Timon* and *Hamlet* in light of New Historicism, which, as Ross C. Murfin says in his introduction to *Hamlet*, views literature as being "caught in a web of historical conditions, relationships, and influences" (*Hamlet* 368). Kahn confirms that psychoanalysis and New Historicism are interrelated in *Timon* because "in articulating this fantasy [of women and power] . . . Shakespeare draws upon the cultural forms that constituted patronage in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods: gift-giving and credit finance, then known as usury" (35). The anxiety surrounding the practices of James I plays into the "core fantasy" (35) of *Timon* and thus helps us determine his motivation; likewise, public anxiety over English succession, such as Kermode describes ("If the successor was not

proclaimed immediately, anarchy threatened”), is easily seen in *Hamlet* (23). A look at the historical and political situations connected to these two tragedies will nicely supplement the psychoanalytical approaches I will take and add another dimension to an exploration of Timon’s and Hamlet’s personalities.

## I

In order to begin an analysis of *Timon*, it might help, as a preliminary, to take a brief and slightly more detailed look at the play’s unusual structure. Kermode’s summary of the plot reveals, as mentioned above, a clear division into two distinct halves, as well as a short sequence of transitional scenes (233). The segments are not joined seamlessly, but it is therefore all the easier to distinguish them. The first part of the play deals with Timon the bounteous benefactor, beloved by noblemen, senators and servants alike for his inclination to give lavish banquets and freely distribute extravagant gifts:

You see how all conditions, how all minds,  
As well of glib and slipp’ry creatures as  
Of grave and austere quality, tender down  
Their services to Lord Timon. His large fortune,  
Upon his good and gracious nature hanging,  
Subdues and properties to his love and tendance  
All sorts of hearts . . . . . (*Timon* I.i.52-59)

We learn from the conversation between the poet and the painter, an example of the *paragone*\*, that Timon has a large and glowing reputation with people all over Athens and that his treatment of them has put him in what seems to be a position of power over them, for they are all put in his debt and service when they accept his offerings. This section also consists of several



“systematically arranged exempla of Timon’s excessive generosity” (Kermode, *Language* 233) in the form of a procession of Athenians who need assistance and who walk away with far more than they could have hoped for from Timon, who refuses repayment of any kind, as well as in the form of the Banquet of Sense.

The Banquet of Sense, another set piece like the *paragone*, is worth closer consideration, for it plays an important role in defining Timon’s sense of self and can therefore provide insight into his personality. While the tradition of the *paragone* was primarily concerned with matters of an artistic nature, the Banquet of Sense dealt with issues of morality. Often, as in Marvell’s poem *Dialogue between the resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*, it was used to uphold Virtue over Vice, with the banqueter rejecting the temptation of a banquet which, in its ability to gratify all of the earthly senses but none of the spiritual ones, represents the latter (Kermode, *Shakespeare* 84-5). Alternatively, the banqueter may have been portrayed in the midst of indulging his senses in the banquet, but in such a way that “the emphasis is on danger rather than on dissipation,” or the banquet itself may have appeared as part of an argument over spiritual versus natural pleasures, as in Jonson’s play *The New Inn* (88, 90-93). In *Timon*, the second example seems the most fitting, for Timon and his guests do not hesitate to enjoy the pleasures of the banquet; this behavior reflects on Timon as a character, not only in the sense of how the audience understands him, but also in the sense of Timon’s perception of himself. As noted above, Timon has always been praised by those around him and called generous and noble because of the excesses he presents to his guests, and Kermode adds that the banquet demonstrates that Timon believes what they say, that his view of “honor and nobility” is inextricably tied to wealth and “lavish entertainments” (96). The masque and the second banquet, discussed below, are part of an “unspoken criticism of Timon’s misconception of Honor and Nobility” (97).

The transition to the second half begins when Flavius finally confesses to Timon what he has told the audience in an aside at the end of the banquet – Timon is ruined. One truly feels the irony inherent in the play at this point, for when Timon, disbelieving and panicked upon hearing the news of his financial situation, consoles himself with the thought that his friends will help him and sends to them for money, they not only turn his servants away but also proceed to call in the debts he owes to them. Fortune has apparently turned her back on the lord, and all who once followed him “let him slip down” now that they can no longer profit from him (I.i.88); the poet’s prediction in the *paragone* has come true. The Banquet of Sense is also repeated here as the play approaches its second half, but this new banquet, while it still occurs in Timon’s hall and features what seems to be the usual gracious host, is actually an inversion or, one may say, a perversion of the earlier gathering. No senses are satisfied this time, for Timon serves only hot water, stones, harsh words, and (in some productions) beatings to his guests before chasing them all out in his fury. The false banquet visits Timon’s revenge on the men who abandoned him in his time of need; it signifies that he realizes that his understanding of honor was mistaken and is the first step in his transformation into a misanthrope.

When at last we come to the second half of the play, we discover that Timon has once again gone to the extreme, though in a fashion opposite to his previous behavior. He is now Misanthropos, the cave-dwelling hermit who spends his days hating and cursing all of humanity. The irony of inversion or perversion runs throughout this part of the play because most everything that happens here correlates to an occurrence from the first half. For example, Timon is still as excessive in his hatred as he once was with money and gifts, going far beyond what is necessary in his railing against mankind given the nature of the wrongs committed against him:

..... Let not thy sword skip one.

.....  
 ..... Spare not the babe  
 Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy;  
 Think it a bastard whom the oracle  
 Hath doubtfully pronounced the throat shall cut,  
 And mince it sans remorse. Swear against objects;  
 Put armor on thine ears and on thine eyes,  
 Whose proof nor yells of mothers, maids, nor babes,  
 Nor sight of priests in holy vestments bleeding,  
 Shall pierce a jot. .... (IV.iii.111, 119-27)

The procession of suitors in the first half also returns when another string of visitors, many of them the same people who came to the banquet, come to Timon in his cave to beg money from him once more. For Timon does have money again after finding it buried nearby in the woods, though what he truly wants to dig up now is not gold, but roots to eat. But in his new incarnation as Misanthropos, Timon desires only to give disease, suffering, and death to those who visit him. On the occasions that he does decide to give generously of his gold, as with the whores Phrynia and Timandra, it is only on the condition that they will spread disease and destruction to the rest of humanity and then fall victim to it themselves. “Make large confusion; and, thy fury spent, / confounded be thyself!” (IV.iii.128-29) In the play’s second half, Timon basically becomes the opposite of what he is in the first half, and yet his two personalities are remarkably similar and consistent in their extremity; likewise, the structure of each section of the play serves as an ironic mirror.

Another factor one might take into account in order to understand the uneven nature of *Timon* is the divergent style of the verse. Critics have long since recognized it as a collaborative work, beginning with Charles Knight in 1839 (Butler 15). Knight noted that several scenes did not seem to fit into the play structurally and, upon closer examination, that their style also did not seem to be consistent with that of Shakespeare. “They contained jingling couplets and crude prose, the kind of writing which belonged to an earlier period in English Literature” (15). In his observations, he generally agreed with the earlier assessment of Samuel Johnson, and after many successive studies of the play by various editors and critics, a sort of consensus seems to have arisen regarding which scenes were penned by Shakespeare and which were the products of his collaborator. For instance, Butler includes a table which shows that I.i.1-185, with a few lines more or less, was declared Shakespearean by seven of the nine critics whom she features, ranging from 1839 to 1924, while all eight of those who answered definitively (Sykes believed it impossible to distinguish with certainty Shakespeare’s influence in the play, which he attributed to Middleton and Day) found most of II.ii.4-131 to be the work of another playwright (39-41).

Some of the more modern opinions of the play’s authorship seem to go along with the collaboration theory in a number of cases as well. Kermode, for example, describes at length how the *paragone*, included under Shakespeare’s name by the majority of the above critics, exhibits his characteristic style:

The *Paragone* scene is fully written in a characteristically contorted style. The Poet’s account of his art in a sense belies itself . . . . Johnson called this “very obscure” . . . . But in the verse of the mature Shakespeare, such disconnections and collocations are common; we have seen how powerful the “ill sorted” images of Lady Macbeth could be (“Was the

hope drunk / Wherein you dress'd yourself?") and sometimes ill-sortedness can occur without comparable power, as here. (*Language* 233-34)

Conversely, the scene in which Apemantus and the Fool speak with the servants who are awaiting Timon's payments to their lords (II.ii.47-126), which most of the critics rejected as Shakespeare's work, is still dismissed even today and was not included in such performances as Jonathan Miller's 1981 production of *Timon*. This passage contains, after all, some of the same jingling and crude language that Dr. Johnson complained of in his critiques, sparse and choppy compared with the convoluted, carefully crafted lines of the *paragone*:

CAPHIS. Stay, stay; here comes the fool with Apemantus.

Let's ha' some sport with 'em.

VARRO'S SERVANT. Hang him, he'll abuse us.

ISIDORE'S SERVANT. A plague upon him, dog!

VARRO'S SERVANT. How dost, fool?

APEMANTUS. Dost dialogue with thy shadow?

VARRO'S SERVANT. I speak not to thee.

APEMANTUS. No, 'tis to thyself. . . . (II.ii.47-54)

Arguments for the collaboration theory used sections like this for support, and though there were periods when more critics favored the idea that the play was simply a rough draft that was never actually meant to be published (Kermode, *Language* 231-32), it is true in any case that the confusion caused by the state of the text has played a large part in preventing *Timon* from ever gaining critical acclaim.

## II

In spite of the many textual and structural obstacles found in *Timon*, the play has its thematically sound moments and would have engaged an audience of the period. For example, the issues raised in the *paragone* and the Banquet of Sense would have been familiar and helped to ground the play in a context to which the typical Jacobean playgoer could relate. In addition to these set pieces, there is another socio-political element that would have spoken to a contemporary audience even more strongly, for it was bound up not in moral or artistic debates, but in the very fabric of the English government and economy: the patronage system.

Timon's court is an example of the Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition of gift-exchange gone terribly wrong; if he were not so extreme in his largesse, audiences would hardly have been able to fault Timon for giving generously to his guests, for patronage was an established and important part of the government at the time and was meant to provide a "trickle-down effect" for the nobles and to organize class structures (Kahn 41). There were certain "rules" for the operation of the patronage system, specifically that the monarch would give gifts of offices, titles, land, favors, or money, to name just a few possibilities, in exchange for the patrons' "attendance at court, service (real or delegated) to the sovereign, flattery . . . and in turn secondary patronage to other suitors" (42). In this way, wealth circulated and loyalty to the monarch, whether genuine or for self-serving purposes, was promoted. It was also generally expected, of course, that gifts would be given in the proportion to which a suitor deserved them and that services performed would be reciprocated. However, it seems that this ideal vision of the system was often manipulated or distorted, sometimes through necessity and sometimes for more questionable reasons.

During Elizabeth's reign, for instance, the patronage system was especially crucial; according to Kahn, "without a professional army or a paid bureaucracy, Elizabeth had to entice

her courtiers into executing her will” (41). She was, after all, a woman holding a position of power that was usually occupied by a man and had to assert herself as ruler. She bent the rules of the patronage system in the direction of nonreciprocation, meaning she did not reward all gifts and services as her patrons would expect and demand, but fashioned herself as a virgin queen and an unattainable Petrarchan mistress so that courtiers would compete for rewards and be that much more eager to serve her (Scott 47-8). This method drew much criticism and had often complicated and contradictory results:

Indeed, by practicing royal liberality, Elizabeth risked granting ambitious young men such as the Earl of Essex very real influence and power that could potentially undermine her own. On the other hand, to give was to exercise power, and so in withholding her gifts, the queen was left oddly vulnerable. Indeed, she was frequently subjected to a form of criticism routinely advanced against the sonnet mistress; she was charged with ingratitude and, importantly, with failing to maintain proper bonds through the honorable exchange of gifts. (48)

In any case, while there may have been some confusion in Elizabeth’s patronage system, the overall conditions of the economy during her reign seem to have been positive; for example, G.B. Harrison wrote that “[t]he old Queen demanded only what was necessary,” and reference has been made to the “outwardly fruitful and noble idyll of Penshurst and to the balanced provision of Elizabethan England” (Scott 27).

For several years, however, during the waning of the health of the virgin queen, serious concern was already widespread due to the fact that there was no heir and the future of the

country was, therefore, uncertain. Elizabeth's accession had quieted a terrible, ongoing upheaval, during which Mary, Queen of Scots, had cruelly persecuted Protestants while attempting to reestablish Catholicism as the national religion. The question of who would become the next monarch would directly affect whether England would encounter civil strife or peace in the years to come, depending upon whether he or she was Protestant or Catholic, militant or pacifist. Unfortunately, the number of possible candidates was bewilderingly high, meaning that almost anything could have happened:

The centuries of dynastic marriage had indeed created a situation in which most of the crowned heads of Europe could claim each others thrones with some degree of plausibility. . . . As a result of divorces and marriages [of Henry VIII] there had been provided in the last fourteen years of his reign three different acts laying down the succession . . . There were, in effect, about a dozen people who in the 1590s could present themselves, with varying degrees of optimism, as the future occupants of Elizabeth's throne. (Hurstfield 372)

The traditional succession from parent to child had been disrupted, and now the throne would have to be taken by some distant relative, possibly a foreigner whose only connection to the country was marriage. Such situations made people wary. The plight of England during the succession crisis is echoed clearly in *Hamlet*, where Claudius' accession in place of the king's own son is dwelt upon at length in an atmosphere of dread.

It is no wonder that when James I ascended the throne after Elizabeth's death in 1603 and began to make drastic changes to the scale of the exchange system, people became anxious. His accession did not quell the unease in his new kingdom, but merely transferred it from issues of



religion and succession to those of politics, economy, and hierarchy. The king made a complete reversal of Elizabeth's fairly (some might say overly) conservative patronage policy, giving almost unscrupulously where she had denied reciprocation of gifts. Some of his most extreme instances of generosity were directed toward his royal favorites, young men whom he raised up to powerful positions from sometimes very obscure ones. The attention given to favorites was a serious blow to the exchange system, judging from the outrage it caused among those who witnessed it. The case of Robert Carr is a fine example: "Samuel Calvert complained thus in a letter to William Trumbell (3 August 1612) that, 'Carr's continual favor' was 'the misery of [the] age'; [and] the Earl of Suffolk confirm[ed] the undue monopoly of James's gift, meanwhile, in a letter to Sir John Harington which states simply that, 'Carr hath all the favors'" (Scott 126).

Robert Carr and George Villiers were two of the best-known favorites, whose apparently undeserved (due to their low hereditary social status) wealth and prestigious titles, as well as their intimate relationship with the king, blocked the flow of gift exchange by inserting "middle men," so to speak, between James and his other patrons and blurred the very divisions between social classes that the patronage system was meant to delineate. The situation became so serious that an anonymous document, entitled *The Court of the Most Illustrious and Most Magnificent James, the first, King of Great-Britaine, France, and Ireland: and C. with Divers, rules, most pure precepts, and selected definitions lively delineated*, was produced to explain the proper protocol for exchanging gifts and was dedicated to Villiers (127).

According to Davies, this outpouring of generosity by James to his favorites often required the king to borrow money from private parties to support the continuation of the practice, but that, being essentially penniless, he seldom paid back these loans:

He lived in a kind of vicious circle because his failure to settle his

accounts promptly was offset by the exorbitant charges of merchants who risked supplying him with goods. . . . [W]hen unable to reward his favorites with presents of money, he often granted them monopolies or permitted them to accept bribes in order that others should secure monopolies. (331)

In addition, far from burdening only the nobles, the repercussions of James's habits did indeed trickle down in the manner that wealth was meant to under the patronage system, for this extravagant court and its relocations to various parts of the country were kept up at the expense of the common people, who were made to provide supplies as well as animals and carts for transportation (Scott 27). Kahn's overall estimation of James's effect on the economy was that, "By 1608, after five years of peace, [he] had incurred nearly £600,000 in debt, six times that which Elizabeth has accumulated after fifteen years of war. He ended his reign owing £1,000,000" (42). In this excessive generosity, one can clearly see the image of Timon, and by the same token, a Jacobean audience would have been able to see just as clearly in Timon the representation of James.

### III

The uncertain state of the English government and economy in the early seventeenth century and the general sense of foreboding that can be read in the letters of various people who lived during the period were pervasive in Jacobean society, and so it is not unreasonable to expect that some of the psychological implications of this socio-political situation should have found their way into drama. The nobility and general public, and clearly Shakespeare as well,

were in a troubled state of mind for much of the first decade of the century, and hence the anxious behavior of the protagonists Timon and Hamlet were both born out of different facets of the same historical event.

The connection between the situation in Jacobean England and the psychology of Timon, as I have mentioned, was pointed out by Kahn in her observation of Shakespeare's use of the language and "cultural forms" of patronage to articulate the primary fantasy, related to women and power, that Timon harbors (35). Specifically, he wants to believe that he has a limitless source of wealth, or perhaps more accurately, he *needs* to believe that he *is* a limitless source of wealth in and of himself, for only then will he be able to defend himself against the threat of the female's power over men. This power originates in the mother/infant relationship, in which the mother, if so inclined, "can betray, denying nurturance or life itself to her son" (Adelman 166). That the most prominent portrayal of a woman in the play is the poet's description of Fortune on her hill, exhibiting the great fickleness of her whims as she "spurns down her late beloved" (I.i.85), speaks a great deal about the play's and Timon's attitude toward the female; in short, she is unreliable and unpredictable, and any male who is forced to rely on her for sustenance, as an infant relies on its mother's milk, stands the risk of being abandoned and essentially left for dead. In addition, the vivid images of innumerable men "labor[ing] on the bosom of this sphere / To propagate their state" and the "quick blows of Fortune" (in which Oliver suggests that "quick" indicates "pregnant," as in the following line), notably phrased in feminine terms, communicate an acute awareness in the play and its characters of exactly how heavily a woman's capacity to produce and provide bears on that of a man to do the same (I.i.66-67, 91). Only through her, by seeking her nurturance and support, can he hope to accomplish anything for himself, from surviving infancy to accumulating wealth or "propagating" children of his own.

The disquieting “sense of infantile dependency” (Kahn 37) that results from this relationship can only be entirely surmounted if the female body can somehow be replaced by a male body with the same generative and nurturing powers, allowing the dangerous woman to be removed and the man to live free from dependence on something that cannot be trusted. Timon’s efforts to cope with such fears of maternal betrayal and power by building a stable if illusory reality are evident in his words and behavior at the gathering in Act I as well as in the composition of his court. First of all, the crowd of suitors is conspicuously devoid of women. Senators, artists, merchants, and servants congregate in Timon’s hall, but not one of them is female or has a wife, daughter or other female relative with him. The old Athenian speaks of his daughter, but only in such a context that she serves as just one more opportunity for Timon to enforce his role as the source of bounty.

TIMON. This gentleman of mine hath served me long;

To build his fortune I will strain a little,

For ‘tis a bond in men. Give him thy daughter:

What you bestow, in him I’ll counterpoise,

And make him weigh with her.

OLD MAN.                                   Most noble lord,

Pawn me to this your honor, she is his.

TIMON. My hand to thee; mine honor on my promise.

LUCILIUS. Humbly I thank your lordship. Never may

That state or fortune fall into my keeping

Which is not owed to you! (I.i.142-51)

Likewise, the few women who do physically appear in the first half of the play, as dancers in the masque of the Amazons, do not actually appear *as women*; we do not get a sense of them as beings capable of providing nourishment or generating life, but, rather, they represent the earthly senses that are being satisfied by Timon at the feast. Cupid announces to Timon and the guests that they, the senses and dancers, come “To gratulate thy plenteous bosom. There, / Taste, touch, all, pleased from thy table rise; / They only now come but to feast thine eyes” (I.ii.121-23).

Therefore, these women are also devices by which Timon is praised as the provider of satisfaction, establishing his fantasy more firmly. As Adelman points out, the male guests dance with the Amazons in order to “show their loves” to Timon, so the latter “exist only to enable other men to adore him” (169). By basically denying the existence of women as *women*, bearers of life and nourishing milk, and reducing them to conduits of praise for himself, Timon eliminates his “competition” for the right to provide bounty and makes it easier for his defensive fantasy of male bounty to exist.

Second, Timon protects his position as the sole source of wealth by denying reciprocity of his gifts: “Honest Ventidius. You mistake my love: / I gave it freely ever; and there’s none / Can truly say he gives, if he receives” (I.ii.9-11). Not only can bounty not come from women in Timon’s fantasy, it also cannot come from *any* source outside himself, not even grateful friends, for to acknowledge such circumstances would undermine his new identity. “[Timon’s] entire sense of himself turns on denying reciprocity, hence denying his dependence on others” (Adelman 167). Of course, since Timon cannot actually produce an endless supply of wealth from his own body, we know that he must accept gifts from others on occasion in order to gain the finances required to continue his lavish giving. But that he is so deeply in debt indicates that acceptances are vastly outnumbered by rejections, or perhaps that there is a tendency to accept

and then reciprocate that gift immediately afterward, thus diminishing the importance of his suitor's offering. We see examples of both at the banquet, first in Timon's accepting "Four milk-white horses trapped in silver" from Lord Lucius after turning away many other gifts, and then in his acceptance of greyhounds and a hunting invitation from Lord Lucullus, "Not without fair reward" (I.ii.180, 88). Indeed, Timon can barely stand to be reciprocated in praise or pledges of service, as is evident in his repeated interruptions of the lords as they are leaving:

FIRST LORD. We are so virtuously bound –

TIMON. And so

Am I to you.

SECOND LORD. So infinitely endeared –

TIMON. All to you. Lights, more lights! (I.ii.223-25)

With these strategies of denial in operation, Timon fashions for himself a fantastical reality in which all wealth is magically produced from his own body, allowing him to evict the changeable Lady Fortune from her position of power and usurp her hilltop throne. There, he is safe from the anxiety of dependency on an untrustworthy provider and can act as a constant and unbiased "nourish-father" (Kahn 43) for the male masses still struggling in his wake. In his indiscriminate generosity, he becomes what the dependent male child may wish his mother to be but fears that she is not – an unconditional source of limitless love and nurturance – and in many cases goes beyond anything his patrons could have hoped for:

If I want gold, steal but a beggar's dog

And give it Timon – why, the dog coins gold.

If I would sell my horse and buy twenty more

Better than he – why, give my horse to Timon;

Ask nothing, give it him – it foals me straight  
 And able horses. No porter at his gate,  
 But rather one that smiles and still invites  
 All that pass by. . . . . (II.i.5-12)

Timon, indeed, seems to be the ideal mother, for although the fear of infantile dependency motivates him to find safety in his fantasy, he does not use his “magic of bounty” (I.i.6) to provide only for himself. Upon achieving this goal, he immediately attempts to lighten the burden of other men who labor under the same tenuous conditions that he once did, allowing them to trust in their provider.

However, there is another side to Timon’s behavior that does not cast him in such a positive light but, instead, “awakens our suspicions” (Kahn 39). By denying reciprocity in gifts and praise and by constantly trying to outdo his friends who pledge their indebtedness to him, Timon not only makes himself the sole source of bounty, but also holds himself in a position of superiority over others, as the image of the throne on the hill suggests. If one understands his actions in this way, Timon’s generosity becomes more about his need to feel exalted and to subjugate others than a desire to help them or even to save himself from maternal dependency. Kahn claims that Timon’s “bantering courtesy” to Ventidius “belies an awareness [although one hidden from his conscious thought] of the manipulateness, the bad faith, the obsessiveness of his behavior. But he wants to stay on top, the phoenix of generosity in Athens, renowned for a lavishness that, though it benefits all comers, keeps them in awe” (40). Most likely, both this buried desire for dominance and attention and the fear of maternal betrayal work together to motivate Timon, and, in terms of these facets of his personality, we can put a name to his thought processes and read him as a narcissist.

Simply put, a narcissist is one whose perception of reality is distorted, usually in a self-centered fashion, and who, therefore, has extreme difficulty relating to the world around him or her except on what Avi Erlich calls an “infantile” level. An infant’s or young child’s perception, he explains, is generally confused and overly simplistic, such that it often cannot properly distinguish between self and other and tends to form shifting judgments and improbable expectations about itself and others (Erlich 217). Most people grow out of these perceptions and gradually come to a mature understanding of the complexity of the world, but the narcissist does not, continuing “even as an adult, to live with caricatures” rather than fully-formed human beings (217). If we think of Timon as a narcissist, then his infantile fear of maternal betrayal is further substantiated. It may be due to his failure to develop an adult’s perception that he dwells on his own helplessness in the face of a lack of mother’s milk and his need to compensate for that lack with his own bounty. He casts the woman into the role of fickle Fortune and himself as a great and powerful male benefactor with the power to overthrow her, both exaggerated views of reality. In doing so he superimposes himself onto the nursing mother and confuses their identities. The generosity Timon shows to everyone around him, then, serves not only as a safe alternative to female bounty or an effort to gain glory, but also as a defense against his lack of a stable self. “[T]he narcissist’s overriding wish is to shield his slender self and to mask his infantile modes as dazzling virtues. As long as he can, he shines in grandiose public display . . .” (219). The praise and friendship Timon gleans from others helps him to hide his shortcomings in the realm of relations to humanity, all the while keeping others at a distance and loosening the control of Fortune in his life, at least in appearance.

It is in his narcissism that Timon, still in the midst of his fantasy world, most resembles Hamlet, who, as we first see him, is desperately trying to maintain his own illusions as they



begin to crumble. The Danish prince exhibits many of the same types of behavior as Timon, though in a less extreme manner, and they can be traced to a desire to protect himself from closely related anxieties. Thus, this character, who is more round and accessible to readers and audiences, reflects aspects of the difficult Timon and can support a comparable psychological inquiry.

First, on the subject of narcissism, John Russell has made a lengthy examination of Hamlet's penchant for forming ideas or opinions about the people around him that overlook and grossly exceed all rational views of reality. These judgments do not concern all men or all women, however, but are restricted to Hamlet's family, particularly his parents. His uncle/stepfather Claudius, for example, is guilty of both fratricide and regicide, but even before any evidence of this has been revealed to him, Hamlet "ignores the King's patent capacities [and] disparages him in the most exaggerated and demeaning terms" (Russell 41-42). As far as Hamlet knows at the beginning of the play, Claudius has married the queen and tried to steer the kingdom toward peace: "Claudius at once asserts himself as a stabilizing factor in an unsettled situation. He confidently resolves the first international crisis of his kingship, Fortinbras's threat of war" (41). To most people, such actions would probably be enough to win the new king some measure of favor, regardless of the circumstances of his marriage, but Hamlet does not see things this way; Claudius has married Gertrude and he is not her "true" husband (that is, not Hamlet's father) and that makes him seem menacing, evil.

Conversely, Hamlet tends to praise and idealize his father, the old King Hamlet, as if he were some sort of deity and not a simple mortal man:

See what a grace was seated on this brow:  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,  
 A station like the herald Mercury  
 New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,  
 A combination and a form indeed,  
 Where every god did seem to set his seal  
 To give the world assurance of a man. (*Hamlet* III.iv.55-62)

As for his mother, it is plain that Hamlet wishes to exalt and idolize her as well, that he has probably done so in the past, but her relationship with a beast like Claudius and her failure to show proper grief over her first husband's death are threatening to make an ideal vision of her impossible to uphold. Therefore, he begs her:

..... Confess yourself to heaven,  
 Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,  
 And do not spread the compost on the weeds  
 To make them ranker. ....  
 .....  
 ..... Refrain to-night,  
 And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
 To the next abstinence, the next more easy. (III.iv.149-52, 165-67)

A second element of the narcissistic personality that can be observed in Hamlet is a tendency toward exhibitionism. Piotr Sadowski makes several interesting observations in this area using the theory of dynamism of character, which can be read psychoanalytically and provide a clear link to Timon. Dynamism of character is an approach to personality assessment that categorizes the personality based on the interaction of three mental components. These are

the persona, or the facet of oneself that is formed by and presented to society; the ego, which deals with the individual's self-identity and personal needs; and the unconscious (Sadowski 34-35). It is the balance, or a lack thereof, of these components that influences the functioning of the mind and, hence, the behavior of the individual. Sadowski explains that the "measure of dominance" of a particular component changes continuously over the course of a lifetime and results in different sorts of behavior patterns as one ages (41). The broadest categories for behavior patterns are "introvert," "extrovert," and "balanced," but they can be broken down into more specific subcategories. Sadowski divides extroverts into "exodynamic" and "exostatic" character types, whose behavior could range from what we may call that of a "simpleton," on the one hand, through that of the "idealist" and the "conventionalist" on the other (52). The balanced character is known as "static" and can be further classified as either a "hero," a "decent person" or an "antihero," while the introvert is either "endostatic" or "endodynamic" with the behavioral subcategories of "individualist," "conformist," or "villain" (52). These categories span the various degrees of personality structure, from the extremely open and enthusiastic exodynamic/simpleton to the cold and silent endodynamic/villain, and Sadowski describes throughout his book how people in each category tend to behave based on the way they think.

For our purposes, however, we need only focus on Sadowski's application of this theory to the work of Shakespeare, in which he classifies Hamlet as an exostatic/idealist and evaluates him in such a way that it could almost be an evaluation of Timon, as well. In an exostatic character, "imaginativeness, creativity, and emotionality dominate over social adaptation, so that an exostatic person projects his or her imagination onto the external world, to whose often harsh realities they are only partially adapted" (54). This is quite an accurate depiction of a person who must relate to the world through fantasies and illusions as Timon does. Exhibitionism, as

mentioned above, is also an integral part of an exostatic personality: “Exostatic people . . . like to show off, to amaze and shock others, which they achieve by cultivating an individual eccentric style and manners” (54). Timon presents himself as an impossibly wealthy and generous man because inspiring amazement and awe in others lets him pretend that he has a stable sense of self; Hamlet “put[s] and antic disposition on” (II.i.172) and presents himself as a madman in order to, in the words of Oscar Wilde, “grapple with . . . life in its practical realization, of which he knows nothing, not life in its ideal essence, of which he knows much” (Sadowski 109). Hamlet is not prepared to deal with the world as it is because his mind dwells on idealistic fantasies, and now that the coherence of these fantasies is threatened by Gertrude and Claudius and by the Ghost’s command, the prince’s exostatic nature leads him to behave in a very theatrical way, playacting and posturing to express his anxiety and, perhaps, to make the situation before him seem less like reality and more like a stage drama. “Hamlet’s ‘madness’ is thus several things at the same time: part actual hysteria, part a mode of conscious self-dramatization, and part a protection against prying eyes and ears” (Sadowski 111). Like Timon, he protects his fragile self by cloaking reality under a grand show.

Hamlet’s behavior, as explained through dynamism of character and Russell’s narcissistic approach, vividly recalls Timon’s conduct and Erlich’s assessment of it. Therefore, the two protagonists share the same psychological space in struggling to maintain their fantasies and illusions. The similarities extend even further when one considers the specific anxieties that these illusions are meant to defend against. Timon, as we have seen, has failed to develop a mature perception of the world, and so he fears maternal betrayal and the withholding of nourishment from the helpless male child. Hamlet, too, fears maternal betrayal, though in a slightly different

sense. According to Adelman, he is haunted not only by the power of the mother to deny her bounty, but also by the power of her sexuality.

As Timon sees fickleness in Fortune and realizes the dangerous implications it has for men, so Hamlet sees great fickleness in Gertrude, who,

Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

Ha[s] left the flushing in her galled eyes

..... post[s]

With such dexterity to incestuous sheets . . .” (I.ii.154-57)

He recognizes this apparently unrestrained and indiscriminating sexuality as a threat and a betrayal as well, for as a narcissist and an exostatic whose perception of the world has remained at a juvenile level in spite of his age, Hamlet desires above all to maintain a child’s idealized image of his parents. His extreme views will not allow anything less than caricatures of perfection, so to him Old Hamlet is a god, a Hyperion, and Gertrude is a loving and devoted mother endowed with pure and saintly virtues; that is, until the events of the play prove the king to be mortal and the queen to have desires of her own that she is entirely willing to pursue. Now Hamlet’s whole world seems corrupt, a “sterile promontory” surrounded by a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors” (II.ii.293, 296-97), because his mother’s body and, by extension, his father’s are now corrupt. This corruption also reflects on Hamlet himself, as the product of their tainted union. “[Gertrude’s] frailty unleashes for Hamlet, and for Shakespeare, fantasies of maternal violence, of maternal spoiling, that are compelling exactly as they are out of proportion to the character we know, exactly as they seem therefore to reiterate infantile fears and desires rather than an adult apprehension of the mother as a separate person” (Adelman 16).

Adelman discusses how Hamlet's relationship with his father, an important bond for him and for any man, is inextricably bound to the nature of Old Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude. The presence of the father keeps the mother's sexuality in control, in Hamlet's way of thinking. In I.ii, his soliloquy depicts a man who shields his wife from all unpleasant things with great tenderness and a woman who is completely enthralled by her husband, and Hamlet clings to this image because it "seems to enfold his mother in his father's protective embrace: by protecting her against the winds of heaven, he simultaneously protects against her, limiting and controlling her dangerous appetite" (20). With Old Hamlet gone, however, Gertrude's sexuality is free to run rampant, to overstep the boundaries that were previously set for it and come out into the open, contaminating everything and creating a rank, "unweeded garden / That grows to seed" (I.i.135-36). In addition to the corruption of the mother's body, this overwhelming sexuality, together with Gertrude's apparent failure to differentiate between her two husbands in terms of her desire for them, indicate that the dead king could well have been as unclean as both she and Claudius (Adelman 21). The Ghost even admits that he was sent to his judgment with terrible sins as yet unaccounted for, using floral imagery that links his "blossoms of . . . sin" (I.v.76) to his former wife's rank garden.

Hamlet's entire sense of himself and the world is at stake in the play. To summarize, his situation leaves him vulnerable to the mother's power and prevents him from being able to idealize and base his identity on his father (Adelman 18), and he is therefore determined to do something about it before it is too late. Rather than pursue revenge immediately, he becomes preoccupied with his mother, who is essentially the origin of his crisis, and spends a great deal of time and effort trying to convince her to be the virtuous woman he wishes her to be, the perfect match for an ideal father who is above vulgar, mortal men. He repaints his caricatures of his

parents over and over again, as if he can somehow cover up the realities that have been revealed to him. One way that he does this is through a psychological defense mechanism called splitting, which is used by infants to cope with the unpredictable responses of the mother. As Russell explains, no mother is perfect and even the most dedicated and attentive cannot completely satisfy all of the infant's desires each and every time it cries, and so the infant forms "memory images" of both satisfying, comforting interactions with the mother and frustrating, painful ones; it then separates the two kinds of images:

The infant thus fashions an omnipotent and ideally gratifying mother composed exclusively of memory images of pleasure and satisfaction, and dissociated completely from memory images of pain and distress. This spontaneous capacity to split its world into opposing sectors, pleasurable and unpleasurable, provides the infant with an important means of defending against anxiety (Russell 27).

By dissociating the negative images of the mother from the positive, the infant can allow the latter images to take over its consciousness while rejecting the former, thereby establishing the illusion that there is no possibility that its mother will ever fail to provide nourishment and security.

Hamlet, who has not developed a more mature method for dealing with anxiety, must split his image of Gertrude in this manner, striving to hold the "good mother" image in place and denying the "bad mother" image that she threatens to adopt willingly by her actions. He cannot allow her to be both at once, so her decision to put her own corrupt, sexual desires before her duty and loyalty to her son and "true" husband mean that she can only be the bad mother, the fickle woman who leaves her crying child to his misery. This is why it is so important to Hamlet

that Gertrude begin to change her ways, to gradually distance herself from Claudius so that the image of her as an devoted, good mother can be repaired and allow the prince to make sense of the world and of his own identity once more. Like Timon, who struggles with the potential inattentiveness of mother Fortune, Hamlet creates his illusions to guard himself against infantile fears and uncertainties and to help him construct the stable self-image that a narcissist lacks.

#### IV

The similarities between Timon and Hamlet do not end with the fears and fantasies upon which they build their respective existences. Both men also experience the shattering of their illusions and, unprepared for reality, flounder and sink into isolation and cynicism. Timon's case is, of course, far more extreme, more Jacobean, than Hamlet's because he completely gives in to the momentum of his fall, while the earlier protagonist tries to climb back up and reimagine the barriers dividing himself from the world.

The structuring of *Timon*, as we have seen, sets up ironic parallels that make it very easy to identify when the once-great Athenian has finally been forced to confront the truth of his situation. After losing both his money and his faith in his so-called friends in quick succession, he realizes that the identity he has created for himself with his protective fantasy of endless male bounty is fragile and insubstantial. It cannot shield him from Fortune's whims or help him maintain a stable self-image based on shameless, insincere flattery. He is left with only "a world of masculine competition, of combat, of aggressiveness, and wounds, in which he meets his downfall through the treachery of those he holds as comrades" (Kahn 37). In despair and anger, Timon, who once isolated himself on the hilltop throne among his adoring dependents, withdraws from humanity and becomes isolated in a more absolute sense, so much so that he gives himself a new name, Misanthropos.



The change in him is first apparent during the second banquet, like and yet so unlike the Banquet of Sense that the significance of the differences between the two is emphasized. No longer does Timon give extravagant gifts and provide sumptuous food, or compliment his suitors and deliver speeches to them about friendship. Now, his speech is void of warmth and full of bitterness, and he sets his guests to their meal of stones and water, saying, “For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them, and to nothing are they welcome. Uncover, dogs, and lap” (III.vi.83-86). In treating them this way and calling them dogs, which would have evoked associations with fawning, flattering spaniels to Shakespeare and his audience (Spurgeon 197), Timon strikes back at those who have wronged him and exhibits a new and painful awareness of the nature of his “friends’” devotion. The dog imagery, in particular, hearkens back to the words of Apemantus during the Banquet of Sense (an appropriate connection since the dog was also a symbol for a cynic philosopher [Soellner 90]), which depicted the suitors behaving not like children being fed by a bountiful mother, but like a pack of ravening hounds tearing their provider apart: “O you gods, what a number of men eats Timon, and he sees ‘em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man’s blood” (I.ii.37-39).

Following his revelation that these men he once trusted are no more than greedy, dissembling animals, Timon, as a narcissist who can only relate to the world in terms of totalities and extremes, then projects their corruption and treachery onto the earth and mankind as a whole and decides to physically remove himself from them by going into the woods. Like Apemantus, he becomes a cynic, one who believes people are entirely motivated by self-interest and who is skeptical of human nature. The similarities between the two characters are underscored and used as a measuring device for Timon’s progression into deeper misanthropy when they converse in IV.iii.

Timon's characterization of Apemantus and the Horatian tag [*Ira furor brevis est*] set the stage for paralleling and comparing the two angry men, and Alcibiades' quarrel with the senate adds a third. Timon's wrath will become greater and more ingrained than that of his two foils; it will ironically prove the truth of his own phrase that anger is a short madness since it will be brief and self-consuming (Soellner 92).

As a misanthrope, Timon spends his days railing and cursing humanity. Before long, he meets a procession of familiar faces after finding buried gold, an ironic mirroring of the wealth he believed he had and the throng of suitors he entertained in Act I. Once again, he gives out his gold, but this time it is not given freely; it is to be taken as payment for the service of spreading death and disease in the world:

Here, take. The gods out of my misery  
 Has sent thee treasure. Go, live rich and happy,  
 But this conditioned: thou shalt build from men,  
 Hate all, curse all, show charity to none  
 But let the flesh slide from the bone  
 Ere thou relieve the beggar. . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . be men like blasted woods,  
 And may diseases lick up their false bloods (IV.iii.522-30).

In the face of a reality that is stark and cruel compared to the comforting fantasy world he once knew, Timon's behavior has shifted from excessive generosity with money to excessive

hatred and militancy. This is because he feels helpless; without the illusions he so carefully formed, his anxieties associated with the “bad mother” can no longer be controlled. He cannot erase the female’s nourishing body and replace it with his own, and he does not know who he is or where he belongs if he cannot be a “nourish-father” for other men. His sudden blatant obsession with women and sexually transmitted diseases, rather startling after the nearly total lack of women in the play’s first half, shows that fear and resentment of the fickle mother have come to the surface of Timon’s consciousness now that there is nothing to hold them back:

. . . . . Strike me the counterfeit matron;  
 It is her habit only that is honest,  
 Herself’s a bawd. Let not the virgin’s cheek  
 Make soft thy trenchant sword; for those milk paps  
 That through the window bars bore at men’s eyes  
 Are not within the leaf of pity writ,  
 But set them down horrible traitors (IV.iii.113-19).

Given his personality, there does not seem to be much hope that Timon’s situation will improve. The illusion that once gave him power and purpose is already broken beyond repair, and the judgment he has passed on men and mothers now that he has been left unguarded is so strong, so unconditional, that he is unwilling to listen to any voice but his own or to forgive humanity its perceived faults. Nothing is left for him but to keep hating, cursing, and wishing for chaos to descend on the world until the day he dies, and his misery and weariness ensure that that day will not be long in coming.

Why, I was writing of my epitaph.  
 It will be seen tomorrow. My long sickness

Of health and living begins to mend,  
 And nothing brings me all things (V.i.185-88).

Timon's identity as a misanthrope apparently cannot sustain him as his identity as the giver of limitless wealth did. He anticipates his imminent death and does not resist, does not try to think of another fantasy to rekindle his hope, but instead prepares an epitaph to carry on his curses after he is gone.

For Hamlet, Timon's Elizabethan predecessor, reality intrudes more gradually, chipping away at his fantasy – first in his father's death, then in his mother's remarriage, and finally in the Ghost's revelation and call for revenge – rather than ending it with one crushing blow. As a result, he has the opportunity to attempt to save his self-image and his understanding of the world before they are permanently destroyed. At first, he prepares to redress the wrongs done to him and his father directly, according to the Ghost's wishes, by killing the one responsible, Claudius. Indeed, he vows to give himself over to the task completely:

Yea, from the table of my memory  
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
 That youth and observation copied there,  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain,  
 Unmix'd with baser matter. . . . (*Hamlet* I.v.98-104)

However, since Hamlet's personal fears, which are the real foundation of his disturbed state, stem from the horrendous conduct of the mother and corruption only touches the father from that source, he becomes preoccupied with trying to solve his problem at its root by turning

Gertrude back onto the path of virtue. Presumably, if he can make her behave as a “good mother” should, he will be able to reestablish the illusion that her sexual appetite is once again in his father’s control, even in death, and hence know that he has regained his place in his own idealized world. Russell points out this thought process of Hamlet’s and contrasts it with the Ghost’s idea of how the transgressions of Gertrude and Claudius should be handled:

Hamlet has rescued his mother from her incestuous relationship and restored his father to his rightfully prominent position in the family constellation, an accomplishment that deeply satisfies him in his role of good son to both mother and father, and that, he assumes, will also satisfy, at least in part, the paternal spirit.

But when the father’s Ghost reappears, it evinces no interest whatever in its son’s endeavor to reclaim the errant Queen. The father’s primary goal has always been the annihilation of the competitor who has sought to annihilate him. . . . Once [this] has been [achieved], the reclamation of Gertrude will automatically follow. (144).

Since Hamlet has this hope that he can somehow “fix” his damaged illusion by recovering his father’s power through Gertrude, he does not take revenge on his and Old Hamlet’s enemy (like Timon at the false banquet) until the end of the play, and he does not become the all-consuming misanthrope that Timon does. However, the very nature of the task appointed to him, together with his narcissistic tendency to make extreme judgments, does cause him to become fairly isolated and cynical. The reality of his parents’ imperfections has already made the world seem bleak and humanity seem like a “quintessence of dust” (II.ii.302), and

therefore distanced him from them. But now that he is planning to kill the king, an act which requires secrecy; suspicion and caution, lest one should confide in or be discovered by the wrong person; and, in Hamlet's case, a great deal of reflection and soul-searching, his disillusionment has grown worse and he must withdraw even further. Between his inner musings on the reliability of the Ghost and the duty of the son of a murdered father, and his madness, feigned or real, Hamlet becomes very introverted and contemplative. He alienates the other characters with strange and, to them, incomprehensible behavior for which they spend their time trying to find a cause and, usually, hitting wide of the mark. His task, as a result, is kept safe and secret while he decides which course to take next.

In the meantime, the prince's narcissistic perceptions of human beings as all-good or all-evil caricatures are still in operation. He decides to attempt the conversion of Gertrude because he sees her as a "bad mother," and that is not acceptable to an idealist, but before he finally manages to achieve this conversion, there is a period of time when he thinks it is impossible because he has projected the rank corruption of Gertrude onto all women, including Ophelia. Sounding almost like Timon for a moment, he rails against them and against marriage:

I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad. I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already (all but one) shall live, the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunn'ry, go. (III.i.141-48)

In moments such as this, fears of maternal power and betrayal squeeze through the cracks in Hamlet's defensive illusion and into his conscious until he manages to contain them once more.

It is less intense than Timon's struggle with his fears, where no part of the illusion remains, but it is still poignant enough to distress Ophelia, who, as far as the play lets us see, is probably an exception to the "rule" of female fickleness and disloyalty.

Hamlet's estrangement and distrust of other people continues to grow as the play progresses and his need to fulfill his task and save his identity becomes more desperate. Claudius calls in two of Hamlet's old school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to "probe his mind" (Sadowski 114), and although the prince is at first quite glad to see them and tell them about his problems, he soon learns of their true aim and shuts them out. Eventually, he becomes angry at the two courtiers and their false friendship and skeptical of any attempts they make to be friendly to him thereafter (III.ii.330-51), again mirroring Timon.

But unlike Timon, Hamlet never completely gives in to the anxieties that escape the tattered barriers of his fantasy to trouble him; he is not *entirely* helpless or lost despite his apparent inability to act. In fact, Sadowski claims that he is "far from being inactive, and in his way he is scarcely less resourceful and energetic than, say, Iago, except that his activity, totally a function of his exostatic character, remains within the elusive realms of imagination and theatrical illusion rather than pragmatic action" (116). He thinks, imagines, plans things like the play-within-the-play to ascertain Claudius' guilt, and talks Gertrude back into a "good mother" role, more or less; he does just about everything he can do aside from killing his uncle, which is an action outside the sphere of the ideal and the imaginative and is thus difficult for him. His sense of self and his relation to others is in jeopardy, like Timon's, full of cracks and holes through which a disturbing reality can leak, but Hamlet believes there is at least a chance that it can be restored if he can only find the right way to do it.

In the end, Hamlet's hope proves fruitless and the reestablishment of his protective, idealistic fantasy of his parents is never fully accomplished. However, he seems to have shifted his focus somewhat in Act V, after he returns from having been sent to England, and accepted a new source of comfort rather than degenerating into Timon's hateful despair. Perhaps being physically removed from the seat of his fears has allowed him to abandon a losing battle and find another way to cope with his problems, one which Timon fails to find in the forest outside Athens' walls. In any case, it has been noted by many critics, including Harold Bloom, that Hamlet seems to have matured to some extent by Act V, or at least to have put aside some of his obsessions from the earlier acts:

Consciousness itself has aged him, the catastrophic consciousness of the spiritual disease of the world, which he has internalized . . . . [H]is obsession with the dead father is definitely over, and while he still regards his maligned mother as a whore, he has worn out his interest there also. Purged, he allows himself to be set up for Claudius's refined, Italianate version of *The Mousetrap*, on the stated principle of "Let be." (Bloom 430-31)

He no longer dwells on Gertrude's sexuality or Claudius' evil, but on death. Nor is it the bitter death to which Timon goes; it is the natural end of things, a welcome rest, as we shall see. From Gertrude's behavior at the swordfight, which is now more motherly and shows more of a focus on her son ("He's fat, and scant of breath. / Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows" [V.ii.269-70]), it seems that their relationship, at any rate, has been patched up into some semblance of what Hamlet believes it should be. Perhaps Claudius poses less of a threat because



of that. Thus, the world is not completely set to rights, but it is closer now and Hamlet can be more at ease. Only the poisoning of his mother enrages him enough to provoke him to violence.

Wounded, Hamlet accepts his own death without Timon's anger and animosity; he is emptied of such emotions. It appears that in Act V, he has managed to piece together a new identity and a new perception of the world to replace the ones he was unable to salvage – they may not be quite complete, but they are enough to help him carry on until his death. Death even seems to be an integral part of this new identity, since he sounds so comfortable with the idea from the moment he picks up Yorick's skull. "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come . . . . Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?" (V.i.179-81, 194-98) But despite the change in him, Russell reminds us that beneath it all, a narcissistic and psychologically underdeveloped personality exists and probably even informs the Danish prince's reformed outlook on life and death:

Hamlet is ready to meet death – not the reality of death, but his fantasy of death, a consummation he has long and devoutly wished . . . .

[His] abiding concern is not to enter into the heritage of his maturity, an authorship that will prove of finite duration and limited scope. His concern is with totality and perfection, with the illusion of a pure and unsullied world of potency and infinite gratification, if not in this life then in some fantastic afterlife, in the aura of the providential father or in the embrace of the symbiotic mother – or, as must of necessity be the case, in communion with both. (180)

Throughout this exploration of Timon and Hamlet, both the plays and the protagonists, differences have arisen as well as similarities. The choices each man makes, the course of events he follows, and the nature of his end show us especially important distinctions – for instance, Timon’s complete loss of his illusion all at once leads him to fall rapidly into extreme misanthropy, while Hamlet’s illusion is lingering and fragile and so he tries to salvage it, though he does not really succeed. But even these differences form parallels that can be used to compare the two characters, despite the obviously tremendous disparity in the quality of the texts. One could look at Timon’s excessive cursing of humanity and the treacherous female alongside Hamlet’s slightly more balanced version of this behavior, for example.

It becomes apparent that the protagonists, no matter how different they may be on the surface, are part of the same family, so to speak. They originate from similar types of psychological anxieties that can be connected to the socio-political situation of England during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods. In their perceptions of women and power, it is difficult not to see traces of Elizabeth I, in so many ways the mother of her country during her reign. Her decision to deny her people, on many occasions, the bounty of exchange and to deprive them of the secure future an heir could provide caused terrible anxiety for her subjects, as has been discussed, and could no doubt have been understood as a betrayal by the citizens. Also, James I’s excessive generosity, which was largely directed toward a few royal favorites, created problems by separating other suitors from their “nourish-father” and disrupting the conventional social order. The feelings of the courtiers who were left with less in the way of gifts and titles because some man of a lower station had, suddenly and without merit, gained the

king's favor could likely be compared to those of an infant whose bounteous provider decided to take away the nourishing breast and give it to another infant. They probably also knew that the extremity of James's giving would soon deplete all of the bounty (whether in terms of wealth or mother's milk) that he possessed and leave them all with nothing, simply because the provider refused to admit that his bounty was limited.

Timon and Hamlet embody these psychological and socio-political concerns remarkably well between them, related as they are. They are "Twinned brothers" (*Timon* IV.iii.3), or if not so close as that, we may at least say that Timon is something like the younger brother of Hamlet, a Jacobean reimagining of him, and that together they underscore one another's personalities and socio-political origins, giving us a more complete picture of a New Historical moment and a "particular state of mind" (Knights 49).

## Works Cited

- Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Butler, Francelia. *The Strange Critical Fortunes of Shakespeare's Timon of Athens*. Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1966.
- Charney, Maurice. "Coriolanus and Timon of Athens." *Shakespeare: A Bibliographical Guide*. Ed. Stanley Wells. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. 295-320.
- Davies, Godfrey. *The Early Stuarts, 1603-1660*. 1937. Ed. Sir George Clark. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.
- Erlich, Avi. "Neither to Give nor to Receive: Narcissism in *Timon of Athens*." *CUNY English Forum*. Vol. 1. Eds. Saul N. Brody and Harold Schechter. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1985. 215-30.
- Hurstfield, Joel. "The Succession Struggle in Late Elizabethan England." *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale*. Eds. S.T. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield, and C.H. Williams. London: The Athlone Press, 1961. 369-396.
- Kahn, Coppelia. "'Magic of Bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38.1 (1987): 34-57.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Age of Shakespeare*. Modern Library Chronicles. New York: The Modern Library, 2003.
- . *Shakespeare's Language*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000. 231-42.
- . *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne*. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.

- Knights, L.C. *An Approach to 'Hamlet.'* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961.
- Russell, John. *Hamlet and Narcissus.* Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995.
- Sadowski, Piotr. *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies.* Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003. 98-163.
- Scott, Alison V. *Selfish Gifts: The Politics of Exchange and English Courtly Literature, 1580-1628.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet.* Ed. Susanne L. Wofford. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1994.
- . *Timon of Athens.* Ed. H.J. Oliver. The Arden Edition of the Works of Shakespeare. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- . *Timon of Athens. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare.* Eds. Stephen Orgel and A.K. Braunmuller. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.
- Soellner, Rolf. *Timon of Athens: Shakespeare's Pessimistic Tragedy.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979.
- Spurgeon, Caroline. *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.
- Timon of Athens.* Dir. Jonathan Miller. Perf. Jonathan Pryce, Norman Rodway, and John Shrapnel. 1981. DVD. Ambrose Video, 2000.