

Timon of Athens:
The Rage of Disillusion

By
SUSAN HANDELMAN

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In the final analysis, every object is a substitute, and in the strict psychoanalytic sense a *symbol*, for all the abundance of unconscious meaning, inexpressible in itself, associated with it. From the point of view of the libido, no object cathexis possesses any reality beyond this symbolic one.

...the profoundly racking illness—the primal hurt of all of us... the uncomprehending self-absement of becoming an individual....

—Lou-Andreas Salomé¹

For Shakespeare, the dreams and diseases of the narcissistic ego were of particular fascination. His stage is peopled with characters who represent in both comic and tragic modes the manifold forms which these dreams and disorders may assume. Malvolio and Lear, for example, are so different and yet so similar, for the cornerstone of their characters is an infantile narcissism which abruptly conflicts with a reality which negates their dreams of omnipotence, confines the boundaries of their egos, and denies them the objects of their desires. And Shakespeare gives them both very harsh therapy.

And as Freud also revealed, on his own stage, narcissism is indeed something very primary, and one of the cornerstones of everyone's ego: "The development of the ego consists in a departure from the primary narcissism and results in a vigorous attempt to recover it."² To summarize this concept in brief: this "dual orientation" of narcissism basically involves the conflict between the drive to recapture the primal feeling of undifferentiated unity with the original object, and the opposing drive to assert one's own separate ego. The primal object is

¹ Lou-Andreas Salomé: "The Dual Orientation of Narcissism," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 31 (1962), 1-30.

² Sigmund Freud: "On Narcissism" (1914), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), XIV, 100. Cited hereafter as *SE*.

one's own body and that of the nurturant mother, who in the earliest stage is an extension of the all-encompassing, omnipotent self. The loss of that primal all-embracing unity, and the necessity of becoming a separate individual is the continuing hurt of us all, and every succeeding object can only be a substitute, a symbol for what we once had. Thus we must idealize our substitute objects in order to compensate, endow them with extra value, believe in their magical power to redeem the loss.

Thus, we create together the public monuments and myths of our culture, and each construct separately the private symbol-systems by which we endure. On the deepest level, separation and loss are the very founding recognition of consciousness, and the starting point for the functions of discrimination, judgement, and thought—as well as primitive rage. For in truth we do not and cannot really ever accept this loss. The project of the developing ego is recovery, and awakened consciousness seeks in its substitute objects the image of the lost beloved, the remembrance of things past. In his essay, "On Negation," Freud writes:

The contrast between what is subjective and what is objective does not exist from the first. It only arises from the faculty which thought possesses for reviving a thing that once has been perceived, by reproducing it as an image, without its being necessary for the external object still to be present. Then the first and immediate aim of the process of testing reality is not to discover an object in real perception corresponding to what is imaged, but to *rediscover* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there. . . .an essential pre-condition for the institution of the function for testing reality is that objects shall have been lost which have formerly afforded real satisfaction.³

Yet the continuing project of consciousness to regain lost objects, to recapture the unity of subject and object through its substitutions, idealizations, symbolizations, identifications,

³ Freud, "On Negation" (1925), *SE*, XIV, 237-8.

constantly confronts the reality of an irreparable breach. And the more the object is idealized to compensate, the more in fact is it annihilated, and the more disastrous is the disillusion.

The problem of the symbolic object and the belief in the magic of those creations is, of course, the general problem of culture and the particular problem of the artist. While the artist must firmly believe in the power of his symbolic objects, he is also continuously and painfully confronted with their provisionality, their limitations within the frame of the picture, the letters on the page, the enclosure of the theater. In his drive towards articulation, he is engaged more than others in abrupt entrances and departures from those moments of communion when subject and object, inner and outer again become one. He inhabits the confusing and deceptive boundary areas, the zones where illusion and reality intermingle.

Shakespeare's characters frequently express an obsession with the problems of creation, illusion, boundaries, dreams. The anxiety that the symbolic world will break down, vanish and leave not a rack behind, is present in all the plays, and perhaps accounts for their obsessive self-reflexiveness—their constant reflection on their own origins, their own natures as plays. The anxiety of the artist's ego is another variant of the primal shock to our universal narcissism. But with those characters who insist on retaining and trying obstinately to recapture that original, state Shakespeare is often not kind.

The inability to accept loss may express itself in the creation of higher narcissistic illusions or heightened rage. In *Lear*, both reactions exist simultaneously—holding dead Cordelia in his arms, he cries “Never, never, never,” etc. etc., and yet looks for signs of breath on her lips—“The feather stirs; she lives! If it be so,/It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows/that ever I have felt (V, iii, 264-8). *Timon of Athens* follows *Lear* and is a play so close and yet so far from *Lear* because it asks the question: How do we go on living after Cordelia is dead? In *Timon of Athens* disillusion is absolute, no substitute is acceptable, there are no rituals of atonement, no provisions for mourning. The play is less about the experience of loss itself than a demonstration of the rage which refuses to accept loss. Perhaps this is why it is generally considered to be a bad play—it does

not do what we except of art in general: help us to accept loss.

All the questions about its authorship, which stem from the many confusions and disjunctions in the text, indicate an unfinished play which somewhere broke down, would not allow itself to be composed. But that indeed, I think, is itself what the play is about—a breakdown of all those ways in which rage, pain, and loss can somehow be accepted, made sense of, transformed into life-affirming energies. That transformation indeed requires a magic power, and the magic of art which is always engaged in denying loss by making something from nothing, making dead matter live, conjuring presences, thieving immortality from time, does not work in this play—both structurally and symbolically.

In *Timon*, Shakespeare does not believe in his own art, and that is why the play is unfinished. *Timon* tells us something that the artist himself cannot dwell on too long: that mourning is never finished, that we can't and don't really know how to accept or redeem loss, that we are always pained and enraged. Says Alcibiades, "To be in anger is impiety;/But who is man that is not angry?" (III, v, 56-8).

But every artist must have that anxiety, anger, and impiety; for art, like thinking and any symbolic activity, is a negation of negation—an attempt to accept loss, by refusing to accept it, by re-presenting to consciousness what is no longer fully, physically, and constantly "there." As noted previously, all thinking, talking, and imagining evoke, by sign and symbol, what is absent. The tension of presence is a tenuous way of being at-one. The confrontation with loss is a continuing catastrophe for beings who exist in time, space, and the finite body. The question for the artist, and for Shakespeare in particular, is whether the denial of loss by the creation of his presences is a poor substitute and insubstantial shadow, a sad capitulation—or a redemption by transformative magic.

In the world of *Timon* nothing can redeem sorrow. Nothing can come of nothing. There are no acceptable substitutes; loss is irrevocable. Therefore, Timon does not mourn, he rages. In a world without Cordelia, without an embodied ideal of love, art, nature, man himself is not man, but a beast. What Apemantus says also applies to the modern city: "The

commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts." What Timon asks him is also the question of contemporary history: "What beast couldst thou be, that were not subject to a beast? And what a beast art thou already, that sees not thy loss in transformation!" (IV, iii, 345-53).

That the embodied principle of good is often an idealized woman in Shakespeare is significant. In *Timon*, there is neither good art nor good women. The play itself is in part about the cultural and individual disaster of execution of the female. A world without women is a world not only without art, but without order. In *Lear*, the good woman, the ideal of pure love was exiled, but not murdered until the end of the play. In *Timon*, she never existed; there is no feminine representative of goodness and constancy. When woman as nourisher is perceived as devourer, and relation with her as feared dependency; when the wish for a gratifying union with her is seen as threatening destruction only; when she is not only banished, but hated and murdered, then there can be neither manhood nor brotherhood, neither human being, nor society. That is the condition of the world in *Timon of Athens*.

Accepting woman, however, means accepting loss, accepting not only the gap between self and other, but also the gap between self and self—recognizing the illusion of narcissistic omnipotence, knowing that one is limited, imperfect, dependent and not projecting that part of one's nature onto a conveniently hated and abhorred weak, false female. The world cannot be split, as Timon originally splits it, into a male brotherly good and a female fatal bad. Woman herself cannot be split, as the cultural myth splits her, into the Sacred Virginal Good and Profane Prostitute Bad. Accepting woman means accepting art itself. The world which excludes woman splits itself apart; the man who denies the female divides his own self and like Timon becomes his opposite, Misanthropos, monster, and beast. In *Timon of Athens*, there is no way back to humanity.

Thus, the world of *Timon* is a world of negations, mutually destructive oppositions—male female, good-bad, love-hate, man-beast, friend-enemy, forgiveness-revenge. Contraries do not mutually exist, differences and separations are not tolerated;

the gap between self and other, presence and absence, ideal and real, loss and recovery is unbridgeable. The adjoining "bonds" are broken. The structure of the play itself operates on the principle of splitting, of incorporation and expulsion, orally ambivalent perception. The first half of the play centers around Timon's communal feasts, the second half around his solitary exile; the imagery turns from the intake of nourishing food to the vomiting of poison and disease. In place of an internal principle of integration which Timon lacks and cannot find, he had depended on a false, external, reified, material means of mutuality: money.

Seen in terms of the relation of loss and return, money, art, and love are all intimately connected. All are attempts to bridge the gap between self and other, wish and need. All are ways to deny loss, to find recompense. Karl Marx, in an early essay on money quoted liberally from *Timon of Athens*, recognizing that Shakespeare well understood the mystique of the transformative value of money. Marx wrote,

If money is the bond that binds me to human life, that binds society to me and me to nature and men, is not money the bond of all bonds? Can it not tie and untie all bonds? Is it not therefore also the universal means of separation? It is the true agent both of separation and union, the galvanochemical power of society.⁴

Money is the externalized power of mediation,

the pander between need and its object. . . .It is the visible god-head, the transformation of all human and natural qualities into their opposite, the general confusion and inversion of things; it makes impossibilities fraternize. . . .What I cannot do as a man, that which my individual faculties cannot do, this I can do through money. Thus money turns each of these faculties into something that it is not, i. e. into its opposite. . . .It changes my wishes from being imaginary, and translates them from their being in

⁴ Karl Marx: "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), III, 324. Cited hereafter as *CW*.

thought, imagination and will into a sensuous, real being, from imagination to life.⁵

Marx quotes Act IV, scene iii in *Timon*:

Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold? No, god,
I am no idle votarist: roots, you clear heavens!
Thus much of this will make black, white; foul fair;
Wrong, right; base, noble; old young; coward valiant;
...Why this
Will lug your priests and your servants from your sides (etc).
(ll. 26-43)

and from lines 383-90 in the same scene,

O thou sweet king-killer and dear divorce
'Twixt natural son and sire! Thou bright defiler
Of Hymen's purest bed! Thou valiant Mars!
Thou ever young, fresh, loved and delicate
Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow
That lies on Dian's lap! Thou visible god!
That solder'st close impossibilities,
And mak'st them kiss! (etc).

Marx continues,

Money is the universal means and power, exterior to man, not issuing from man as man or from human society as society, to turn imagination into reality and reality into mere imagination...the universal inversion of individualities that turns them into their opposites and gives them qualities at variance with their own...It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice...⁶

Money transforms imagination into reality; the language of capitalism is the inverted language of art. In Marx's views, it inverts human value to market value, is postulated on an externalized, material structure of exchange which, in fact, abstracts and alienates man from his objects, empties him the

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

more he tries to fill himself, makes him lose that which he seeks to have or be. To Marx, money is bad art, bad love, and bad mourning. Money is predicated on loss and gain, and is another substitute for object loss. But "Happiness," says Freud, "is the deferred fulfillment of a prehistoric wish. That is why wealth brings so little happiness; money is not an infantile wish."⁷ For the artist, and for Shakespeare in particular, recovery depends on another kind of recapture in which a literal and material substitution gives way to a metaphoric and symbolic transformation through an interior and reintegrating principle which might be found in art and imagination. There are two kinds of art corresponding to two ways of being and having: the art of substitution, imitation, copy; the art of transformation, metamorphosis, and identity-in-difference.

The problem of substitutive values is also the problem of loss and mourning. Freud writes: "Really we can never relinquish anything; we can only exchange one thing for something else. When we appear to give something up, all we really do is adopt a substitute."⁸ How can one find acceptable substitutes for what has been lost, how can one exchange one lost object for another? What has equal value to what has been lost?

In *Timon*, money has replaced the mediating power of the idealized woman (Blake's Emanation which joins man to man, but for him ultimately hermaphroditic), but instead of providing a way for contraries to mutually exist, marry, mingle, and create, money destructively converts opposites into negations of each other and Timon becomes Misanthropos. Marx, like Shakespeare, perceives that money is a psychological structure of alienated exchanges. When economics is conceived in terms of man's relation to man, and society as a system of exchanges, Marx asks what motivates the buying and selling of private property and answers:

Need and want. The other person is also a property owner, but of another object which I lack and which I neither can nor want to be without, an object which seems to be

⁷ Freud: *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters, Drafts and Notes to Wilhelm Fleiss 1887-1902*, eds. M. Bonaparte, A. Freud, E. Kris (New York: Basic Books, 1954), letter 82, p. 244.

⁸ Freud: "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), *SE*, IV, 145.

something *needed* for the reintegration of my existence and the realization of my nature. . . . For the need of an object is the most evident and irrefutable proof that the object belongs to my nature and that the existence of the object for me and its *property* are the property appropriate to my essence.⁹

The problem of loss is the problem of need and want, the problem of wholeness, an integrated and not split identity. Art, money, law, love, all bonds and means of exchange between men, civilization itself, are means to recover loss. Timon's primitive communism is a dream of restored communion, an attempt to defend against primal loss, to become both Self and Other, to be fed by his friends' flattery and feed them from the overflow of his bounty—to be simultaneously the passive nursing one, and the beneficent nourishing Mother. Yet he can only replace the flow of female milk with the rigid exchange of male money. Timon's attempted identification with the role of the Mother is a way to deny the loss of that primal one who gratified the infant's every wish, and to thereby be autonomous, not dependent on any female, not in need or vulnerable to any woman. But his primitive communism is, in fact, a feudal lordship, a narcissistic dream of adoration from his retainers under the guise of a Holy Brotherhood, one which admits no women. In Freud's important paper on *Mourning and Melancholia*, he located the phenomenon of identification of the ego with the abandoned object as one of the crucial structures in melancholia:

The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up. This kind of substitution of identification for object-love is an important mechanism in the narcissistic affections. . . . It of course represents a repression from one type of object-choice to the primal narcissism. . . . The ego wishes to incorporate the ob-

⁹ Marx: "Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d'économie politique*," *CW*, III, 218.

ject into itself, and the method by which it would do so, this oral cannibalistic stage, is by devouring it.¹⁰

Loss can be denied by identification with the lost object and by attempted appropriation of female magic. For Shakespeare, Timon's magic, however, is impotent because it is narcissistic, substitutive, cannibalistic, and not transformative. Coins, jewels, food, are nonhuman, inert matter that cannot gratify the wish to be at one. The failure of all narcissistic substitutions leads to expulsion, spitting, and vomiting out all with which Timon had identified—women, friends, food, money, art:

Therefore, be abhorred
All feasts, societies, and throngs of men!
His semblable, yea, himself, Timon disdains.
Destruction fang mankind! (IV, iii, 20-24)

Alcibiades: Why, fare thee well:
Here is some gold for thee.

Timon: Keep it, I cannot eat it. (IV, iii, 96-8)

Timon, who had the world as his "confectionary" (IV, iii, 260) would change his feast of love to devouring hate: "Get thee gone./That the whole life of Athens were in this!/Thus would I eat it."/ (IV, ii, 281-2), eating a root. (Root possibly as phallic power and genital organization as opposed to oral ambivalence). That which is orally incorporated is both loved and hatred, united with and destroyed. As Timon's servant tells him: "Feast won, fast-lost" (II. ii, 180).

The first scene of the play contains in miniature the critique of the impossible feast of civilization in its art, love, money and law. The poet in line 6 exclaims, "See,/Magic of bounty/All these spirits thy power/Hath conjured to attend." The poet, too, though, is in attendance not because of free love, nor is his art a free gift, but rather a counter to be exchanged for monetary recompense. The painter's art is described as a "pretty mocking of the life" (l. 35). The mentality of art as imitation is the same mentality as literal, externalized sub-

¹⁰ Freud: "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *SE*, XIV, 249-50.

stitution—as the mentality of money and the merchant. Art mocks nature by holding up the mirror, by copying and aping. In Renaissance thought, over against this kind of art, is the idealized power of Nature—the divinely created order of things, the procreative power which art might tutor or tame, but which art does not possess itself. To transfer the belief in that kind of natural transformative and freely creative power to Art, as we have done since the Romantics, and as Shakespeare plays with doing especially in the later works, signifies the loss of the divinely ordered scheme (and not incidentally the rise of bourgeois capitalism).

The Shakespearean moment is one in which the theological hierarchy gives way to the chaos of history (and regulated value to the chaotic fluctuation of the capitalistic market). In the Great Chain of Being, differences are dissolving, and all things are dangerously confusing their places (especially if money can transform identities, “place thieves/And give them title, knee, and approbation/With senators on the bench” (IV, iii, 35-7)). Men and beasts are transformed into each other. Art itself cannot mirror life, correspond in a one-to-one relationship to a nature no longer based on a hierarchical set of correspondences. What is the place of art in Timon’s vision of Nature?

Common mother, thou
Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast
Teems and feeds all; whose self-same mettle,
Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man is puffed,
Engenders the black toad and adder blue,
The gilded newt and eyeless venom’d worm,
With all the abhorred births below crisp heaven. . . .
Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves, and bears;
Teem with new monsters, whom thy upward face
Hath to the marbled mansion all above
Never presented! (IV, iii, 177-192)

Art must somehow find a way within that transformative process, try to make monster back into man; *Timon of Athens*, like *Lear*, is yet monster, however, and cannot make its way back, or immerse fully enough in the destructive element (as Conrad advises in *Lord Jim*) to find a metamorphic freedom,

a restorative way of ordering the world. In Shakespeare's vision of metamorphic freedom, there is always (except for *Antony and Cleopatra*) a drawing back, a reinstitution of hierarchical order, or return from the forest or island to the secular city, a deep anxiety that art simply cannot bear the burden, and within the plays themselves a missing resolution of the dramatic content.

In Shakespeare's world, things can no longer correspond like copy to image; nothing is identical with itself because there is no fixed value, no ground. Identity, therefore, must be sought in transformation as opposed to imitation and substitution. Instead of a world in which one can literally equate "this" for "that," the word for the thing, the price for the value, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, is a world where identity is unfixed, and knowledge is analogical, provisional, predicated on "as if," instead of "is." When nothing is equal to itself, or when subject and object, self and other, art and nature are disjoined, the disparity is threatening— as it is for *Timon* or *Lear*. And it means also as Hamlet says, "The time is out of joint;—O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" (II, 1, 189-90). Time as change is therefore also perceived as loss of constancy; change makes us "the fools of time," the rose is cankered, the man sick. *Timon*, like *Lear* and unlike *Antony and Cleopatra*, can find no trusted constancy-in-change, cannot accept change as metamorphic, a process where identity is not found in sameness, but in sameness-in-difference, where one has to give up the attempt to have and be and to devour the lost object. Metamorphosis leads not to free creative play, but to frozen shapes of distortion, to monsters.

The inability to accept change as the inability to accept difference is also the Shakespearean theme of loss as ingratitude— of betrayal as lack of faith and constancy. Woman is the first betrayer of constancy, not only because she is different, but because she forces separation from her body, through birth and weaning, and because she cannot be possessed by the child as the father possesses her. Thus it is that the changes and petulance of "Fortune" are personified, especially in the Renaissance, as female. Fortune is a fickle and false lady; the poet in the first scene of *Timon* likewise portrays *Timon's* ascent and

fall from Fortune as a climbing of a female body: Fortune sits on a "mount," her followers "labour on her bosom" "to propagate" their states. Timon, "bowing his head against the steepy mount/To climb his happiness" (I, i, 63-77) is pursued by followers who "rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear. . . Drink the free air." The images are oral and phallic, having the sense of a small boy mounting and climbing a large woman to drink and copulate, and being spurned.

Timon's own first word as he enters the play is "Imprison'd" and, one might say, he is indeed imprisoned in his own narcissism, his desire to have the love of the whole world, to devour and incorporate all into his own body. His first act in the play is to "free" a friend from "debt." "Your lordship ever binds him," says the messenger (I, i, 103). Timon's acts of beneficence *bind* other men to him, defend against separation, dissolve boundaries, as Marx showed it was the particular property of money to do. Timon's next act is to put up money for his servant to equally "weigh" with a woman of higher status, "For 'tis a bond in men" (I, i, 143). Bounty, Boundary, and Bond are all significantly related both in sound and sense. Timon wants the binding power of his money to be magically omnipotent.

Timon is creating a universal debt to himself. He who owes him, is also he whom Timon owns. Money is a language of debt and debt is a language of guilt. Yet money can "ransom" but it is not the free grace that absolves. Thus the language of capital is the inverted language of religion as well as art. In religious language, too, grace is thought of as a free underserved gift, the mercy of God over the justice of God (the analogous conflict between the mercy and justice of the law is worked out in the Alcibiades sub-plot in *Timon*). In Christianity, the death of Jesus as mediator, is an act of recompense for the sins of man, an at-one-ment with God.

The language of religion is also an economics of loss and transformation, and one with which Shakespeare struggles in *Timon* as in many of the other plays. The Eucharist, the communal meal in which each participant drinks of the body and blood of the god and becomes spiritually transformed into him, is the image behind Timon's communal feasts. Apemantus

comments, "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; and the madness is, he cheers them up too" (I, ii, 39-43). With echoes of the betrayal of Judas, Apemantus says, "the fellow that sits next to him now, parts bread with him, pledges the breath of him in a divided draught, is the readiest man to kill him; 't has been proved" (I, ii, 47-50).

The whole imagery of communion and Eucharist involves loss and transformation through the idea of transubstantiation; the change of body and blood into spirit is the same problem of art as alchemy and metamorphosis. The capacity to change one thing into another in order to restore union is based on an oral incorporative mode; digestion is a divine process which turns food to magic; and faeces, for children, are originally prized products, to be given as gifts, and later identified with gold. The bodily process of feeding and excreting is the other side of the spiritual ideal of communion and grace. Gold is grace as creative faeces, excrement is aliment, body and blood are transformed into a god. Timon bitterly throws dirt at the poet saying, "You are an alchemist; make gold of that!" (V, i, 118).

The waste, the excess, the surplus, the superfluous is necessarily the sacred (and represents another aspect of the narcissistic overflow onto the object). The superfluous is the unneeded. As Lear says,

O reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in poorest things superfluous. Allow not nature more
than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beasts. (II, iv, 267-70)

The life is in the excess, the sacred in the superfluous; the magic of capital investment is in the creation of something out of nothing; the magic in the fertility of the generative process is likewise, *creatio ex nihilo*, as is the magic of art. When the need is reasoned, there is no art, no allowed surplus. And without the excess of self-love transformed into the idealization of the substitute object, there is utterly no possibility for love.

The libido is drawn back into the ego and the world is renounced—Timon becomes *misanthropos*.

The psychology of exchange which is based on a demand for substitutive value, for equivalence and not surplus, necessarily implies a civil law based on the *lex talionis*, on vengeance and mutual devouring, as the Alcibiades sub-plot shows. The problem of justice and mercy in the law, which Shakespeare writes about in so many plays, and particularly *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*, always involves forgiveness, communion, and art as the loving superfluous sacred... a luxury not available in Timon's world. Every play, comedy or tragedy, needs some kind of superfluous unjustified forgiveness in order to end as a play, to restore order within the world of the play, and close off the play itself. The nature of art itself is the superfluous, but when the play world is closed off, can that grace overflow outside the theatre? In this play, Shakespeare seems to withdraw his grace from his art, just as Timon withdraws his libido, trying to replenish his depleted ego. But he has no ideal any more and so Timon turns the superfluous back to dead waste, abhorrent excrescence, man to beast, abundance to debt and thievery:

the earth's a thief,
That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
From gen'ral excrement; each thing's a thief;
The laws, your curb and whip, in their rough power
Has uncheck'd theft. Love not yourselves; away,
Rob one another. There's more gold.

(IV, iii, 444-449)

Money as a medium of exchange and mediator of relations between men is here seen as an expression of universal natural law by Timon.

I think it makes more sense in terms of the play itself, to see Timon's raging waste, communal feasts, oral ambivalence in terms of the superfluous sacred rather than in terms of Freud's conception that the totem feast is a response to a primal murder of the father, a mutual sharing of guilt. And the superfluous sacred means at-one-ment, diffuse union with an original lost mother instead of guilt over the jealous murder of the father.

(Freud's patriarchal Judaism might have something to do with his reading as opposed, say, to Jung's alchemical Christianity). Marion Milner's discussion of idealization, creativity, and the desire to be at-one is most helpful:

Idealization is commonly talked about by analysts in terms of its use as a defense against ambivalence in the relationship to the object; my patients' material suggests that it can also be used as a way of symbolizing the genital or pregenital subjective experience of orgasm. And in this setting the concept of disillusion takes on a special meaning, especially in connection with the urge towards passivity and the blissful surrender to the body impulses. . . . a letting go of the discriminating capacities which distinguish differences. Thus what patients experience as a dread of 'passivity' often turns out to be partly a dread not only of letting go of the sphincters, but also a perceptual letting go, which would mean a return to an extreme of undifferentiation between all the openings of the body and their products. Thus there is a dread of the total letting go of all the excited mess, faeces, urine, vomit, saliva, noise, flatus, no one differentiated from another, a state of blissful transcending of boundaries, which, to the conscious ego would be defined as madness. The dread is of a wish for the return of the state of infancy in which there was no discrimination between the orgiastic giving of the body products and the products themselves. . . . I suggest that it is this original lack of discrimination which is partly responsible for the later idealisation of the body products; and the disillusion is then experienced when the real qualities of the intended love gift come to be perceived. . . . particularly in poets and artists who are inhibited in their work, there has been a catastrophic disillusion in the original discovery that their faeces are not as lively, as beautiful, as boundless, as the lovely feelings they had in the giving of them.¹¹

¹¹ Marion Milner: *On Not Being Able to Paint* (New York: International Universities Press, 1957), pp. 150-1.

Timon's love gifts (and Shakespeare's as well perhaps) are an attempt at orgiastic giving and a denial of the need to receive, a fear of passive dependence and a desire for it, a wish to dissolve the differences between self and other: "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) . . . O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many, like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes " (I, ii, 10709) .

When Timon discovers that his idealized brotherly communion is a cannibalistic mutual devouring, his response is not guilt or shame as it would be in the case of Freud's totemistic brotherhood, but rage and primitive hatred (what in Freud would precede the murder of the father) . This rage is directed against and placed in terms of women, not men; the breeding and feeding generosity of the mother must be accepted as beneficent bounty or it becomes detested as parasitic dependence. Before he can give his gift, Timon needs to learn how to accept and receive the gift of nature, love, grace; he must accept the power of women. Instead, he tries to omnipotently become the woman and nourisher himself. He refuses to accept generation from the female, and thus *all* generation, all creation of something from nothing is detestable debt and abhorred birth. . . . including the breeding of capital:

He pours it out: Plutus, the god of Gold,
Is but his steward. No meed but he repays
Sevenfold above itself; no gift to him
But *breeds* the giver a return exceeding
All use of quittance. (I, i, 287-91)

If I want gold, steal but a beggar's dog
And give it Timon; why the dog coins gold. (II, i, 8-9)

The birth of man is an excrescence: "If thou wilt curse, thy father, that poor rag,/Must be thy subject, who in spite put stuff/To some she-beggar and compounded thee/Poor rogue hereditary " (IV, iii, 271-4) . Timon curses mother Nature: "Ensear thy fertile and conceptionous womb; Let it no more bring out ingrateful man!" (IV, iii, 187-8) . And in the background is Lear:

Crack nature's molds, all germins spill at once
That makes ingrateful man! (III, ii, 7-8)

Down from the waist they are Centaurs
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends'. (IV, vi, 126-9)

A woman who gives birth is unclean, not virginally pure and chaste; the breaking open of the womb and expelling of the child from his narcissistic self-containment into a cruel world of differentiation and unsatisfied need is the primal crime. Creation is whoring, superfluous waste.

Outside of the two whores who appear briefly with Alcibiades in Act IV, the only women in the play are, significantly, Amazons in a masque—threatening, warlike women placed under formalized and ritual control through art (the same defensive strategy used in *The Tempest*). "They dance! they are mad women," says Apemantus, "I should fear those that dance before me now/would one day stomp upon me." (I, ii, 148-49). Women, he says, "eat lords; so they come by great bellies" (I, i, 209). After he loses his money, devoured by his debts, woman becomes also for Timon a ravenous destroyer:

This fell whore of thine
Hath in her more destruction than thy sword,
For all her cherubin look. (IV, iii, 61-4)

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, 112-8)

The taking in of nourishing milk reverses to the vomiting of poison; communion with the mother and the other is now a source of corruption and syphilitic disintegration. But Timon's hatred, while it is a schizophrenic reversal is itself still a refusal to accept loss, a refusal to reconstruct, and recover new objects, to transform or metamorphose. He cannot find a

substitute ideal. His rage remains primitively narcissistic. His hatred is as orgasmic, diffuse, and undifferentiated as his love. It contains both the desire to control and enclose the whole world, and the desire passively to see oneself as a victim of universal corruption. On the one hand, it represents an all-or-nothing split between ideas of good and evil, pure and impure, and the outward projection of the primitive hatred at the recognition of the discrepancy between self and other into the outside world. The original unity of love and hate in oral ambivalence becomes undone and in place of incorporation is expulsion. Yet Timon's curses all center around the confusion of opposites and boundaries, the collapse of splitting divisions:

To general filth
Convert 'i the 'instant green virginity. . .
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraires,
And let confusion live! (IV, i, 6-21)

To convert everything into its opposite means to negate and destroy one term of the existing contraries; such was the original aim of Timon's love and his use of money. His hate has the same purpose of destroying difference, of denying mourning and recovery. His split ego, even in its construction of a nightmare world is seeking still a way back to primal undifferentiated unity. To hate is a way to retain his relation to his objects; only when he becomes indifferent does he die. As one psychoanalyst writes, "Hatred can be used for ego syntonic purposes. . . . [it can serve to avoid] feelings of despondency, of a need to be loved, of passivity and helplessness, or a desire to dominate and control, and even feelings of affection."¹²

Yet how is Timon to react to betrayal, ingratitude, inconstancy? In the Alcibiades sub-plot, the alternative to hatred and vengeance, which is mourning, is identified with unacceptable womanishness. The idealized chaste virtue of a good woman, one who like Cordelia suffers, yet forgives full of pity and love, does not exist in this play, and is excluded from

¹² Pnig Nie Pao: "The Role of Hatred in the Ego," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 34 (1965), 257-62.

the code the men live by, and by which they control the world. Alcibiades argues for the pity of the law to absolve a man who revenged himself according to the noble male political and civil code of honour; that is, who made good his loss by a compensatory act. Says the Senator,

To revenge is no valour, but to bear. (III, v, 39)
 He's truly valiant that can wisely suffer
 The worst that man can breathe. (l. 31)

Alcibiades points out the contradiction of these words in one who dispenses retaliation under the words "Justice" and "War."

If there be
 Such valour in the bearing, what make we
 That stay at home, if bearing carry it;
 And the ass more captain than the lion [the felon]
 Loaden with irons wiser than the judge,
 If wisdom be in suffering. (III, v, 45-50)

The senator who calls for forbearance also stands for the law of capital retaliatory punishment: "Friend or brother/He forfeits his own blood that spills another" (III, v, 8708). Justice in its abstract disguise as a noble civil order is at bottom bloody revenge—the *lex talionis*, the economics of exchange based on a false reduction of human value to market value, of human life to dead coin and literalism. This same law exalts murder in war as valorous; the boundaries which demarcate the acceptable place of hatred, vengeance, and murder are false and confused. The cultural sanction of retaliation leads finally only to self-devouring.

In the world of Timon, as in the world at large, the nobility which defines itself in terms of the frozen exchanges of retaliatory violence, of life for life, destroys itself in the end; the society which sanctions mercantile exchange as a model for law ends by confusing the boundaries between the pure and impure, the permissible and inviolate. Alcibiades' giving of himself in the noble, altruistic pursuit of war to destroy his society's enemies is at bottom the same kind of narcissistic love-feast in which Timon devours his friends. As Timon says to him in I. ii, 77, "You had rather be at a breakfast of enemies

than a dinner of friends." Alcibiades: "So they were bleeding-new, my lord, there's no meat like'm/I could wish my best friend at such a feast" (ll. 79-81).

Love and war are not opposites; politics is erotic. Destruction seeks to unite with its object by devouring incorporation, to have and to be the other. One can escape only through positing the superfluous sacred value, the idealized object, above recompense, revenge, law. In Shakespeare, this idealized vision of the feminine virtues of pity and forgiveness means also a kind of sacrifice of male selfhood. When there is no acceptance of woman or what woman represents, there is also no mediation between men. The idealized value of woman as mercy and selfless love becomes the bond between men, the surplus which allows man to unite to man. In *Timon*, this surplus love is found in the faithful servant, who seeks Timon out despite his poverty and exile to serve him without price. Weeping in front of Timon, Timon can exempt him from the general hatred and curse because of the servant's tears: "What, dost thou weep? Come nearer. Then I love thee,/Because thou art a woman and disclaim'st/Flinty mankind (V, i, 498-91). Yet this singular act of the one poor servant is not enough in this play. Isolated acts of forgiveness exist, but do not redeem the world from the general curse—except in the early comedies, where the violence is barely contained.

Shakespearean endings, which often depend on an act of forgiveness (belated if tragic, saving if comic) to provide the resolution of the play often have, to me, a feeling of artificiality. The forgiving endings are often anti-climactic afterthoughts which seem to serve the purpose of cleaning the messy carnage from the stage so the audience can go home; they resolve on a formal and aesthetic level somewhat mechanically, I think, the violently disruptive forces which have been unleashed in the plays. Perhaps Shakespeare's constant reminders to his audience that they are watching a play comes from his need to distance and assert a constant control over the troubling presences he himself has conjured; and conversely to make the world outside the theater a stage in order to extend the realm of power of the artist from the play-world to the world-as-a stage in general. Perhaps the belief in the world as art is the

highest necessary illusion, just like the belief in the possibility of universal mutual forgiveness. The Shakespearian vision of forgiveness, though, is often pessimistic. Endings are not redeeming apocalypses but often bloody slaughters, barely warded off catastrophes. Without what is necessary for man to stop the cycle of destruction—that vision of the ideal feminine, or the magic of art, or mutual forgiveness, man can only unite to man by violent devouring. The politics of war are the problems of love. Marion Milner writes of

the primitive ruthlessness of a love which in the beginning cannot help but destroy in imagination what it loves. . . . what one loves most, because one needs it most, is necessarily separate from oneself; and yet the primitive urge of loving is to make what one loves part of oneself. So that in loving it one has, in one's own primitive wish, destroyed it as something separate and outside and having an identity of its own.¹³

When differences are conceived as threatening and hostile, the other is loved and hated; the enemy is the object of erotic aggression: to love him, he must be destroyed.

The inability to tolerate difference is the nature of primitive love; yet human identity itself is based on differentiation, sameness-in-difference, continuity-in-change. Timon's establishment of his grave by the edge of the sea, whose rhythms embody this metamorphic identity is the frustrated yearning, perhaps, for an identity-in-difference rather than a dissolution into a maternal Nothing, though he says "nothing brings me all things" (V, i, 191). In *The Tempest*, one must endure immersion in the destructive element in order to find a metamorphic power full fathom five.

Both cultural and individual identity demand the establishment of differences, the toleration of mutually co-existing opposites of self and other. The precariousness of these differences and of this toleration is the threat of inner violence which suddenly wells up to cause a breakdown of differentiation, a collapse of things into their opposite, of Timon into Misanthropos, noble warrior into revengeful rebel. What saves

¹³ Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Athens at the end of the play is an act of forbearance which had been previously stigmatized as unmanly. Alcibiades will discriminate between those who were responsible for his expulsion and those who were not, will find the appropriate victim. "Like a shepherd,/Approach the fold and cull th' infected forth,/But kill not all together (V, iv, 42-4). Justice is restitution and recovery, equal compensation for loss—acceptable substitution; revenge is devouring hunger, unsatiable rage at loss, but the line between the two is thin. Having confused and revealed that, Shakespeare withdraws to the reinstitution of traditional order.

The shadow that hangs over the play, however, is Timon's. Alcibiades' eleventh hour retraction is again an artificial and uncertain resolution, a formalized defense against the violence which threatens to explode the containing power of the play as artistic form:

And I will use the olive with the sword,
Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each
Prescribe to each other as each other's leech. (V, iv, 8204)

"Leech" as a symbol of re-integration, of symbiotic toleration is indeed an ambiguous and unsatisfactory image. This kind of blood-sucking feeding and nourishing is not the kind of communion ideal for social order. That there is no regaining the milk of paradise in this play (as there is in *Antony and Cleopatra* where the leech brings freedom, is a babe at the breast) is evident. Yet the reconstituted remains infected and unpurged; it is still based on the flow of blood.

There is no transformation back into dream as there is in *Antony and Cleopatra*, because there is no dream in the play not founded on the devouring and destructive rage of narcissistic love. Where Antony and Cleopatra's dream is of a marriage between male and female, an interpenetration of opposites, Timon's dream is of a male fantasy of exclusive brotherhood, based on an identity which needs to destroy the other. The difference between the two dreams is the difference between the art of recovering loss by metamorphosis (identity-in-difference) and the recovery of loss by substitution (identity as sameness, incorporation, internalization). One is transformative, the other

sacrificial. One allows for surplus value as free gift; the other demands exact recompense. One represents mercy, love, art; the other money, law, capitalism, artifice.

Timon of Athens is a dead end. Such transformative magic does not exist in its world. *Antony and Cleopatra* must necessarily follow upon Timon's heels if the rest is not to be silence. Once recognized and accepted, one can render to Caesar that which is Caesar's. The transformative power of art means another world than this one. Art can no longer imitate nature, but just transform it into "something rich and strange." Yet the world remains Caesar's. The world which is the province of art, the part of nature which can become a part of paradise exists in the realm of the idealizing imagination. But Shakespeare was not a Romantic; Prospero needs to abjure his art so that we can return to Naples, to face death. Yet in facing death, we need the imaginative dream of Cleopatra, a dream that is permitted to us only for a few moments. But then, frighteningly, in awakening from our dream, we become again Caliban.

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had wak'd after a long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again.

(III, iii, 145-52

Tempest)

Susan Handelman
Department English
University of Maryland
College Park, Md. 20742