IDEALISTS REALISTS AND CYNICS

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IN

TIMON OF ATHENS AND TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1977

MASTER OF ARTS (1977) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Idealists, Realists and Cynics in
Timon of Athens and Troilus and Cressida

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SUPERVISOR: Doctor A. S. Brennan

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 124

ABSTRACT

It is suggested that Shakespeare reveals in his work a continuing interest in the variety of human responses to societies whose members no longer adhere to traditional social and moral values. It is maintained that in certain plays the emphasis lies more on these responses and their implications than on the unique personalities of the characters themselves. In such plays the primary interest of the poet is seen to be in a triadic division of attitudes towards and responses to the same social conditions. The characters exhibiting these attitudes are here referred to as idealists, realists and cynics. It is argued that idealists are presented as being admirable in some respects but inadequate as leaders of their respective societies and often ultimately dangerous both to themselves and to their fellow citizens. It is further argued that cynics are portrayed as fulfilling no positive function in their societies and are even destructive insofar as they foster their own negative attitudes in others. The point is made that the realists can be seen to serve both their own interests and the interests of their societies and may therefore be best fitted for leadership under the prevailing social conditions. It is acknowledged that Shakespeare's realists are on occasion to be found in situations where no moderate, realistic solutions are possible. These general hypotheses are first briefly

examined in relation to King John, The First Part of King Henry IV, King Henry V and Coriolanus. They are then examined more thoroughly in Timon of Athens and Troilus and Cressida in which, it is maintained, the triadic division of attitudes involving idealism, realism and cynicism may be most clearly perceived.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. A. S. Brennan for his advice and encouragement, and to those who have patiently allowed themselves to be used as an audience in order that I might clarify my ideas.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In this thesis I shall suggest that Timon of Athens and Troilus and Cressida are remarkable for their thematic emphasis on a triadic conflict of attitudes towards imperfect and degenerating societies. I shall suggest that two of these attitudes are presented as being socially destructive, while the third is shown to be at best an effective compromise, and at worst, impotent in the face of widespread social degeneration. Furthermore, I shall suggest that this triadic division of attitudes, while most clearly defined in Timon of Athens and Troilus and Cressida, may be seen to fulfil a structural and thematic function in other plays in the canon.

The attitudes I am primarily concerned with are manifest in characters whom I shall call idealists, realists and cynics, but I must stress from the outset that while these labels are employed as useful categories, it is recognized that there is some overlapping between them. The idealist, for my purposes, is the character who holds the belief that some sort of ideal system of values is, or should be, a generally accepted motivating force in his society, and who tries to live by this system of values disregarding all evidence of its impracticality or irrelevance. The cynic subscribes to the view that there are no worthwhile values operating in his society, and that the society is therefore not worthy of his support.

Such a character will partially or totally dissociate himself from society and will exhibit a tendency to pour cynical or satiric invective upon everyone - even, at times, upon himself. The realist is rather more difficult to define for the very reason that, by definition, he has a flexibility of outlook that is lacking in the idealist and the cynic. In fact, the realist embodies something of both the idealist and the cynic. While he believes in and tries to behave according to some system of values, he is always aware of the imperfections in his society and recognizes that in coming to terms with them he may have to modify his system of values. He is never either entirely selfish nor entirely altruistic; rather, he tends to seek a compromise between self-interest and the interests of his society. He represents, perhaps, the middle of humanity, for while he does not adopt the extreme moral positions held by both the idealist and the cynic he remains outside the mainstream of self-seeking opportunism that characterizes his corrupt society. The point must also be made here that the path of the realist is more difficult in some respects than that of the idealist or the cynic. The idealist holds onto his values in their entirety come what may, and is therefore rarely in doubt about what course to take. The cynic, lacking all conviction, despises everyone and reacts to every eventuality with the same contempt. For the realist, even if he has the power to influence events, the right path might be very difficult to see, or, indeed, there might be no course open to him which satisfies both his personal aspirations and his moral values. It is worth making the point here that whether we view the realist as a positive, cohesive social force or a scheming, self-seeking Machiavel may well depend upon the way we view the context in which we find him. If we see his society as a fading Golden Age of universal altruism and fixed moral values which is being undermined by a few cynical opportunists, then we shall place him with

the villains. But if we view the realist against a background of shifting values and social turmoil where the pursuit or maintenance of idealistic standards has become an intensely personal struggle for supremacy, we shall feel ourselves in sympathy with his aspirations.

The degenerating societies we observe in these plays are characterized by the presence of a notable element of cynical self-seekers whom I shall refer to as cynical opportunists in order to distinguish them from the alienated cynics. Present in all societies to a greater or lesser extent, the cynical opportunist tends to proliferate when leadership is weak or is itself cynically opportunistic. There is no dearth of such characters around the foolishly idealistic Timon, and they receive no discouragement from the usurious senators. What differentiates this type from the other three types is that its representatives act from motives of unambiguous self-interest. The idealist, the realist and the cynic operate on the assumption that society has or ought to have some system of moral values.

In the two plays with which I am most concerned, then, the idealist, the realist and the cynic are not primarily of interest as unique personalities, as are Lear, Hamlet and Macbeth, for example, but rather as manifestations of certain attitudes towards and reactions to their social conditions. Neither Timon nor Hector takes hold of our imagination in the way Shakespeare's major tragic heroes do, and Thersites and Apemantus seem limited, one-sided creatures in contrast to the full, rounded humanity of Falstaff. But Falstaff, too, is something of a cynic, a very able, if jovial satirist.

Indeed, Shakespeare reveals a deep interest in social attitudes and their implications throughout his work. By the time of Elizabeth the old

his cynicism are destructive and that the answers to the problems of Athenian society might be best provided by a man who comes to recognize the value of compromise and moderation. All this is not to say that Shakespeare saw the figure who pursued the Golden Mean as an infallible solution to social upheaval. The spark of Diomedes' forthright realism is lost among the fiery idealism and smouldering cynicism burning on the Phrygian plain, and Enobarbus is overwhelmed by similar forces clashing on his battleground. But whether they are saviours or victims, kings or stewards, Shakespeare's middle-men provide a point of reference from which we may observe the seething humanity on either side.

In this introductory chapter I shall, as a preparation for my consideration of Timon of Athens and Troilus and Cressida, look at a number of plays in which the triadic division mentioned above may be seen to be operating, or in which a realist of the middle way figures prominently.

King John

Perhaps the first of Shakespeare's characters who may be seen as a realist is the bastard Philip. Indeed, the action in King John would seem largely to resolve itself into a conflict between the realism of Philip, which is of a somewhat political nature, and the very cynical opportunism of most of the other characters. King John himself appears at first to be a man of strong personality, for he takes decisive action when his position is threatened by the supporters of the young Arthur, but one comes to suspect that his strength derives largely from his mother, after whose death John becomes weak and defeatist. Moreover, with his plot to have Arthur murdered he puts himself firmly among those who are guided by a

ruthless opportunism.

While John's character deteriorates during the course of the play, Philip develops into an able leader. When he appears in the first scene of the play, however, Philip is an outsider, an entirely non-political figure, a man who is utterly naive in the ways of the court. It is not without significance that this country innocent makes his first entrance immediately after the politically shrewd and forceful Elinor has reminded John, and us, that her son is a usurper:

John: Our strong possession and our right for us.

Elin: Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me.
(I.i.39-40)[1]

From the first Philip is a wit and a "good blunt fellow". It will be seen that bluntness of speech is characteristic of those figures who view their world realistically; it is also, of course, characteristic of the alienated cynic. But at this point the most notable thing about Philip is that he is a "madcap", something of a Falstaff in the satiric wit which he displays most clearly in his assessment of the possibilities and hazards of his newly-acquired position at court. It is apparent, however, that Philip is a quick learner, and already he reveals a measure of political astuteness:

> . . . though I will not practice to deceive,
> Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn,
> For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.
> (I.i.214-6)

And what better way to rise than in a war? Philip at first shares Hotspur's enthusiasm for war, but he does not have the earnestness, the idealization of honour with which Shakespeare imbued the later character. Still in his

role of clown, Philip sees the process of war as a jolly game; he delights in baiting Austria and he sees in the First Citizen's elaborately-phrased proposal for peace an excellent opportunity to indulge his satiric wit (II.i.455-67). When this proposal, involving the marriage of Lewis and Blanch, is accepted by all except the powerless Arthur, Philip's satire becomes for a while more serious as he gives his soliloquy on Commodity. It is quite clear at this point that his judgment is unclouded by idealism, for he obviously has no illusions about the motives of all concerned. His harshest criticism is directed against King Philip, whose "conscience", "zeal" and "charity" are quickly dissipated by considerations of self-interest.

Indeed, Philip is more perturbed by the inconstancy of "fickle France" than by the usurpation of John, a fact which may seem to pose a problem for those who would wish to view the Bastard entirely sympathetically. The full wisdom of his allegiance will become manifest as the play develops, but even at this time his position is supported by the fact that John is apparently a strong leader and well-established as king, while he is challenged by an immature prince who is supported only by a foreign power.

If Philip's allegiance involves a concern for England's welfare it also serves to aid his own advancement, and may even at this point appear to involve a narrower, even cynical self-interest, for having witnessed the prevalence of the latter motive he gives an interesting statement of intent:

> Since kings break faith upon Commodity,
> Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee.
> (II.i.597-8)

But if we expect in the action that follows to see Philip single-mindedly

pursuing his own ambitions we shall be disappointed. Rather, his words here will seem to serve the purpose of emphasizing that it is his constancy, the loyalty with which he serves his chosen cause in the full knowledge of all the factors involved, that distinguishes him sharply from the other major characters.

After distinguishing himself in battle by slaying Austria and rescuing Elinor, Philip makes a brief appearance in the second scene of Act IV where his behaviour is contrasted with that of Pembroke, Salisbury and John. The two lords are obviously very worried about their security as supporters of the King in view of the latter's lack of judgment in insisting on a second coronation. Moreover, that their request for Arthur's freedom is not motivated by humanitarian reasons is apparent from Pembroke's words:

> . . . let it be our suit
> That you have bid us ask his liberty,
> Which for our goods we do no further ask
> Than whereupon our weal, upon you depending,
> Counts it your weal to have his liberty.
> (IV.ii.63-6)

In other words, if John falls, they fall with him. With the news of Arthur's death the King's position must seem extremely precarious, and the lords abandon him with hypocritical lamentations for the young prince. Philip, on the other hand, shows no sign of withdrawing or transferring his loyalty. In view of Arthur's apparent death and John's rumoured complicity, Philip's continued allegiance can hardly be ascribed to an airy idealism, but neither, considering the King's beleaguered position, can one accuse the Bastard of purely selfish motives. Why then does he remain loyal to an apparent murderer? The answer would seem to lie in the alter-

natives open to him. He can either support an unscrupulous English king or an unscrupulous Frenchman who is in league with Rome. A third alternative would be for him to retire from the scene altogether, but his help is obviously needed to repel the French invader.

The choices Shakespeare allows Philip at this point constitute an early example of the poet's characteristic method. The choice is not as in the simpler medieval drama between right and wrong, but between one problematic course and another rather worse. Shakespeare insists on presenting the world as it is, where an ideal solution is generally not available. Henry V's soldiers are aware of his responsibility in hauling off his subjects to die in foreign quarrels, but they are not fully aware of his larger responsibility to England, of his need to busy the giddy minds of fractious nobles and attempt to unify his country by setting it against a foreign enemy. Alcibiades is finally faced with the decision of either destroying Athens or taking on the formidable task of healing a society sick with rampant self-interest. And Enobarbus is forced to choose between desertion to the enemy and loyalty to a friend who seems determined to destroy himself and all his army.

Philip's choice of loyalty is crucial, for John is already beginning to crumble under the tide of adverse events. To the King's emotional plea for no more ill tidings Philip returns a very practical reply:

> But if you be afeard to hear the worst
> Then let the worst unheard fall on your head.
> (IV.ii.135-6)

Again, he does not believe in mincing words. Nor does he believe in wasting time on recriminations, but sets out in haste on his errand to the disaffected lords. Philip has by now utterly cast off his role as clown,

and his businesslike manner is in great contrast to that of John, who now feebly tries to throw the blame for Arthur's supposed death onto Hubert.

In the following scene Philip is again contrasted with Salisbury and Pembroke, who vie with each other in describing the foulness of the "murder" of Arthur. Philip's comment is equally condemnatory but far briefer, and only he admits to the possibility that it was not murder:

> It is a damned and a bloody work,
> The graceless action of a heavy hand,
> If that it be the work of any hand.
> (IV.iii.57-9)

As the two lords go off to join the Dauphin Philip is left to contemplate the dead prince, who is a symbol of the chaos that now besets England. What we should draw from the speech with which he closes this scene is that it is not he but the weak and unscrupulous John who has lost his way "among the thorns and dangers of this world"(IV.iii.141). And so, too, would the idealist if there were one present, for there is no ideal solution possible in a world so dominated by Commodity. There must be a middle way between impractical idealism and Commodity, and for Philip this means loyalty to an imperfect but established king and opposition to a foreign invader.

In fact, he is more loyal to the King than the King himself, for by the opening of Act V John is so dispirited that he has not the heart to pursue his cause with force of arms. Philip attempts to reason with him on the art of kingship, but finds himself delegated to carry the responsibility of repelling the invader.

In the event, it is Fortune and the forces of nature that persuade the Dauphin to break off hostilities, but the lesson of John's troublesome reign is made very clear: England's safety depends on the loyalty

of her subjects. But this loyalty must not be of the blindly idealistic kind, for persons and conditions are rarely ideal; it must rather be guided by a moral but realistic vision which does not look inward to self-interest but which strives to see and attain the general and long-term good in spite of the obscuring effect of pervasive evils.

It must be said that the Bastard is not a well-drawn character; his development from country clown to the responsible commander of the English forces is inadequately treated. His soliloquies and speeches tend to confuse us as often as they serve to enlighten us on his character, and we must therefore look to his actions for more useful evidence of his true motives. The most notable thing about Philip's behaviour is its variety, or more precisely its pattern of growth, of developing maturity as Philip is faced with increasingly severe tests of his integrity and qualities of leadership. Such a pattern of irresponsibility, growth through challenge, and ultimate political maturity will be treated more skillfully in Shakespeare's development of Hal into a monarch who successfully combines politics and principle. Like Hal, Philip is a man of the middle way, neither foolishly idealistic nor corrupt or cynical. Always motivated by his loyalty to England, he does, in fact, react in the most politically reasonable way to the corruption all around him.

The First Part of King Henry IV

Prince Hal is one of Shakespeare's most eminently political figures, and it is in The First Part of King Henry IV that we first find a conflict between characters who have in them something of the idealist, the realist and the cynic. Hotspur is, at least in one respect,

an idealist. His one ideal is honour and he places it far above all other considerations. He is described by King Henry himself as "the theme of honour's tongue" (I.i.80), and by Douglas as "the king of honour" (IV.i.10), and it is repeatedly stressed that honour is, for Hotspur, the driving force of his life. As Shakespeare presents him this young, hot-headed man is heedless of danger where honour is concerned:

> Send danger from the east unto the west,
> So honour cross it from the north to south,
> And let them grapple.
>
> (I.ii.193-5)

There is no doubt that the bold and boisterous Hotspur is, on one level, a very attractive figure. He is not a political schemer, lusting for power or profit; he is a man of action, a Fortinbras who would no doubt go to war for "a little patch of ground" as soon as for a kingdom, so long as there were honour to be won. We admire his impulsive response to perceived injustice, his impatience with empty rhetoric and bombast, his boundless energy.

However, we should not allow our admiration for him to blind us to the fact that his idealism is, under the circumstances, dangerous and destructive. In the first place, his excessively single-minded pursuit of honour obscures from him the political realities of the situation into which he thrusts himself so naively. For while he is a man of formidable courage and prowess on the battlefield, he is a simple, though sometimes stubborn, child at the council table. He can see neither that he is being exploited by Worcester, nor that his rather Machiavellian uncle is not a reliable ally. Moreover,

while one may, as Traversi has said, see in Hotspur a "manifestation, inadequate but sincere, of honourable chivalry"[2], one soon begins to question the nature of this honour, and to have doubts about its worth as an ideal. For medieval chivalry involved fighting bravely for a noble cause, but Hotspur seems to place far too much emphasis on the fighting and renown to be won, and too little on the cause. He does, in fact, serve the cause of honour rather than an honourable cause. He is ready to leap to the moon or dive to the depths of the sea to reach his goddess Honour, so long as he

> might wear
> Without corrival all her dignities.
> (I.iii.204-5)

This need of the idealist to stand alone at the pinnacle of his idealism, to reign supreme in his ephemeral dream-world, is one source of his isolation from the rest of humanity, for it looks both upward and inward, but never outward. Wilson has summed up Hotspur's motivation succinctly, though perhaps a little strongly:[3]

> . . . the honour of which he dreams is personal renown and nothing else; a conception which, for all its implications for bravery in battle and contempt for danger and death, is a purely selfish one.

But Shakespeare's Hotspur is surely neither a villain nor a hero; he is rather, like Hamlet, a man for whom the time is out of joint. At King Arthur's court his vigor and valor would have won him the honour he so desperately pursued; in

Henry Bolingbroke's England there is no unquestionably noble cause to serve, no simple issue to resolve. The white knight is out of place among the grey shades of political reality.

Falstaff, too, is a man whose nature is not fitted for the everyday working world of power politics. Prince Hal makes it clear at Falstaff's first appearance that this Dionysian character, this "fat-witted" knight, rejoices only in eating, drinking, wenching and purse-snatching, and Falstaff delights in accepting this assessment of his character. But if for the prince, as for generations of audiences, his faults are for a good while redeemed by his wit and abundant sense of life, it must also be recognized that the riotousness and lack of respect for law and order that he represents pose a danger to the state less immediate but no less real than do Hotspur and his fellow rebels.

While both are destructive forces as far as orderly government is concerned, Falstaff and Hotspur are obviously in many ways contrasting characters. The old knight is not a man of action but a man of words, and with his great fund of wit he is usually able to talk himself out of, as well as into trouble. He is, in fact, something of a satirist, in part a cynic who rails, albeit good-humouredly, against the concept of honour and against "old Father Antic the law". It is not that he thinks society too corrupt to deserve his support, but rather that the normal conventions do not suit his temperament. But if society is not generally corrupt, all is far from being

well in England, and Falstaff and the rebel lords are symptoms of a disease which festered from the wound of Bolingbroke's usurpation. Even the field of Shrewsbury upon which Prince Hal is to distinguish and redeem himself will not be allowed to shine forth as a field of glory, for the cynical Falstaff is there together with the soldiers he has impressed. "Food for powder", he calls them, remarking that they will "fill a pit as well as better"(IV.iii.72-3), and his cynical comments are, like those of Thersites, a sharp reminder of the more ignoble aspects of war.

It is upon Shrewsbury field that Falstaff makes his most famous satiric attack, and it is directed against the very thing that Hotspur seeks so diligently on the same field. Falstaff's catechism presents honour as a mere abstraction which is useful neither to the living nor to the dead. Having declared that he will have none of it he soon proves himself true to his word when he feigns death in order to save his life. And a kind of cynicism would seem to triumph over idealism as Falstaff mutilates the body of the gallant Hotspur and hauls it ignominiously around the battlefield. In this we have a foreshadowing of the even more brutish treatment of the body of the idealistic Hector by the cynical Achilles. The heavy irony in the dishonouring of Hotspur, the man of honour, is redoubled as the man of dishonour attempts to claim some honour for his act. But the honour he seeks is not, of course, of the abstract

variety:

> If your father will do me any honour, so;
> if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke,
> I can assure you.
> (V.iv.143-6)

Falstaff does not, of course, get his earldom or dukedom, and cynicism does not triumph. The true situation is suggested somewhat earlier, as Hal stands over and between the two supine figures. On one side of him lies the gallant Hotspur, an idealist but a man of excess, a man for whom the accretion of honour was everything; on the other side lies the cynical Falstaff, a man of many excesses, none of them honourable. Hal stands in the centre, both literally and symbolically, a man of moderation, a man with a very realistic approach to life.

While the prince obviously shares Falstaff's enjoyment of the life of the tavern, Shakespeare lets us know very early in the play that Hal intends to put his youthful profligacy to sound political use:

> So, when this loose behaviour I throw off
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word I am,
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes.
> (I.ii.231-4)

He will "so offend, to make offense a skill" (I.ii.239), and this skill is, after all, essentially the same as that employed by his father who succeeded in "wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles" (Richard II, I.iv.28). Moreover, unlike Hotspur and Falstaff, who have the unfortunate tendency to be controlled by their humours, the prince is constantly in total control of both himself

and of his situation. Hotspur, like Hector and Coriolanus, can become subject to unreasonable anger when crossed in matters of honour#; Falstaff is unashamedly a slave to all the lower passions. When the state is threatened Hal immediately discards his profligate ways and becomes an able soldier, and he never allows anger to interfere with his dealings with friend or foe.

Indeed, in using the spoken word Hal can be as witty as Falstaff and far more tactful than Hotspur; he can earn the title of "king of courtesy" from common drawers (II.iv. 10), and draw admiration even from his enemies (V.ii.52ff.). He is able, that is to say, to match his words to the occasion, as one would expect of a rational, political man.

Moreover, Hal is able to assess the qualities of Falstaff and Hotspur very accurately, but both these characters misjudge Hal and come to suffer for it. Traversi has remarked the prince's shrewdness in judging character and motivation:[4]

> His sense of the limitation of this [Hotspur's] honour is one of the principal touchstones of Hal's developing character. His intelligence is of the kind that, operating entirely on the political level, sees through all pretences and evasions to the realities beneath them.

This quality Hal shares with Diomedes, for whom Helen's beauty does not obscure her inadequacy as a "theme of honour".

Falstaff can certainly see through his own pretences

but, in the nature of a man guided by the senses rather than by reason, he tends to indulge in wishful thinking. He believes that the prince values his friendship and will favour him highly when he becomes king, but in spite of obvious evidence that Hal takes serious business very seriously indeed, it is not until Hal takes the throne that the implications of this become devastatingly apparent to Falstaff.

Hotspur discovers his mistake much sooner. He, like many others including the King himself, has thought of Hal as nothing more than a wastrel. Perhaps Hotspur cannot be blamed for this, but when Vernon arrives with a glowing description of the prince (V.ii.52ff.) young Percy, true to his nature, dismisses it too lightly:

> Cousin, I think thou art enamoured
> On his follies: never did I hear
> Of any prince so wild a libertine.
> (V.ii.69-71)

Were he as shrewd as Hal, Hotspur might have suspected that this prince, who has offered him a challenge in very modest terms, is not that "madcap Prince of Wales" indulging in another of his follies, but is a man acting very deliberately and with a wholly serious - and political - purpose. But Hotspur's somewhat ascetic idealism, like that of Timon, is too rigid to allow him to adjust his opinions, and it puts him at such a distance from other men that he can never perceive them clearly.

That he issues such a challenge to Hotspur in such a way is an indication of the prince's sound reasoning and political awareness. He is well aware that the challenge in itself would raise him in the estimation of many, while he is equally aware that his father would not allow the heir to the throne to risk his life in single combat. Thus, the prince has enhanced his reputation even before he has raised his sword. This is but one example of the very careful political strategy that Hal has had in mind from the outset.

It is on the battlefield that we see with greatest clarity the most important manifestation of the different outlooks of the prince, Hotspur and Falstaff, this being their different concepts of and attitudes towards honour. It has been said that Hotspur idealizes honour, and that for him, as for Hector, this honour amounts largely to personal renown gained by victory on the battlefield. We learn the extent of this hunger for glory as he lies dying at Hal's feet:

> I better brook the loss of brittle life
> Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;
> They wound my thoughts more than thy sword my flesh,
> (V.iv.77-9)

In his last words Hotspur does not express a concern for the cause that is lost, nor does he lament the fate of England under an unjust and usurping king; singleminded to the end, he mourns only the loss of his reputation as a great warrior.

Falstaff has a similar understanding of the concept of honour, but a very different attitude towards it. If honour amounts to nothing more than renown then it is, he feels, useless both to the dead and

to the living, since the dead are insensible to it and for the living it is open to detraction by the envious. Thus, with the logic of the cynic, Falstaff, recognizing that an idealistic notion of honour is inadequate, rejects honour in its totality. As different as the individuals are, this process is similar to that operating when Timon is forced to recognize that his idealistic concept of friendship is shared by none of his "friends", and he thereafter denies the existence of any form of friendship between men.

Unlike Timon, however, Falstaff is willing to profit by what he despises. There is some irony in the fact that Falstaff would attempt to "steal" the honour of having slain the man of honour. On his part the prince is willing to support Falstaff's unlikely claim to having killed Hotspur, and in this we begin to see the difference between Hal's concept of honour and that of Hotspur and Falstaff. Unlike Falstaff, the prince is willing to risk his life on the field of battle for honour; unlike Hotspur, he never sees that honour as an end in itself. But while Hal surely does not seek renown for its own sake, one might feel that Wilson has misjudged the selflessness of Hal's motives in searching for honour:[5]

> Thus the prince . . . is already at Shrewsbury the soul of true honour, caring nothing for renown, for the outward show of honour in the eyes of men, so long as he has proved himself worthy of its inner substance in his own.

For must not the prince display very clearly his courage and prowess in battle in order to put himself back in favour with his father and to convince his father's subjects that he is a worthy heir to the

throne? That this is, and always has been, his intention is abundantly clear from the text. In the first act he has stated that he intends to "falsify men's hopes" and "attract more eyes" by an apparently sudden conversion from his dissolute life, and he sees in the rebellion an excellent opportunity for doing so. Hotspur has gained a great reputation in arms and the prince, in the interview with his father, has announced his plan to capitalize on it:

> Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
> To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf,
> And I will call him to so strict account
> That he shall render every glory up,
> Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
> Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.
> (III.ii.147-52)

Yet nowhere does Hal worship honour for its own sake, and neither does he lust after battle for the sheer enjoyment of fighting as Hotspur does. If Hotspur's one ambition is to be unrivalled "king of honour", Hal's is to be unrivalled king of England, and as a realist he knows full well that this will require far more than an eagerness for battle and a thirst for personal glory. It is interesting that the play opens with Hotspur proudly and defiantly refusing to hand over his captives, including Douglas, to the King, and closes with the prince bestowing the honour of disposing of Douglas upon his brother.

Hotspur's pursuit of honour is seen to have been an exercise in futility; the prince's concept of honour is seen to be of that apparently self-effacing nature that his father used to such great effect that he gained first the hearts of the nobles and the populace, and thereafter the throne. It is unquestionably a political form of

honour, but it is by no means to be disparaged, for this, according to Shakespeare's interpretation of history, is what England required in a leader at this time. Hotspur's idealistic but ultimately self-glorifying concept of honour, like that of Hector, could only be destructive in a world corrupted by cynicism or self-interest of the kind shown by Hotspur's own allies. In such a world the rigid and naive idealist is too easily manipulated by ruthless opportunists. To be sure, Hal himself is an opportunist and his motives are not without a strong element of self-interest, but we do not accuse him of cynicism because his vision is not limited to his own career. The prince always has his eye fixed on his ultimate goal - a strong, stable and united kingdom with himself as a popular and therefore unchallenged monarch. His interests and those of the nation are thus one. The disaffected nobles, on the other hand, notwithstanding their rationalizations, are seen to be cynically pursuing self-interest unenlightened by concern for the larger goal of national unity and the common good.

Henry V

As Henry V, Hal fulfills what Shakespeare has promised of him in the two earlier plays. The King draws not only the nobles of England with him against a common enemy; he also succeeds in enlisting the support of Wales, Ireland and Scotland[5]. Whether Henry's claim to the throne of France is valid or not need concern us as little as it might concern Henry. What is important is whether the claim appears, or can be made to appear valid, for if Henry is to

follow his father's good advice to "busy giddy minds/ With foreign quarrels" (II Henry IV, IV.v.214-5), he must appear to have God and justice on his side. For Hal knew as well as any military leader that the justness of the cause can have a considerable bearing on the morale of an army, and wars can be won or lost on the strength of morale.

It must be said that nowhere does Shakespeare suggest that Henry does not believe in his cause, but the poet does show clearly that the King places the whole responsibility for establishing the validity of his claim on his (clerical) advisers, thus very cleverly deflecting the moral responsibility for the war onto God's representatives. For Hal the important thing is that he can direct the energies and emotions of his countrymen against a common enemy and thereby encourage in them a pride in both their country and their king. As I have said earlier, the realist, the man of the middle way, has in him something of both the idealist and the cynic. For Henry, the sine qua non is that England be strong and united under his leadership, and in the light of this ideal his apparently cynical readiness to take his countrymen abroad to die may be seen more as a calculated and justifiable compromise. Better that some should die in foreign squabbles that serve the ultimate cause of national unity than that many should die in domestic squabbles that would promote continuing disunity.

Of the King's deeper motives the common soldiers know nothing, and through Henry's words to them at Agincourt Shakespeare is able to

make it clear to his audience that Henry is not fighting against great odds merely in order to gain honour for self-aggrandizement. Indeed, under cover of his disguise the King points out that the monarch, far from being an irresponsible pursuer of glory or power, is rather a man who shares the fears and concerns of his soldiers, though in pursuit of his duty to England he cannot let these latter considerations interfere with the business at hand. Nor can he concern himself with the spiritual welfare of the individual, and he rejects the responsibility for the souls of his soldiers just as he has earlier delegated responsibility for hazarding their lives by placing it with the church. He is therefore left with only his immediate and long-term responsibilities to the state, which is onus enough for a leader of a troubled land.

This is not to say that Henry has no care or respect for his soldiers. He moves humbly among them on the field of Agincourt, attending to their doubts in his cause and according them respect by trying to argue with them reasonably. And in so doing he is able not only to teach them about the king's essential humanity, his hopes and fears; he is also able to learn, to discover their hopes and fears and doubts, so that when the time comes for rousing words he is able to offer them what they need - pride in themselves for doing their duty to God and England. Such, Shakespeare shows us, are the methods of an able and victorious military and political leader.

Coriolanus

Coriolanus, too, is a successful military leader - for a time. But his outstanding success, like his ultimate failure, springs from far different qualities from those we have seen in Henry V. While the latter is a realist, a man of the middle way, Coriolanus is a man of extremes; he is both an idealist and a cynic. His ideal is honour, but it is an honour of a rather more complex kind than that of Hotspur. What it amounts to, in fact, is an idealization of constancy, which involves a complete and unswerving dedication to valor and truthfulness. In the face of enemies at home and abroad he will never retreat in either word or deed.

His enemies at home are the plebeians in general and the tribunes in particular, and in his estimation of them, which he takes no pains to conceal, he is totally cynical. In Coriolanus' view the common people are untrustworthy by nature, are unconstant both in peacetime and in war, and for the man whose ideal is constancy this means that they are totally worthless. Because he himself is rigid and unchanging, it never occurs to Coriolanus that the plebeians could ever be other than as he sees them. Just as in the blindness of his idealism Hotspur cannot see that his uncle and father are untrustworthy, just as in the blindness of his idealism Timon cannot see that he is surrounded by sycophants, so in the blindness of his idealism Coriolanus cannot see that the plebeians, if they lack courage and firm resolve, can respond to good leadership and kind words. After all, leadership is the obverse side of exploitation; if the people

can be manipulated into foolish actions they can be led to do noble ones. But the only kind of leadership that Coriolanus knows involves hurling himself into danger and hoping with threats and abuse to encourage men to follow him. On the one occasion when, flushed with his victory over Corioli, he encourages the soldiers by appealing to their valor and patriotism, he finds himself with more than sufficient volunteers (I.vi.80-1). Unfortunately, Coriolanus learns nothing from this; back in Rome he is as ready as ever to treat all common men with contempt.

It is this inability to learn, this total inflexibility of his nature, rather than his idealism or cynicism in themselves, which leads Coriolanus to his destruction. Like Hotspur and the early Timon, he is a man of inflexible idealism; like Thersites and the later Timon, he is a man of inflexible cynicism. It is this rigidity that produces the excesses of such figures, and Coriolanus would make a virtue of rigidity, which is what his constancy amounts to. To be sure, inconstancy can lead to disorder, but absolute constancy to one's own values can also be dangerous. Lear's absolute convictions of hierarchy are as dangerous as Edmund's espousal of Nature's law of anarchy, and Angelo's severity is as dangerous as Duke Vincentio's laxness. Shakespeare shows us that when such men fall, they fall from one extreme to the other. Lear comes to see the world in terms of jungle anarchy, and Angelo develops a

cynical disregard for both state and moral law. It is no paradox, then, that Coriolanus should be both idealist and cynic, for idealists and cynics as extremists, as men whose vision of the world is utterly inflexible, have more in common with each other than either has with the balanced middleman.

It is in Coriolanus as much as in any other of Shakespeare's figures that we can see the isolating effect of both idealism and cynicism. Mighty warrior that he is, Coriolanus seems a strong and useful arm of Rome, but we soon discover that this limb is not fully governed by the head, that his allegiance is to himself rather than to the state. First Citizen suggests that the motives behind Coriolanus' exploits are to "please his mother and to be partly proud"(I.i.39-40), and Coriolanus lends support to this view by describing Aufidius not in terms of an enemy of Rome, but rather as a personal adversary, a contender for the title of most accomplished warrior:

> Were half to half the world by the ears, and he
> Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make
> Only my wars with him. He is a lion
> That I am proud to hunt.
> (I.i.237-40)

Coriolanus' attitude does not suggest pride in being a Roman, but pride in being himself, a great warrior. Were he not himself he would choose to be the equally renowned warrior, Aufidius, a Volscian and a bitter enemy of Rome:

I sin in envying his nobility,
And were I anything but what I am,
I would wish me only he.
(I.i.234-6)

This driving desire to reign supreme on the battlefield is an aspect of Coriolanus' idealism that we also see in Hotspur and, to a somewhat lesser degree, in Hector. The idealistic endeavours of all three characters are seen to be primarily directed not at preserving or strengthening their societies, but at enhancing their own self-image. For such men there is not world enough for a Hal, an Achilles or an Aufidius; they must stand alone above all others. "I'll fight with none but thee"(I.viii.1), says Coriolanus, and he goes on to taunt Aufidius with his recent exploits:

Within these three hours, Tullus,
Alone I fought in your Corioli walls
And made what work I pleased.
(I.viii.7-9)

The significant word here is "alone", and, indeed, the incident in Corioli symbolizes the aloneness, the isolation of Coriolanus as an idealist. He will repeat this taunt - "Alone I did it" - at a time when his isolation will prove fatal to him.

The isolationist aspect of his idealism is likewise seen in his rejection of the acclamation afforded him after the battle. Certainly, his dislike of praise is commendable in itself, and his refusal to accept more than a common share of the spoils may seem to show not only a laudable modesty but also an uncharacteristic tendency towards democracy. But his harsh criticism of the spontaneous human emotion expressed with drums, trumpets and voices shows

that his form of idealism, like that of Timon, cannot tolerate reciprocity. Timon can never understand that true friendship involves both giving and receiving, and believes that receiving negates the value of his giving. In like manner, Coriolanus feels that his deeds are amply repaid in the doing of them and that they can only suffer diminution from praise or material reward. Cominius is aware that Coriolanus owes a duty to more than his own modesty, and he tells him so:

> Too modest are you,
> More cruel to your good report than grateful
> To us that give you truly.
>
> (I.ix.53-5)

Certainly Coriolanus owes the troops the opportunity to express their gratitude and admiration, for as they see it his triumph is also partly their triumph and that of all Rome. We see, however, that Coriolanus does not want his deeds to be part of a reciprocal relationship, for his proud words still echo in our mind - "Alone I fought . . ." All that he accepts for his deeds is the title "Coriolanus", a reward that he won alone and that he therefore need share with nobody.

The St. Crispian's Day speech of HenryV before the Battle of Agincourt presents a sharp contrast to such an attitude. Henry offers his soldiers fame in history for serving the cause of God and England to defeat the heathen French. Moreover, he holds out to them the prospect of

sharing with him fraternally in the dangers and glory of the conflict:

> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers,
> For he today that sheds his blood with me
> Shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile,
> This day shall gentle his condition.
> (Henry V, IV.iii.60-3)

Such is the leadership of the man of the middle way, the man with an ideal that goes beyond the personal accretion of honour. He is able to recognize that his interests are bound up with the interests of his people, and that by offering them respect he can make them worthy of respect. He knows, moreover, that mutual respect draws people together, and, after all, the name of his game is unity, both in his army and in his country.

This is a lesson that Coriolanus can never learn. His remoteness from, and contempt for, his countrymen is divisive and destructive. He sets the plebeians against the Patricians and in so doing he almost destroys Rome. He sets himself against all Rome with a similar effect. Finally, he sets himself against the Volscians, and destroys himself. And it is his final proud and destructive outburst that underlines a basic quality of Coriolanus' nature: he can never be anything other than himself, even to save his own life.

It is, in fact, a mark of Shakespeare's more extreme characters that they can never adapt their behaviour to suit the different circumstances in which they may find them-

selves; they can never play different roles and, indeed, they may scorn doing so. Conversely, Shakespeare frequently relates maturity and stability to the ability to play a number of roles. Viola, who slips easily into a male role, has a maturity that makes her attractive both to Orsino and to Olivia. But when Malvolio, cross-gartered and wearing yellow stockings, tries to play the jovial lover, he appears ridiculous. For Malvolio can be nothing but Malvolio. Rosalind, in the guise of a shepherd, proves a capable matchmaker, but Parolles, as a soldier, accomplishes nothing. His play-acting convinces nobody but Bertram, and he must finally resolve to be, "Simply the thing I am . . . ."(All's Well that Ends Well, IV.iii.369).

The contrast between the ease with which Shakespeare's mature, balanced figures adopt roles and the inability of his extreme characters to do so may be amply illustrated in a comparison between Henry V's nocturnal visit to his soldiers and Coriolanus' compulsory visit to the marketplace. On the eve of Agincourt Hal dresses himself humbly and moves among his soldiers, not only to talk but also to listen. He lends a patient ear to their doubts about the king's cause and to their fears about their own fates, and he accords them the respect of trying to argue with them reasonably. The most significant aspect of this episode, however, is that Hal does not remove his disguise; he does not uncover

his authority in his role as king in order to impose his will upon them. In his humble, anonymous role he listens and learns and tries in turn to teach them something of the responsibilities of kingship. His acceptance of anonymity indicates a mature flexibility that is entirely lacking in Coriolanus.

Coriolanus is extremely reluctant to don the robe of humility, and when he does so he cannot match his attitude to his attire. In the very act of asking for the people's voices he scorns them, so that he is no closer to them in the marketplace than he is in the senate. The gulf between Coriolanus and the common man is that between extreme idealism and human frailty, and the breadth of this gulf is revealed as much in a remark he makes to the tribunes as in all his bitter railing: "But your people, I love them as they weigh"(II.i.77-8). "Your" people? Are they not his people too? He clearly does not perceive them to be so, and how could he when he weighs their value against his own idealistic standards? Coriolanus' refusal to be humbled indicates his obsessive self-regard which will not allow him to see that he might learn something of value to himself from the common folk.

Hal has acquired such knowledge long before he arrives at Agincourt. At the Boar's Head tavern he has "sounded the very base-string of humility" and become "sworn brother to a leash of drawers"(I Henry IV, II.iv.57). And

he is evidently a fast learner:

> . . . I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour that I can drink with any tinker in his language during my life.
> (I Henry IV, II.iv.19-21)

While he is jesting with the drawers of Eastcheap, while he is wearing their garb to eavesdrop on Falstaff, while he is conversing with his soldiers on the field of Agincourt, Hal is growing in knowledge of the human condition. "I know you all . . .", he says, in the first soliloquy we hear from him(I Henry IV, I.ii.218). Nevertheless, he continues to observe and to learn as Shakespeare unfolds his development into the ideal king.

It is such a process of learning and development that is lacking in Coriolanus and other characters of both extremes. Coriolanus cannot learn, he cannot grow. At the end of the play he is glorying in his lone stand in Corioli just as he was at the beginning of the play. Hotspur, always obsessed with honour, dies regretting only the proud titles he has lost. He dies because he has never grown out of the boy playing at medieval knights, and he has not the mature flexibility of mind to pay heed to the warnings that his adversary is playing a man's game. In Troilus and Cressida we find a host of figures who have never developed adult attitudes towards their world. Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus, Troilus, Paris, like petulant or lovesick adolescents, are open to manipulation by the more mature Nestor, Ulysses and

Diomedes. Timon, like a child in an opulent playhouse, is manipulated by everyone who comes knocking at the door. In a sense he changes little after his fall. Learning nothing, he remains the same spoiled child, now sulking in a corner.

All these excessive characters show an arrested growth, an unnatural stasis. Even when, like Timon, they appear to change, there is no growth; it is merely the turn of a coin. To the Elizabethans growth was an evident aspect of natural law; being fixed and unchanging was grotesque. Shakespeare plants Rosalind in the Forest of Arden and we see her grow; he plants Viola in Illyria and we see her blossom; he plants Hal on the field of Shrewsbury and we see his youth unfolding into a powerful maturity. But whether Coriolanus is in Rome, in Corioli, or in Antium he remains proudly idealistic, defiantly cynical.

It must be said that the idealist generally possesses admirable qualities that on occasion may serve as a source of inspiration to those around him. More often, however, the rigidity of his idealism is a destructive force in his society. Coriolanus is a formidable warrior who can, in certain circumstances, inspire great loyalty and devotion in his troops. Even the Roman citizens, whom he so much despises, acknowledge their indebtedness to his valor and skill:

So, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must

> also tell him our noble acceptance of them.
> Ingratitude is monstrous.
>
> (II.iii.8-10)

And in this spirit of gratitude they freely recognize his greatness as well as its limitations:

> I say, if he would incline to the people,
> there was never a worthier man.
>
> (II.iii.41-3)

But Coriolanus' cynicism, which is a function of his idealism, has the tendency to polarize the interest-groups in his society. The mediators on both sides come up against his intransigent hostility towards the plebeians. The tribunes see him as a threat to their own power and to the interests of those they represent; Menenius, in his efforts to restore order and maintain the status quo, finds himself frequently in the position of trying to restrain Coriolanus' outbursts, or else trying to explain them away.

Menenius and the tribunes have much in common. On each side there is a readiness to manipulate the plebeians and an evident competence in doing so. Both sides also try to manipulate Coriolanus, the tribunes being successful in their endeavour because they push him in the direction he is driven by his nature, while Menenius is pushing against this tidal force. This tendency of Menenius and the tribunes to manipulate and exploit shows a distinct tint of cynicism in their personalities, but it must be remembered that both sides seek a balance of power that will ensure a stable state as well as safeguarding their own positions. Shake-

speare would have us see that the presence of such men is inevitable, even necessary, in such a society in order to avoid the confrontation that produces the cycle of dissatisfaction, insurrection and repression. We do not admire Sicinius and Brutus, and while we enjoy Menenius' wit we feel uneasy about his tendency to distort the truth in the interests of his class, but we should see these men as having a cohesive function in the state of Rome.

It must be stressed that the tribunes, unscrupulous as their methods sometimes are, are not evil men. Like all political men they see as their first duty the retention of power, and with an adversary as rigid and formidable as Coriolanus they may well feel justified in using questionable methods to safeguard their position. After all, if the interests of the people take second place in the priorities of the tribunes, they would seem to take last place in the priorities of the Patricians.

It is notable that Shakespeare frequently puts Menenius into the company of the tribunes and, in times of unrest, we find the wily old politician exercising his art upon the plebeians. When, as the play opens, we see him attempting to placate the mutinous crowd, we are given a display of his wide repertoire of political gambits. He is at first their friend and neighbour, assuring them of the Patricians' paternalistic concern for them. When this does not serve he catches their interest with a tale and follows

it up with witty banter aimed at the most vocal among his audience. This is clever politicing, but it is because of his willingness to discuss and argue with them that they afford him a measure of respect. Shakespeare brings Coriolanus into this first scene so that we may feel the full force of the contrast between the methods of the idealist warrior and the politician. Without giving the commoners an opportunity to voice their grievances Coriolanus launches against them an attack of railing as savage as anything uttered by Thersites, Apemantus or Timon:

> He that will give good words to thee will flatter
> Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs,
> That like not peace nor war?
>
> (I.i.171-3)

It is clear that from the god-like heights of his idealism he sees these men, these "curs", as scarcely human.

For his part Menenius always, even at his bitterest, treats the plebeians as men. Moreover, he puts himself closer to the people by wryly allowing of his own very human imperfections:

> I am known to be a humerous patrician, and one
> that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop
> of allaying Tiber in 't; said to be something
> imperfect in favouring the first complaint,
> hasty and tinderlike upon too trivial motion;
> one that converses more with the buttock of
> the night than with the forehead of the morning. What I think I utter, and spend my malice
> in my breath.
>
> (II.i.51-8)

Such self-depreciating candour allows Menenius to be candid in his criticism of the tribunes and of the people without

arousing in them such bitter opposition as they show to Coriolanus. As a politician Menenius, like Hal, is well aware of the essential role of the people in the state, and he has made it his business to know them. He knows their collective strength and their weaknesses; and he knows that, fickle as they are, they are as ready to forgive as to condemn;

> For they have pardons, being asked, as free
> As words to little purpose.
> (III.ii.88-9)

It is clear here, as elsewhere, that as a man of the middle way Menenius leans rather more towards cynicism than idealism. He does not hold the plebeians in high regard but he is realistic enough to recognize their essential function in the body of Rome, and he places the preservation of the Roman state above considerations of personal honour. We see both his low opinion of the people and the high priority he places on the integrity of the state in his words to Volumnia as he tries to persuade Coriolanus to repair his quarrel with the people:

> Before he thus should stoop to the herd, but that
> The violent fit 'o the time craves it as physic
> For the whole state, I would put mine armor on,
> Which I can scarcely bare.
> (III.ii.32-5)

But for Coriolanus it is his own integrity that is of paramount importance; he cannot compromise in the interests of safeguarding his class, his state, or even his own life. And herein lies his tragedy, for he is indeed, in some sense, toonoble for his world. For it is an excessive and therefore a distorted or unnatural nobility that he possesses; it is an absolute idealism that, having no relation to the reality of his world, must in

the end turn in upon itself and become an end in itself, ultimately annihilating itself because it simply cannot be totally self-sustaining. Coriolanus is a golden arm that hacks at its mildly-infected body until it severs and destroys itself.

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to illustrate that Shakespeare, unlike the medieval morality dramatists, was concerned in his work with the problems of social, as well as individual salvation. I have suggested, through an examination of a number of plays, the poet's continuing interest in the variety of human responses to social upheaval, and in the implications of such responses. Shakespeare shows us dramatically that, in times of great social change, men who are unable to change, those rigid idealists who cling steadfastly to old and absolute values or pursue outdated goals, are, while worthy of our admiration, frequently incapable of leading their society toward the path of peace and order. What we draw from these plays is that it is the Hals or the Philips, the men of the middle way who are less idealistic but more in tune with their society, who might be best suited to provide leadership in troubled times.

The two plays which are the main subject of this thesis are characterized by a peculiarly bleak atmosphere which derives, I believe, from their subtle but persistent projection of the notion that a Golden Age has been recently, but totally and irrevocably lost. It is in these plays, perhaps more than in any others in the canon, that Shakespeare conveys the social implications of idealism, realism and cynicism.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. All textual citations are from Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York, 1948).

2. Derek Traversi, Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V (Stanford, 1968), p. 99.

3. J. Dover Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff (Cambridge, 1945), p. 70.

4. Traversi, p. 68.

5. Wilson, p. 72.

CHAPTER II

Troilus and Cressida

Troilus and Cressida is in many respects the blackest of Shakespeare's plays. While it is not without its moments of humour, these are always undercut by a pervasive cynicism which is the most notable feature of the play. The drama resolves itself into a conflict between, on the one hand, the idealistic notions of the chivalric code of honour and the code of courtly love, and on the other hand, a ruthless cynicism.

But to put it thus is to state the matter too simply. For before we arrive at this polarization of idealism and cynicism there is, in the Greek camp, a conflict between rationality and cynicism with the latter emerging as the victor, while at Troy rationality is set against idealism, with rationality again being the loser. Moreover, throughout the play Shakespeare makes it clear that the idealistic values of the Trojans are, at best, anachronistic, and, at worst, hollow, distorted and destructive. However sincere a lover Troilus may consider himself to be, his desires are shown to be no more than physical ones. And the honour upon which Hector places so much value, and the pursuit of

which will bring both himself and, ultimately, his city to destruction, is seen to be directed both toward an unworthy cause and, insofar as it involves a chivalric code of conduct, ultimately inadequate in coping with an enemy that recognizes no rules of war. The tragic element of the play lies in Hector's rejection of rationality in favour of this blindly idealistic concept of honour.

The themes of chivalry and courtly love or, as Thersites would have it, "wars and lechery", are closely knit in this play, the one apparently providing some portion of the motive for the other. Troilus and Cressida are separated by the war, and she is lost to the Greeks as Helen was lost to the Trojans. The Greeks fight the Trojans over Helen; Troilus fights Diomedes over Cressida. It is made abundantly clear, however, that neither of these women is, in herself, the cause for the shedding of blood; they are rather symbols, or pawns in the game of honour.

In the blind idealism of the Trojan Hector and the clear-eyed but colour-blind cynicism of the Greek Thersites who sees everything in shades of black, Shakespeare presents us with two antithetical views of the same situation. In his chivalric leniency on the battlefield Hector stands alone, but the cynicism of Thersites infects many in the Greek camp, and when this attitude manifests itself in action Hector is anihilated, and with him the honour and chivalry that he represents. In place of them Troilus can

only put that concept which motivates the Greeks - revenge.

In order to see clearly how the conflicts between idealism, rationalism and cynicism are worked out, it will be necessary to undertake a close reading of the play, for this is one of the more complex of Shakespeare's works in terms of both theme and structure. For example, notwithstanding the title of the play, the story of the lovers clearly does not provide the main plot; nor is the fall of Hector strong enough in itself to provide it. The Greek leaders' conspiracy to draw Achilles back into the war is as important as these elements structurally, though not thematically. What we seem to have, in fact, is a woof of these threads, tightly woven upon a warp of imagery, symbolism and characterization, producing a tapestry which, until we stand back and see the total interrelationship of the parts, may seem chaotic in its lack of a central figure or principle story line.

We are thrown off balance from the first. The speaker of the prologue, himself armed, tells us that the theme of the play is war. He speaks grandly of "princes orgulous", of "ministers and instruments of cruel war", of "deep-drawing barks" disgorging "warlike fraughtage". Impressively, he lists the six gates of Troy with their "massy staples/ And corresponsive and fulfilling bolts" which "Sperr up the sons of Troy". Whatever expectations this striking prologue instils in us, we must surely be at once aware of a note of

the incongruous in the opening lines of the play proper:

> Call here my varlet; I'll unarm again:
> Why should I war without the walls of Troy,
> That find such cruel battle here within?
> Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
> Let him to field; Troilus, alas! hath none.
> (I.i.1-5)

In these five lines, spoken by Troilus to Pandarus, there is so much that is of significance in terms of the play as a whole that we should look at them very closely. Troilus intends to unarm again - he has changed his mind. We shall become aware during the course of the play how many of the characters change their minds, and how often. These usually abrupt reversals, which are symptomatic of the growing chaos of a degenerating society, are often as impulsive, and sometimes even less justifiable, than that of Troilus here. After all, what sort of warrior decides not to go into battle because he is love-sick? The apparent conflict between love and war is to be evidenced in the behaviour of other characters, and I shall have more to say of this in due course. What it is important to grasp here, at the outset of a play in which we expect (being familiar with the story) to witness courtly love and warlike chivalry, is that these medieval ideals of behaviour seem to be mutually exclusive, or, at least, not entirely compatible. Thus Shakespeare is immediately sowing seeds of doubt in our minds, and making us ask ourselves, what is the true nature of this love? What is the true nature of this war? The

answers to these questions form the substance of his play.

Troilus, it seems, is not "master of his heart". Is he, then, a slave of his heart? As the drama develops we will be made aware that Troilus is indeed ruled by certain passions, that he has no fondness and little capacity for reason. He does, however, have a certain talent for grandiloquence:

> The Greeks are strong and skilful to their strength,
> Fierce to their skill and to their fierceness valiant;
> But I am weaker than a woman's tear,
> Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
> Less valiant than the virgin in the night
> And skilless than unpractised infancy.
>
> (I.i.7-12)

This is delightful stuff. In the first two lines the ideas are beautifully compressed; the rest has a lyrical quality produced by the piling up of comparatives, by the gentle beauty of the images, by the skilful use of alliteration. But to whom is this addressed? And what is the response to this eloquence?

> Well, I have told you enough of this: for my part, I'll not meddle nor make no further. He that will have a cake out of the wheat must needs tarry the grinding.
>
> (I.i.13-16)

These words from Pandarus are prosaic in all senses of the term, and the sense of incongruity produced by their juxtaposition to Troilus' words is reinforced by the inane catechism that follows. The effect of all this is to make Troilus' rhetoric seem empty, if not ridiculous. It is, moreover, a satiric comment on the courtly love tradition

which Troilus serves, a tradition whereby the unrequited lover was expected to suffer acute melancholy, debilitating weakness, loss of appetite, sickness, and ultimately, if the lady remained unmerciful, death. The naive enthusiasm with which Troilus pursues his role as courtly lover, to the neglect of his duty to Troy, reveals in him an immaturity such as we have seen in other single-minded idealists.

Pandarus' threat to cease acting as a go-between will prove to be an idle one but in the meantime he goes off, apparently in a huff, but no doubt enjoying Troilus' discomfiture. It is plain that Pandarus is able to manipulate Troilus' moods with as great a facility as the tribunes exploit Coriolanus' choler. Having got Pandarus off the stage, Shakespeare gives Troilus a brief but revealing soliloquy. Hearing the clamour of battle he is moved to exclaim, "Fools on both sides!" and to assert:

> I cannot fight upon this argument;
> It is too starved a subject for my sword.
> (I.i.96-7)

Again, these are empty words; he will change his mind about both the fighting and the value of the cause. But for the present the ideal he serves is that of courtly love, and things are not going at all well. Pandarus is being uncooperative, and Cressida is "stubborn-chaste against all suit"(I.i.101). And Troilus leaves us in no doubt about the nature of this suit:

> Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl:
> Between our Ilium and where she resides,
> Let it be call'd the wild and wandering flood,
> Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
> Our doubtful hope, our convoy and our bark.
> (I.i.104-8)

These are fine-sounding words, but all he is saying is that the only way he can get the beautiful Cressida into bed is with Pandarus' help. The apparent sublimity of Troilus' love is further undercut by the imagery of commerce which is used here, as it is elsewhere in the play, in connection with interpersonal relations. There is, in fact, frequently a dichotomy between what Shakespeare's idealists suppose their motives to be, and what they actually are. Hotspur believes himself to be opposing the injustice and oppression of Bolingbroke when in reality he is serving his own lust for danger and glory. Coriolanus pursues a lofty but narrow ideal of moral and physical integrity while imagining that his efforts are on behalf of his city. Troilus, equally ignorant of his own motives, is simply unaware that his passionate love amounts to little more than lust.

Troilus' meditations are interrupted by Aeneas who is on his way to the battlefield, and who remarks on the "good sport" that is "out of town today". "Better at home, if 'would I might' were 'may'", replies Troilus, giving us a further interesting insight on his attitude towards love. Both love and war are forms of sport, it seems, and since his hopes for the one have been frustrated, he changes his mind about the other and goes off with Aeneas.

Having undercut Troilus' ideal of courtly love Shakespeare begins, in the next scene, to modify any preconceptions we may have of the Trojan War as a chivalric conflict between noble adversaries. According to Alexander's report, Hector has gone early and wrathfully to the battlefield to avenge himself on Ajax who has succeeded in bringing him down in combat. Alexander describes Hector's opponent, a man of mixed Greek and Trojan blood, as a person in whom all the humours are mixed:

> He is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant - a man into whom Nature hath so crowded humours that his valor is crushed into folly, his folly sauced with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint but he carries some stain of it. He is melancholy without cause and merry against the hair. He hath the joints of everything, but everything so out of joint that he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and no use, or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight.
>
> (I.ii.20-31)

We should not let this comical description blind us to the fact that Ajax has managed to knock down the great Hector, and that as a warrior he is probably second only to Achilles on the Greek side. Just as Falstaff's presence at Shrewsbury serves to remind us that war is no longer (if it ever was) a chivalric game, so the fact that the Greeks are forced to rely upon the rather ridiculous Ajax plays a strong part in undermining any notion that this is a noble and glorious war. And how much honour would Hector gain from defeating a clown, though he be a very belligerent

clown?

Having sown the seeds of doubt about the worthiness of Ajax as a chivalric adversary, Shakespeare turns our attention to Cressida. Though she will prove to be a rather weak person whose reason is too easily subsumed by her passion, when we first meet Cressida she appears to be a rather attractive figure. She seems intelligent and she has a ready wit; her verbal cat-and-mouse game with Pandarus is reminiscent of that between Hamlet and Polonius. Indeed, she seems to have a good measure of common-sense, and to be not quite the blushing virgin that Troilus appears to take her for. To Pandarus' "One knows not at what ward you lie," she responds:

> Upon my back, to defend my belly; upon my wit to defend my wiles; upon my secrecy to defend mine honesty; my mask, to defend my beauty; and you to defend all these: and at all these wards I lie, at a thousand watches.
>
> Pand. Say one of your watches.
>
> Cres. Nay, I'll watch you for that; and that's one of the chiefest of them too: if I cannot ward what I would not have hit, I can watch you for telling how I took the blow; unless it swell past hiding, and then it's past watching. (I.ii.284-95)

Cressida knows Pandarus for what he is - not a messenger of love but a bawd - and she knows precisely what will happen if she grants her love to Troilus. So long as she remains "stubborn-chaste" she has the upper hand and can control the situation, just as Rosalind and Viola are able to control their worlds. But though Cressida has something of

Rosalind's practical good sense she is too weak, and the forces of idealism and cynicism around her are too strong for her to long maintain control over even her own destiny let alone that of others.

In the third scene of the play we meet the leader of the opposition and the members of his cabinet. Agamemnon gives an impressive speech of some thirty lines which says, in effect, "These things were sent by the gods to try us." He is complaining of their lack of success in the war; and Nestor takes another twenty lines to say the same thing. The object of these speeches is to give an indication of the weakness of the Greek leadership, to show why the cynicism which Ulysses will soon illustrate is taking hold of the Greek camp. The commander who after seven years of failure can offer no solid encouragement, no new strategy, but only blame the gods is obviously ineffectual. Nestor reveals himself to be a garrulous old man who can do little more than echo the words of others.

Ulysses, after flattering the insubstantial speeches of Agamemnon and Nestor in the most extravagant terms, proceeds to disagree with them. The Greeks' lack of success, he suggests, is due to insubordination. He conveys this simple message in sixty lines of superb rhetoric, which at least serves the function of reminding us that the old cosmic order is no longer respected, and that without it there is likely to be chaos. But Agamemnon is in no need of a

lecture on the nature and importance of degree. What he needs is an intelligent answer to the question, 'Where do we go from here?', which is, in fact, the next question posed by Agamemnon to Ulysses:

> The nature of the sickness found, Ulysses,
> What is the remedy?
> (I.iii.140-1)

Ulysses takes another forty-four lines to say that Achilles spends his time mocking Agamemnon and Nestor instead of fighting. Again, Ulysses has stated an aspect of the problem, but has given no solution. Nestor, who likes to make his presence felt, adds that Ajax, like Achilles, has grown proud and keeps to his tent.

Even Ulysses, then, the voice of intelligence and rationality in the Greek camp, cannot provide a solution to the growing chaos that is infecting the Greek army. To be sure, this internal conflict is an unequal one, for in citing the neglect of degree Ulysses has stated only half of the problem. The cynicism in the Greek camp can only thrive because the leadership is weak and ineffectual, a point Shakespeare satirically underlines in the words of Aeneas, whose entrance interrupts the Greek council.

Attempting to identify Agamemnon, Aeneas, in his excessively courtly manner, asks of Agamemnon:

> How may
> A stranger to those most imperial looks
> Know them from the eyes of other mortals?
> (I.iii.223-5)

Well, of course, if the looks were "most imperial" they would be immediately distinguishable from the eyes of other mortals. The obvious inference is that there is nothing in Agamemnon's appearance and bearing that marks him out as the supreme head of the Greek forces. This serious message, which links this episode with the first part of the scene, could be easily overlooked as we enjoy a demonstration of Aeneas' pompously courtly manners. For there is more:

> I ask, that I might waken reverence,
> And bid the cheek be ready with a blush
> Modest as morning when she coldly eyes
> The youthful Phoebus.
> Which is that god in office, guiding men?
> Which is the high and mighty Agamemnon?
> (I.iii.227-32)

We may wonder, as does Agamemnon, if Aeneas is being deliberately cynical throughout, but the persistence with which the Trojan pursues his theme suggests that he truly does not recognize Agamemnon. There may, however, be a measure of satire in Aeneas' reference to Agamemnon as a "god in office, guiding men", for the Greek is clearly by no means a magnificent leader.

There is even more to this episode than has already been suggested, for as the first meeting we have seen between Trojan and Greek, it has something of a symbolic aspect. Aeneas stands forth as a representative of the Trojan ideals of chivalry and courtliness; the Greek leadership, as we have seen, operates on a more rational level. This contrast

is developed in the latter part of the scene.

Aeneas has arrived to present a challenge to personal combat on behalf of Hector. The issue is to be nominally the comparative worths of the mistresses of the combatants, though what will really be at stake is personal, and perhaps national, glory. Having suffered shame at the hands of Ajax, Hector now needs to re-establish himself as the supreme warrior, for fame, as Hotspur came to realize and as Ulysses will later point out in this play, takes a long time to establish but can quickly evaporate. And the man for whom honour is an ideal sufficient in itself must "wear without corrival all her dignities."

Ulysses perceives this challenge in a very different way. He is not concerned with the honour to be won or lost as an end in itself, but with its implications. The challenge is obviously aimed at Achilles, the ablest of the Greeks, and Ulysses is immediately aware that while this business could exacerbate their problems, it could also be a solution to them. He suggests that by arranging a fixed ballot the Greek leadership can ensure that it is Ajax who takes up the challenge. If he loses they can say that he is not their best; if he wins Achilles may feel his reputation threatened and return to the war. Ulysses' rational approach to the challenge would seem to provide the much-needed solution to the Greeks' problems, but it will backfire because

the cynicism which prevails among some of the Greek warriors is too strong an opposition against what this faction sees as the weak and sterile rationalism of the Greek leadership.

We shall not learn of the failure of Ulysses' plot until Act IV, but an ominous note is sounded immediately when, as Act I closes upon the most notable of the Greek rationalists, Act II opens upon the name of the most notable of the Greek cynics. It is significant that in his first words Thersites pleases himself by imagining the Greek general infected with boils, for Thersites symbolizes the disease that is infecting the Greek ranks:

> And did those boils run? say so: did not the general run then? were not that a botchy core? (II.i.5-7)

Indeed, if Thersites' cynicism is the suppuration, Agamemnon's ineffectuality is the "botchy core", for his lack of leadership is the ultimate source of the infection. Towards the end of Act V Hector will refer to the body of the man with the sumptuous armour as a "most putrified core", and this similar image will have a similar significance with respect to his own leadership.

It soon becomes apparent that Thersites respects no one, that his caustic satiric tongue is apt to lash out at everyone on the Greek side. But while he is unquestionably a negative force, contributing nothing to his nation's cause but merely sowing his cynicism and disaffection, one cannot ignore the fact that much of what he says has an

element of truth and is expressed very clearly and concisely, in great contrast to the highly ornamental, but empty, speeches of some of the other characters. It is, of course, in precisely these things that the power of cynicism lies. Its obvious weakness as an attitude to an unsatisfactory situation is that it provides no answers, but Thersites is not interested in answers. Ironically, while Thersites is a product of a degenerating society, it is the degeneration that sustains him, that provides him with an identity. Like Falstaff, Thersites thrives in a disordered world. Falstaff is never more himself than in a Cheapside tavern. On the battlefield he is not truly a soldier, nor entirely a clown. And he cannot exist, cannot be allowed to exist, in Henry V's ordered world. Thersites, like Apemantus, derives satisfaction only from his satiric railing against the ignorance and human weakness he sees all around him.

In this first scene of Act II we find Thersites and Ajax railing against each other. As they trade insults the only apparent distinction between the great warrior and the despised cynic is a visual one. It is clear that Ajax has been infected with Thersites' cynicism, a fact that Thersites himself is quick to point out.

> Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full of envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proserpina's beauty - aye, that thou barkest at him.
> (II.i.35-8)

But in a battle of abuse the blockish Ajax is no match for

Thersites, for his strength lies in his arm rather than his wit. The same might be said of Achilles, who also makes an appearance in this scene, and, indeed, Thersites sums up both these great warriors in an image that brings together the notions of emptiness and decadence:

> Hector shall have a great catch if he knock
> out either of your brains: A' were as good
> crack a fusty nut with no kernel.
> (II.i.109-112)

Having shown us the opposing forces of rationalism and cynicism in the Greek camp, Shakespeare takes us in the second scene of Act II to Troy, where we shall see the conflict between rationality and idealism. The point at issue is whether Helen should be returned to the Greeks in order to end the bloody and protracted war. In support of the motion Hector has much to say that is very reasonable, but Troilus will have no truck with reasons. Sounding somewhat like Hotspur, Troilus asserts that where manhood and honour are concerned there is no place for reason. As he proceeds to support his position we notice that he again uses images from the realm of commerce:

> We turn not back silks upon the merchant,
> When we have soil'd them.
> (II.ii.69-70)

And later:

> Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,
> Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships,
> And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.
> (II.ii.81-3)

Here Shakespeare seems again to be pointing to the dubiousness of Troilus' conception of honour, for it is the second time he has referred to a woman as if she were a commodity.

Troilus has condemned reason, and when he attempts to use it we can see that he and it are strangers, if not enemies. He puts forward the specious argument that it is dishonourable to fear to uphold a crime once it has been committed. Paris, naturally, supports retaining possession of Helen. He, like many of the other characters in the play, has a facility with words, and his argument may sound convincing to the biased or careless listener. But it is not a rational argument and all it amounts to, in fact, is that to give up Helen under compulsion would be dishonourable. He tries to strengthen his position by portraying Helen as an object worthy of protection with one's life - or death:

> There's not the meanest spirit on our party
> Without a heart to dare or sword to draw
> When Helen is defended, nor none so noble
> Whose life were ill-bestow'd or death unfamed
> Where Helen is the subject; then, I say,
> Well may we fight for her whom, we know well,
> The world's large spaces cannot parallel.
> (II.ii.152-62)

We may well wonder, if Helen is indeed such a matchless paragon, if she is a prize whose inestimable value both initiated a war and justifies its continuance, why by the second scene of Act II we have not yet seen her. In fact, we shall not see her until Act III, when the sense of anti-climax we experience will be proportional to the expectat-

ion of her we have developed.

Meanwhile, back in Priam's palace, the debate goes on. Hector accuses Troilus and Paris of speaking from the "hot passion of distemper'd blood"(II.ii.169), and there is no doubt much truth in this. He himself takes up the cause of true logic and reason once more, and for some fifteen lines speaks beautifully on behalf of the moral laws of nature and of nations. Then, in an abrupt reversal, he declares himself in favour of keeping Helen; he rejects the "way of truth" in favour of their "joint and several dignities"(II.ii.189-193). It seems that the discussion has been a futile exercise; Hector's fine words just so much empty rhetoric.

In dramatic terms, however, the debate is of great importance. Insofar as this play is tragedy, this is the tragic turning point of the play. Hector, the one man capable of intelligent reasoning, the one man able to assess relative value in realistic terms, the one man who acknowledges the ascendency of natural and state law over the appetites of the individual: Hector, the natural leader of men, the strongest and most intelligent of the Trojans, chooses to cast away rationality and truth in order to defend that most ephemeral and insubstantial thing that is here called dignity, elsewhere, glory, fame or honour. Unlike Henry V prior to his invasion of France, Hector is not concerned with establishing the validity of his cause -

indeed, he has established that it is invalid. Nor does he have, as Henry does, the welfare of the state as his ultimate objective. Shakespeare makes it plain at this point that Hector, like Coriolanus and Hotspur, sees the pursuit of honour as an end in itself and is thus as much out of tune with his world as they are with theirs.

It is probably no coincidence that the next scene opens with the cynic Thersites railing upon ignorance, and cursing those foolish enough to go to war for a placket. The curse he finds most apt to wish on these people is the bone-ache, which is to say venereal disease. Pandarus will also become very much concerned with this disease, and while it is just one aspect of the imagery of disease and decay which is very prevalent in this work, it is a particularly significant one. The disease has, of course, generally been associated with the sexually promiscuous, and particularly with women of easy virtue. In this play there are only two important female characters, one of whom has changed beds, albeit involuntarily in the first instance, before the play begins; the other does so, or at least plans to do so, during the course of the play. Through both subtle and obvious means, Helen's adultery is kept almost constantly in our minds. As Thersites points out so perspicuously a little later in the scene:

> . . . all the argument is a cuckold and a whore;
> a good quarrel to draw emulous factions and

> bleed to death upon. Now, the dry serpigo on the subject! and war and lechery confound all!
> (II.iii.72-5)

The cynic, at least, is under no illusion about the nature of either love or war.

Before he allows himself the pleasure of this general railing, Thersites exercises his satiric wit at the expense of particular Greeks. First, he throws off what seems like a quick parody on Ulysses' speech on degree:

> Agamemnon commands Achilles; Achilles is my lord; I am Patroclus' knower, and Patroclus is a fool.
> (II.iii.51-3)

But he immediately overturns this order by making them all equal:

> Agamemnon is a fool; Achilles is a fool; Thersites is a fool; and, as aforesaid, Patroclus is a fool.
> (II.iii.62-5)

"Derive this," Achilles demands, and Thersites obliges:

> Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles; Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon; Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool, and Patroclus is a fool positive.
> (II.iii.67-70)

This may sound like impudent nonsense, but it comes very close to portraying the true situation in the Greek camp. The doctrine of degree is fine as long as the leader is indeed a leader. As Shakespeare's Richard II discovered to his cost, it is not sufficient to have the titles and trappings of leadership; one must also have certain important qualities, not the least of which is intelligence. Nowhere does Agamem-

non incline us to believe he has intelligence or even political astuteness; rather he gives us empty speeches and, as we see in this same scene, he throws away any possibility of commanding respect by presenting himself at Achilles' tent and begging an audience. Achilles sends a scornful reply and Agamemnon is reduced to making weak and foolish threats.

This is a victory for cynicism, upon whose side Achilles has shown himself to be firmly placed by his utter lack of respect for Agamemnon and his encouragement of Thersites:

> Good Thersites, come in and rail.
> (II.iii.25-6)

But the rational Ulysses has not despaired of the power of policy and, as part of the plot to set him up against Achilles, he flatters Ajax shamelessly. Ajax is either entirely overcome by pride, or else he is habituated to empty words, for he does not detect the insincerity even when the praise turns from the excessive to the absurd. Says Ulysses:

> Father Nestor, were your days
> As green as Ajax' and your brain so temper'd,
> You should not have the eminence of him,
> But be as Ajax.
> (II.iii.254-7)

What he is saying, of course, is that if Nestor were identical to Ajax he would be like Ajax. It seems at this point that Ajax is being successfully manipulated into serving

the aims of the rational faction, but the victory will prove to be more apparent than real.

As we move into Act III Shakespeare reminds us of the parallel conflict on the Trojan side. In a brief comic sequence a servant insists on interpreting literally the words of the courtly Pandarus, with an effect almost as ludicrous as that of Aeneas' greeting to the Greeks. Pandarus is hardly a representative of the code of chivalry, but he speaks the same language, a language that can, as we have seen during the Trojan debate, obscure meaning and truth. The servant seems to have an inkling of the meaning of Pandarus' business, for his final words, in response to Pandarus' "my business seethes", are puns suggesting lechery:

> Sodden business! There's a stewed phrase, indeed!
>
> (III.i.43-4)

And upon these words, a significant cue, Paris and Helen enter. At last we are allowed to see the "pearl whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships", the woman whom "the world's large spaces cannot parallel", the "theme of honour and renown". She is worth our close attention, for she is the living symbol of the ideal for which Hector has chosen to fight. Helen has some thirty lines, most of them in prose. She twitters coquettishly to the noble lord Pandarus, calling him "honey-sweet lord" as she bids him sing a song. She introduces a note of bawdry when, after Pandarus

tells her that Cressida and Paris are "twain", which is to say on bad terms, she replies, "Falling in, after falling out, may make them three"(III.i.106-7). This indication of her turn of mind is supplemented by her response to Pandarus' agreement to sing:

> Let thy song be love: this love will undo us all. O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!
>
> (III.i.113-4)

And if her love, like that of Troilus, is cupiditas rather than caritas, so also is that of Paris who is inspired by Pandarus' love-song to render his philosophy of love:

> He eats nothing but doves, love, and that breeds hot blood, and hot blood begets hot thoughts, and hot thoughts begets hot deeds, and hot deeds is love.
>
> (III.i.132-4)

Is it indeed? So much for the ideal of courtly love, but what of the ideal of warlike chivalry? Replying to Pandarus' query, "Who's a'field today?", Paris makes a very revealing statement:

> Hector, Deiphobus, Helenus, Antenor, and all the gallantry of Troy: I would fain have armed today, but my Nell would not have it so. How chance my brother Troilus went not?
>
> (III.i.139-42)

All the gallantry are on the battlefield, then, except for Troilus and Paris, the two staunchest supporters of the war. In having both men detained from their duty by women Shakespeare is pointing to a paradoxical conflict between the ideal of courtly love, as it is conceived of by the lovers,

and the ideal of chivalrous combat. This conflict in itself points to their being a serious flaw in one or both of the ideals, and Shakespeare is surely making a satiriacl comment in having Paris kept from the battlefield by the woman for whom he should be fighting. In any event, the conflict in ideals which would trouble men whose actions are guided predominantly by reason does not concern Troilus and Paris, who act according to the passion of the moment.

The man who has the capacity for reason, but who does not use it, does not appear in this scene, though Shakespeare provides an ironic hint in the words of Paris of the tragedy of his choice:

> Sweet Helen, I must woo you
> To help unarm our Hector: His stubborn buckles,
> With these your white enchanting fingers touch'd,
> Shall more obey than to the edge of steel
> Or force of Greekish sinews; you shall do more
> Than all the island kings, - disarm great Hector.
> (III.i.153-8)

The dramatic irony in these words lies in the fact that Hector will die in this war, and he will die because, as Shakespeare has it, he chooses to retain Helen as a symbol of honour rather than rejecting her in favour of reason. He will indeed be disarmed by her, or by what she represents, but what this really amounts to is Hector's foolishly disarming himself. This we shall see brilliantly worked out in the death scene.

In the second scene of Act III we stay with the theme

of love, and Troilus reaffirms for us that for him there is no spiritual element to the concept. After voicing his desire to "Wallow in the lily-beds/ Proposed for the deserver", his language becomes even more sensuous:

> I am giddy; expectation whirls me round,
> The imaginary relish is so sweet
> That it enchants my sense: what will it be,
> When that the watery palate tastes indeed
> Love's thrice repured nectar? death, I fear me,
> Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,
> Too subtle-potent, tunes too sharp in sweetness,
> For the capacity of my ruder powers.
> (III.ii.17-24)

Cressida, as a person, seems to have got lost among the lily-pads and the nectar; Troilus is not afire with her, but with the physical delights he anticipates in her bed. But if Troilus' eyes are blind to everything but the sensual, Cressida's eyes are wide open and, as we may see from the following exchange, she, unlike Troilus, sees a place for reason even in matters of love:

Troi. What too curious dreg espies my sweet lady in the fountain of our love?

Cres. More dregs than water, if my fears have eyes.

Troi. Fears make devils of cherubins; they never see truly.

Cres. Blind fear, that seeing reason leads, finds safer footing than blind reason stumbling without fear: to fear the worst oft cures the worse.
(III.ii.65-73)

It is clear that Cressida very wisely suspects the nature of Troilus' love. However, she has, in fact, already made up her mind to accept him as her lover, though she has shrewdly kept him on a string until his passion is at such

a pitch that he cannot treat lightly her ultimate submission. It is sadly ironic that, after having controlled her situation for so long and after having accepted Troilus - on her own terms - as her lover, she should be so soon whisked away by forces that she cannot control. The arrangements for her exchange with Antenor are made at the beginning of the next scene, and the sad irony is compounded by the fact that this woman who has been for Troilus a piece of merchandise in the business of love is now to be used as merchandise in the business of war.

The main action of this third scene of Act III involves the baiting of Achilles. Agamemnon and the Greek princes ignore him in order to deflate his pride and the ruse almost succeeds, for Achilles, rather stupid though he may be, has no illusions about the transience of the honour which is for Hector the supreme ideal:

> Not a man, for being simply man,
> Hath any honour, but honour for those honours
> That are without him, as place, riches, favour,
> Prizes of accident as oft as merit.
> (III.ii.80-3)

This is the other view, the cynical view of honour, and Ulysses uses it, in policy, in order to reinforce Achilles' fears. He points out that Ajax is the new rising star since Achilles has let his honour become dull through his inaction:

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
> A great-sized monster of ingratitudes:
> Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd

> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
> As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
> Keeps honour bright: to have done is to hang
> Quite out of fashion . . . .
> (III.ii.145-52)

This is but part of a speech, some forty-five lines long, that is aimed at spurring on Achilles to take once more to the field in search of honour and renown. It is, as we have come to expect from a Greek leader, a very fine speech with charming and appropriate metaphors, but in our admiration for all this we should not overlook what is actually being said. Ulysses is encouraging Achilles to pursue honour while describing that entity as being the slave of time, and subject to ingratitude, short memory, the whims of fashion, and emulation. This, when all is said and done, is almost as negative a view of honour as that voiced by Falstaff at his most cynical.

Yet while such considerations provided for Falstaff a justification for avoiding combat, they almost succeed in persuading Achilles to return to the field. One does not have to look far for the reason for this, for Achilles has in great abundance that which in Falstaff is singularly lacking - pride in his reputation as a warrior. And this, as Thersites so comically illustrates at the end of the scene, is a quality shared by Ajax.

We should by now be able to distinguish between what honour means to Hector, and what it means to Achilles and

Ajax. For Hector honour is an accepted and acceptable social ideal and is bound up with the code of chivalry. The honour of the renown he earns is dependent upon the way in which it is earned. This will become clearer when we hear what Hector has to say of honour in Act IV. For the two Greek warriors honour is synonymous with renown; their fame merely serves to feed their pride. It is Hector's tragedy that as a true knight of chivalry he stands alone, for he is, in fact, the only character in the play who has such a high concept of honour.

Diomedes, to whom we are properly introduced only at the beginning of Act IV, is concerned neither with chivalry nor with renown. He is a soldier in the mould of Enobarbus, a man for whom honour involves simply doing one's duty. It is notable that neither of these soldiers, both of whom are men of the middle way, is able to control the tide of events in which he finds himself caught up. Lacking the power to significantly influence events, each can only pursue his profession to the best of his ability.

If war for Diomedes is not a chivalrous game, neither are words. Unlike many of the major characters, both Trojan and Greek, Diomedes speeks directly and to the point. He does not express empty sentiments in grandiloquent terms, nor does he tell courteous lies. To Paris' question as to who is most worthy of Helen, himself or Menelaus, Diomedes'

reply is concise and unambiguous:

> Both alike:
> He merits well to have her, that doth seek her,
> Not making any scruple of her soilure,
> With such a hell of pain and world of charge,
> And you as well to keep her, that defend her,
> Not palating the taste of her dishonour,
> With such a costly loss of wealth and friends:
> He, like a puling cuckold, would drink up
> The lees and dregs of a flat tamed piece;
> You, like a lecher, out of whorish loins
> Are pleased to breed out your inheritors:
> Both merits poised, each weighs nor less nor more;
> But he as he, the heavier for a whore.
> (IV.i.54-6)

In view of the strength of this language, Paris' reply is extraordinarily mild: "You are too bitter to your countrywoman"(IV.i.57). But Diomedes will neither retract nor palliate what he has said; rather, he reiterates his evaluation of Helen in terms no less harsh than before:

> For every false drop in her bawdy veins
> A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
> Of her contaminated carrion weight,
> A Trojan hath been slain: since she could speak,
> She hath not given so many good words breath
> As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death.
> (IV.i.69-74)

Diomedes may indeed be bitter, and inasfar as his sentiments on the cause he fights for are concerned he may be seen as a more articulate Thersites. But the significant fact is that he does fight; he is not a cynic but a man of the middle way whose rationalism is tinged with the cynicism of the conscientious warrior fighting for a bad cause. He is a soldier who, while he sees and portrays the situation without any such obfuscations as honour or imputed value, yet

does his duty. Paris, who shares with Troilus an inability either to see or accept reality, ascribes Diomedes' words to underhand motives. Significantly, he expresses his suspicions in terms of commerce:

> Fair Diomed, you do as chapmen do,
> Dispraise the thing that you desire to buy:
> But we in silence hold this virtue well,
> We'll but commend what we intend to sell.
> (IV.i.75-8)

We see that Shakespeare, in having Paris speak of Helen as a commodity, is persistently stressing the disparity between what the Trojans believe their relationship with their women to be, and what it actually is. During the next few scenes of this act Troilus and Cressida learn of the imminent exchange, and we witness a tender parting that is marred only by the very evident circumstance that Troilus does not trust Cressida, and fears to lose his cherished possession to a subtle and talented Greek.

Enter Diomedes, who is anything but subtle. Toward him Troilus is at first patronizing and, when Diomedes ignores him, ridiculously overbearing. As a chivalrous but immature courtly lover Troilus is no match for Diomedes who, uncowed by bluster, is self-possessed, plain-speaking and, as regards Cressida, very practical:

> When I am hence,
> I'll answer to my lust: and know you, lord,
> I'll nothing do on charge: to her own worth
> She shall be prized; but that you say 'be 't so,'
> I'll speak it in my spirit and honour, 'no.'
> (IV.iv.130-4)

In the following scene both Diomedes and Ulysses quickly become aware of the lady's worth. Arriving at the Greek camp Cressida, so lately heartbroken, trades wit and kisses with the Greek princes, much to Ulysses' disgust. True, it was he who suggested the kissing, but this was no doubt in jest, and we are probably to take it that he did not expect his suggestion to be taken up. Ulysses himself will not kiss Cressida, and when he leaves he gives an assessment of her that is as full of contempt as was that of Helen by Diomedes:

> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That gives accosting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every ticklish reader! set them down
> For sluttish spoils of opportunity
> And daughters of the game.
>
> (IV.v.55-63)

So much for the object of Troilus' ideal of courtly love. But if Ulysses provides a more realistic assessment of Cressida, he goes too far, he is too harsh on her, he is cynical in his immediate and total condemnation of her. Even Ulysses, it seems, is not immune to Thersites' disease.

His invective is interrupted by the arrival of Hector and the other Trojans for the single combat arranged earlier. The main purpose of this part of the scene is to reinforce the idealistic nature of Hector's chivalry. Aeneas informs us, in his usual courtly manner, that Hector will

"obey conditions", will accept whatever rules the Greeks favour. For his own part he is willing that the fight should be a bloodless one, for he and Ajax are blood relations. And it is Hector who calls an end to the fight at the first pause, against the wishes of Ajax, who makes it quite clear that he would have allowed no idealistic considerations of consanguinity to stand between him and fame:

> I thank thee, Hector.
> Thou art too gentle and too free a man.
> I came to kill thee, cousin, and bear hence
> A great addition earned in thy death.
> (IV.v.138-41)

If Hector's scruples in such a ceremonial combat are laudable, we may wonder about the wisdom of those that stay his hand on the everyday field of battle. The picture is drawn well for us by Nestor:

> And I have seen thee,
> As hot as Perseus, spur thy Phrygian steed,
> Despising many forfeits and subduements,
> When thou hast hung thy advanced sword i' the air,
> Not letting it decline on the declined,
> That I have said to some my standers-by
> "Lo, Jupiter is yonder, dealing life!"
> (IV.v.185-91)

The final image here is a significant one, since for the idealist there is a narrow line between striving to rise above imperfect humanity, and playing at god. At Agincourt Henry V, when the issue of battle is put in doubt by a French rally, has no hesitation in having his troops kill their prisoners. He puts the lives of his own men and the safety of the state before all considerations of mercy. By

dealing life to an enemy who would kill him or any other Trojan without hesitation, Hector is jeopardizing his soldiers and his city.

Hector's real challenger is, of course, Achilles, who, while the other Greeks are addressing Hector in suitably polite terms, predicts his destruction of the Trojan in a fashion that cannot fail to arouse Hector's wrath:

> Tell me, you Heavens, in which part of his body
> Shall I destroy him? Whether there, or there, or there?
> That I may give the local wound a name,
> And make distinct the very breach whereout
> Hector's great spirit flew. Answer me, Heavens!
> (IV.v.242-6)

But Hector despises such prognostications, whether the source be human or divine: "Wert thou an oracle to tell me so,/ I'd not believe thee" (IV.v.252-3). And he issues a challenge which Achilles takes up.

However, we are not far into the next scene, the first of Act V, before Achilles changes his mind. Almost inevitably, it seems, a woman is involved in this new change of heart. Two women, to be precise, as Achilles explains:

> My sweet Patroclus, I am thwarted quite
> From my great purpose in tomorrow's battle.
> Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba,
> A token from her daughter, my fair love,
> Both taxing me and gaging me to keep
> An oath that I have sworn. I will not break it.
> Fall Greeks, fall fame; honour or go or stay,
> My major vow lies here, this I'll obey.
> (V.i.42-9)

Again, love, or lust, conflicts with war, and Achilles makes

it is very evident that his valuation of honour is far different from that of Hector. For Hector honour always comes first; for Achilles it comes second to his lust. And Achilles' deliberate indifference to the fate of his countrymen reveals a cynicism that is entirely absent in Hector. As if to underline this point the master cynic, Thersites, ends the episode with a soliloquy in which he rails cynically upon the Greek leadership.

In the next scene Thersites feeds his cynicism as he watches the meeting between Diomedes and Cressida. From her behaviour here we may be tempted to believe that the lady (or Shakespeare) has changed her personality. It becomes clear, however, that faced with the problem of attracting a very different man, she is forced to use different tactics. The courtly love ritual of reticence she has used at Troy is of no use to Cressida in dealing with the rational Diomedes. She does make several attempts to put him in the position of wooer, begging him to tempt her no more, or to visit her no more, but he will have none of this. Several times he threatens to leave, and he makes it quite plain that he "does not like this fooling" (V.ii.101). Indeed, while both Diomedes and Troilus want the same thing from Cressida, Diomedes fools neither her nor himself that there is anything other than physical love involved. He does not flatter her, nor does he make any promises; he will not, one feels sure, allow her

to deflect him from his military duties.

Troilus waxes as lyrical over Cressida's perfidy as he did earlier over her perfection. Here Shakespeare shows us very forcefully that the man who insists on perceiving as reality an ideal vision of himself and his world simply cannot adopt a rational attitude when that vision is destroyed. He may, like Timon, turn to irrational cynicism or, like Troilus, see only a paradox:

> Oh, madness of discourse
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> Bifold authority! Where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt. This is, and is not, Cressid!
> (V.ii.142-6)

In fact, there are indeed two Cressidas - the real person whom Troilus cannot accept, and the one he has created from his idealism. Thersites, to whom idealism is utterly foreign, sees Troilus' behaviour here as ridiculous posturing: "Will a' swagger himself out on's own eyes?"(V.ii.136). The rational Ulysses, too, finds Troilus' passionate outburst hard to swallow:

> May worthy Troilus be half attached
> With that which here his passion doth express?
> (V.ii.161-2)

But if Troilus' love seems to us to have been less than ideal, if his soaring rhetoric is not without an element of swagger, we must allow that Troilus is sincere, that he believed passionately in his illusion, that he is now truly overcome by the passion of his own posturing.

While the most lyrical words in this scene come from the idealist, it is the cynic who has the last word. Thersites ends the scene, as he did the last, with some harsh words on Diomedes and the observation that lechery is in fashion:

> Lechery, lechery! Still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion. A burning devil take them!
> (V.ii.196-7)

Wars and lechery to Thersites, but honour and love to Hector and Troilus. In the scene that follows we find the two Trojans preparing for battle, Hector to keep the vows he has made to the gods and to the Greeks, in spite of dire warnings from his mother, wife and sister. For him, honour is all:

> Mine honour keeps the weather of my fate;
> Life every man holds dear, but the dear man
> Holds honour far more precious dear than life.
> (V.iii.26-8)

This is very noble, of course, and would seem admirable if the cause itself were honourable, and if Hector had no more to lose than his own life. But it is made clear in Cassandra's words that there is much more at stake here than Hector's life and honour:

> Priam, hold him fast.
> He is thy crutch. Now if thou lose thy stay,
> Thou on him leaning and all Troy on thee,
> Fall all together.
> (V.iii.59-62)

Insofar as Hector is blinded to his larger responsibility to the state by his dedication to honour, his idealism must

be seen as destructive. Though he no doubt sees himself as a man of the utmost integrity, in his obsession with honour he lusts after it as hot-bloodedly as Troilus has lusted after Cressida. Cassandra has said as much - "The gods are deaf to hot and peevish vows"(V.iii.16) - but Hector is as deaf to her reason as he is to her prognostication. And the depth of his obsession is ironically underlined by the fact that all those factors that he now ignores - prophecy, reason, intemperance, the unsatisfactory nature of the cause - he has earlier used in arguing against Troilus:

> Now, youthful Troilus, do not these high strains
> Of divination in our sister work
> Some touches of remorse? Or is your blood
> So madly hot that no discourse of reason,
> Nor fear of bad success in a bad cause,
> Can qualify the same?
> (II.ii.113-8)

When these considerations are rejected by Hector here, toward the end of the play, as they were at the beginning of the play, we are reminded of his tragic choice, tragic for both him and for Troy. This tragedy is expressed simply and concisely by Cassandra in one line, her last line in the play: "Thou dost thyself and all our Troy deceive"(V.iii.90).

But if Hector is unwise, he is not ignoble. He subscribes sincerely to his ideals, and there is more to them than the upholding of vows and the pursuit of fame. Calling it "a vice of mercy", Troilus points with disapprobation to one aspect of his brother's chivalric code of honour on the

field:

> When many times the captive Grecian falls,
> Even in the fan and wind of your fair sword,
> You bid them rise and live.
> (V.iii.40-2)

In the context of this dark play such mercy may indeed be a vice. For in his commitment to an ideal chivalry Hector stands alone; he is in a sense a Prometheus banished to isolation for retrieving the fire of a lost idealism for a degenerating mankind. But Hector is not, like Prometheus, immortal, and both he and the spark of idealism will be quenched by the dark forces of Cynicism that are thrust up in a decadent society. To remind us that Troy, too, is not free from decadence, Pandarus enters at the end of this scene complaining of the most decadent of diseases.

If the manner in which Pandarus closes this scene is a comment upon the unpleasant reality of courtly love, the fact that Thersites opens and closes the first battle-field scene may be a comment upon the glory and grandeur that are notably absent from this war. In the manner of the cynic, he takes a perverse satisfaction in the fact that Ulysses' plan has gone awry:

> . . . the policy of those crafty swearing rascals, that stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese, Nestor, and that same dog-fox, Ulysses, is not proved worth a blackberry: they set me up, in policy, that mongrel cur, Ajax, against that dog of as bad a kind, Achilles; and now is the cur Ajax prouder than the cur Achilles, and will not arm today; whereupon the Grecians begin to proclaim barbarism, and policy grows into an ill opinion.
> (V.iv.9-18)

He might well crow, for the cynicism of which he, the meanest of the Greeks, is the foremost representative, is gaining its final stranglehold upon the rationalism with which the Greek leadership has sought to conduct the war.

The presence of Thersites on the battle-field may seem to serve only the purpose of providing a cynical commentary on the issues involved, but it also points to the capacity of cynicism for survival, at least against an idealistic foe. Significantly, he is first challenged by Hector who, upon hearing Thersites report himself "a rascal, a scurvy railing knave, a very filthy rogue"(V.iv.30-1), bids him "Live". According to Hector's chivalric code it is only the noble and worthy who deserve to die, it seems. But where should he find these? When Achilles and Ajax finally come to the field they are spurred not by the desire for chivalric honour but by revenge.

When Hector and Achilles first meet, the former, always chivalrous, offers Achilles an opportunity to rest before they fight but Achilles makes excuses for avoiding combat and moves off. At this point another adversary enters in the form of one in sumptuous armour. This character has no lines nor even any name but he is, as we shall see, of considerable importance to the play's thematic structure. This attractive prize, like the honour of which he is a symbol, will not be easily gained - he must be pursued:

> Stand, stand, thou Greek; thou art a goodly mark:
> No? Wilt thou not? I like thy armour well;
> I'll frush it and unlock the rivets all,
> But I'll be master of it: wilt thou not, beast, abide?
> Why, then fly on, I'll hunt thee for thy hide.
> (V.vi.27-31)

We may not at once see the significance of this figure but it becomes very clear in the death scene, which is prepared for by a short intervening scene. Achilles gathers his myrmidons whom he instructs to follow him and, when he has found Hector, to fall upon the Trojan and slay him:

> Empale him with your weapons round about,
> In fellest manner execute your aims.
> (V.vii.5-6)

Such disregard for any rules of war shows Achilles to be single-minded and cynical. It is therefore apt that he should share this scene with Thersites, who is now challenged by Margarelon, a bastard son of Priam. Thersites again talks himself out of trouble, with a self-depreciating, yet rather Falstaffian speech:

> I am a bastard too; I love bastards: I am a bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valour, in everything illegitimate. One bear will not bite another, and wherefore should one bastard? Take heed, the quarrel's most ominous to us: if the son of a whore fight for a whore, he tempts judgment: farewell, bastard.
> (V.vii.16-22)

Thersites may well be all he says he is, but he has no illusions about the nobility of the cause of this war or of its participants. And he, unlike a far better man, will be alive at the end of the play. In other versions of the Troy story

Thersites did, in fact, die on the plains of Ilium, and we may perceive a Shakespearean comment upon the ignobleness of this war in his keeping Thersites alive while Hector, the valiant and chivalrous warrior, Thersites' opposite in almost every way, will very shortly die a most undignified death.

Hector's first words in the death scene, addressed to the one in sumptuous armour, now dead, are heavy with ironic echoes that ring back and forth throughout the play:

> Most putrefied core, so fair without,
> Thy goodly armour thus hath cost thy life.
> (V.viii.1-2)

It will also, we now see, cost Hector <u>his</u> life, for having captured it he sheathes his sword and puts off his helmet and shield. Achilles and his Myrmidons approach and slay him with ease. The sumptuously armoured figure should remind us of Helen who, it has often been suggested, is fair without but corrupt within. And as Hector sits unarmed our minds go back to the occasion when Helen and Paris went joyfully forth to disarm him. Again, while Cressida is not directly linked with Hector's downfall, we are aware that she has been for Troilus a beautiful picture that he has painted onto the canvas of a corrupt humanity.

Moreover, what Helen and Cressida are supposed to motivate in their society, codes of chivalry in love and war, are attractive concepts but are seen in the event to be as empty as much of the beautiful rhetoric that abounds in this play. The war itself, as Achilles now proves so

unequivocally, is not, as Hector has liked to imagine it is, a splendid sport for gentlemen. If we have listened carefully we know that there have been seven years of the most vicious maiming and slaughtering of the best of Greek and Trojan manhood. The noble Hector himself is brutally butchered, and as if the stark truth is being ironically impressed upon him now that it is too late for him to act upon it, Achilles orders his body tied to his horse so that he can drag it ignominiously around the battlefield.

In fact, almost everything in this play that is esteemed and valued and sought after can be seen to be at best hollow and meaningless, and at worst, corrupt and destructive. Though Troilus believes he serves an ideal code of courtly love, this is shown to amount to little more than lust on both his and Cressida's part. And the ideal of chivalric warfare in which Hector insists on believing has no existence in reality. The cause is bad, the war is bloody, and the man from whom Hector hopes to win the most honour proves to be proud, stupid, sensuous and, ultimately, cynical and motivated only by a lust for revenge. With Hector's fall cynicism triumphs over idealism, and it triumphs because his idealism involves the limitation of rigid conformity to a code, a set of rules, regardless of the reality of the situation, while cynicism rejects all rules and is therefore free to be utterly ruthless. Cynicism is born in a decadent society and is nurtured on pride or contempt or

despair or all of these, but it is always negative, it provides no answers. In this play cynicism is most often marked by inaction, idealism by blind action. Hector is the one man who was capable of succeeding on the middle ground, of acting according to a rational assessment of the situation, taking into account moral and state laws. That he chose not to do so is his tragedy and that of all Troy.

CHAPTER III

Timon of Athens

Timon shares with Hector the misfortune of being an idealist in a much-less-than-ideal world, together with the tendency to behave as if his world shared his ideals. Timon, too, pursues his knight in sumptuous armour, though in his case this involves not a chivalric code of honour but a chivalric code of friendship. And because Timon persists in pursuing his ideal in a society in which it is incongruous, this ideal must turn in upon itself and devour itself and ultimately reveal its putrefied core. Hector's awareness of the emptiness of his ideal comes too late to ward off destruction; he had set in motion the wheels of tragedy long before when he rejected reason in favour of idealism. Timon's opportunity to forestall destruction comes after his disillusionment, but he rejects the middle way, the path of reason, and becomes totally cynical.

Cynicism is represented in Timon of Athens, as in Troilus and Cressida, by a satiric character who rails against the corruption in his society. We hear similar invective, curses calling down disease and destruction upon

almost everyone, and Apemantus uses mock prayer in much the same fashion as Thersites. Though they are sometimes tolerated for their entertainment value, neither of these figures is treated seriously by the other characters. But Apemantus is somewhat less of an extremist than Thersites, and less destructive. Thersites entertains Achilles and Ajax, whom he despises, with satire on the Greek leadership and thoroughly enjoys fostering his cynicism and dissention in others. Apemantus revels in being the solitary cynic and castigates Timon for false cynicism. And Apemantus' invective is far less harsh, less bitter than that of Thersites. Timon's railing, however, is as bitter as anything uttered by the Greek cynic, and herein lies the key to the difference between the two cynical characters in this play. For Shakespeare would have us see Timon as a man of extremes, and the violence of his cynicism would lose much of its force if it were equalled by that of a secondary character. In fact, Apemantus' caustic but sometimes witty cynicism is made to underline the severity, even viciousness, of Timon's acrimonious cynicism.

While in the second part of the play Timon is a more extreme cynic than Apemantus, in the first part of the play Timon's situation has certain parallels with that of Alcibiades, with Timon again being more extreme. Alcibiades, like Timon, is exploited. Though one might not describe him

as an idealist he is dedicated to a profession that is hazardous and finacially unrewarding. He risks his life to safeguard the peace of Athens, and in their security the senators, lords and merchants are free to build their fortunes. But whatever assumptions Alcibiades has made about the obligations held towards him, he is to be as quickly and thoroughly disillusioned as Timon. His immediate reaction to ingratitude is akin to that of Timon; his ultimate attitude toward the problem will, however, be very different.

If we look in Troilus and Cressida for a counterpart to Alcibiades the figure of Diomedes should at once suggest itself. Both are soldiers and both have a serious attitude toward their profession. By the nature of their involvement with women they show themselves to be subject to human weaknesses, but neither would try to idealize his concupiscence. They do not use grandiose terms, nor do they flatter; both speak plainly, directly and truthfully. Finally, and most importantly, both Diomedes and Alcibiades are men of the middle way, men guided predominantly by reason.

Diomedes is, of course, a comparatively minor figure whose rationalism, overwhelmed by the cynicism around him, can have little influence on the conduct of the war. Alcibiades, on the other hand, becomes a major character whose rationalism triumphs over cynicism; instead of despairing of the world he forestalls destruction and provides a purgation.

This brings us to the essential difference between the two plays. Hector's death accomplishes nothing and Troilus and Cressida ends on the very bleak note of the impending destruction of Troy by an ignoble enemy whose leading warriors are cynical and driven by a thirst for revenge. Cynicism has triumphed over both idealism and reason. In Timon of Athens both idealism and cynicism are largely bound up in one man, and with the death of this man both are purged from society. The rationalism of Alcibiades provides some sort of hope for the future of Athens. In order to fully appreciate Shakespeare's working out of the tripartite conflict between idealism, cynicism and rationalism it will be necessary to treat the play as I have treated Troilus and Cressida, tracing the dramatic events and focusing attention upon relevant aspects of theme, characterization and imagery as they arise.

The play opens upon a discussion among a number of minor characters. Behind the fine comedy of the exchange between the garrulous and grandiloquent poet and his polite and patient audience, the painter, we may discern a good deal of information about the social setting of the play. The world "wears . . . as it grows"; we are in Greece, but this is not the Golden Age of classical antiquity. On the contrary, we are soon to discover that Athenian society is in a period of decadence. The poet's reply gives us a hint of the values that are presently operating in this fallen

world:

> See,
> Magic of Bounty! All these spirits thy power
> Hath conjured to attend.
> (I.i.5-7)

He gestures around him but Timon is not present; it is not in the man himself that the power lies, but in his Bounty, his generosity, his gold. And we will become aware that the spirits that Bounty conjures up may be as evil as those conjured by the Doctor of Wittenberg, or those that Thersites would learn to call forth (Troilus and Cressida, II.iii.5-6).

The poet is, in fact, a type of chorus, commenting upon Timon's present state and forecasting his fall. But he is also, though only at this point, the Prologue, the voice of Shakespeare, telling us that the writer must needs write - "Our gentle flame provokes itself . . . ." - but that his satire is not directed against any particular persons:

> No leveled malice
> Infects one comma in the course I hold,
> But flies an eagle flight, bold and forth one,
> Leaving no tract behind.
> (I.i.47-50)

We can only guess whether Shakespeare's audience, had he had one for this play, would have believed him, but from our remote viewpoint we can have little doubt that Shakespeare would not have wasted his art in satirizing individuals. Rather, he is concerned to portray developments arising out of certain basic attitudes and responses to a cor-

rupt society.

From the poet we learn that Timon is very wealthy, extremely generous, and the object of veneration on the part of all kinds of people. Indeed, this veneration amounts to a kind of worship, for his fellows

> Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,
> Make sacred even his stirrup, and through him
> Drink the free air. (I.i.81-3)

There is no danger in this for the man who recognizes sycophancy, but the warning conveyed in the poet's work suggests that Timon takes this worship at its face value. And the danger for Timon is twofold, for it involves not only a mistaken perception of other men, but also a mistaken perception of himself. The imagery used in the poet's words is the first clue that Timon is, in a sense, playing at god. It is as dangerous a game for Timon as it is for Coriolanus or for Hector.

There is undoubtedly an element of pride and vanity in the way Timon relishes the power and capacity for munificence afforded him by his wealth, but we should be doing both him and Shakespeare an injustice if we saw in Timon no more than this. In order to appreciate in the play that element of tragedy which I believe it possesses we must be aware of Timon as a sincere, if very misguided, idealist. Ironically, it is his altruitic idealism that pushes him toward a divine role and away from humanity. Like a god,

Timon must give, and give in great abundance, accepting no repayment or only token gifts in return. But in a decadent world Timon's indiscriminating altruism rather makes of him a devil's disciple, for it encourages greed, exploitation and cynical opportunism.

In the second part of the first scene we see Timon exercising his munificence. It is not enough for him to free Ventidius from prison by paying his debt, he must give him further assistance:

> 'Tis not enough to help the feeble up,
> But to support him after.
> (I.i.107-8)

This oblique allusion to Christ's healing of the lame man is not without significance in terms of Timon's perception of himself. Again, in Timon's generous treatment of Lucilius we may be reminded of Christ's parable of the good and faithful servant.

Not only a benefactor to friends and servants, Timon is also a patron of the arts, especially if he himself is the subject of the artistic endeavour. He is almost certainly the subject of the painter's work, as he is of the poet's, and if he enjoys seeing himself reflected in art, he would also like to see himself reflected in other men. He creates men in his own image. Timon likes to believe that everyone shares his ideal of friendship, of generosity, of the brotherhood of man: "'tis a bond in men" to help others. But

if he would see them as sharing his idealism, they must not, of course, be allowed to share his pre-eminence. Whether on the battlefield or at the feast, Shakespeare's idealists must reign alone.

All those who flock to Timon's house to taste his bounty are well content to allow him to enjoy his illusion; all, that is, save for Apemantus. This figure establishes himself at once as a cynic and a railer though, as I have suggested, he is not nearly as vindictive and bitter as Thersites. Like Thersites, however, he is given to making sweeping generalizations, and suggests at this point that all Athenians are knaves (I.i.182,184). In lines heavy with dramatic irony, Timon asks:

> Why dost thou call them knaves? Thou know'st them not.
>
> (I.i.181-2)

For while he may know them all by name, it will become very apparent that Timon does not know them at all by nature. We should beware, however, of accepting Apemantus' contrary view of mankind as a completely valid one. Though he does not place Timon among the knaves he sees him as a man who wallows in flattery:

> He that loves to be flattered is worthy 'o the flatterer.
>
> (I.i.232-3)

But flattery is insincere praise, while Timon believes those about him to be sincere and courteous - in his ideal world

flattery does not exist. Though Timon is foolish and gratified by praise, he is driven by more than vanity. The fact is that Apemantus is incapable of comprehending Timon's idealism, for the cynic perceives only two motivations that drive mankind - foolishness and evil. He ascribes the former to Timon and both to everyone else. Just as Thersites' vision of the world is limited to "wars and lechery", Apemantus' is limited to knavery and folly. Thus, while his perception may not be as cloudy as that of Timon, it is by no means entirely objective.

The first scene closes with a reminder of the divine role Timon is playing:

> 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)

Here we are given a firm indication of the impracticality of Timon's ideal of friendship, for it does not allow of reciprocity. Hector's ideal of chivalrous warfare, which was equally sincere, was impractical in its lack of a worthy cause and its dangerous assumption that the enemy accepted the same code; however noble in itself, his idealism became destructive in an imperfect world. Timon's idealism seems to involve the highest of the three kinds of friendship designated by Aristotle. In the perfect friendship there existed only perfect harmony or Amitee; there was no place

for gratitude or ingratitude. A lower form of friendship, Concordia, was "the bond of society and the main support of the state as far as the Renaissance was concerned."[1] Concordia involved liberality and gratitude, but while Timon is liberal to excess, he does not allow the beneficiaries of his liberality to properly express their gratitude. Timon, like Hector, unwittingly tries to fit the square peg of his idealism into the round hole of a debased society.

Timon affirms his ideal of perfect friendship at the beginning of the second scene of the play. Ventidius, having inherited a fortune, seeks to repay his debt to Timon but is not allowed to do so:

> Oh, by no means,
> 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.8-11)

And as for ceremony, "where there is true friendship, there needs none"(I.ii.18). Even Apemantus is made welcome at the feast, merely because he is an Athenian (I.ii.35-6). Timon's conception of what it means to be an Athenian is thus in direct contrast to that expressed by Apemantus in the first scene.

This confrontation between idealism and cynicism cannot come to any sort of resolution; it cannot come even to any greater conflict than that between Apemantus' contempt and Timon's irritation. For Timon understands Apemantus as

little as he is understood by him; he misjudges the cynic so far as to believe he can silence his raving with food that is for him the symbol of the brotherhood of man.

Apemantus perceives the feast very differently:

> O you gods, what a number of men eat Timon, and he sees 'em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood; and all the madness is he cheers them up, too.
> (I.ii.39-43)

In portraying Timon as a man playing at god, Shakespeare makes use of many biblical allusions. We cannot fail to recognize in the above lines a reference to the Last Supper, where in the giving of the bread and wine, representing his body and blood, Christ gave all his substance for the good of mankind. At this other feast Timon is giving all <u>his</u> substance but the analogy is by no means perfect, for the men who are eating Timon are sycophants. As Apemantus points out in an obvious allusion to Judas, they are quite prepared to betray him:

> The fellow that sits next him now parts bread with him, pledges the breath of him in a divided draught, is the readiest man to kill him.
> (I.ii.47-50)

If Timon in his naive idealism seems almost to be inviting betrayal, there is no possibility that Apemantus could ever be betrayed. As a cynic he will "trust no man on his oath or bond"(I.ii.66), nor any friend in time of need. He does not, of course, have any friends, for he is an outsider who prays, in his mock grace, for no man but himself.

But his cynicism removes him no farther from humanity than Timon in his idealism.

It is at this point that one might expect the theme of the middle ground of rationalism to be developed but its representative, Alcibiades, is given little to say and the vague picture we are able to construct of him seems rather ambiguous. He, too, is something of an outsider, and in this respect he may remind us of the Bastard in King John, who at first is out of his element in the halls of the great. Alcibiades' heart is "in the field" rather than at the feast; indeed, it would be easy to see him at this point as a bloodthirsty savage, for he describes his "breakfast of enemies" with obvious relish:

> So they were bleeding new, my lord,
> there's no meat like 'em.
> (I.ii.80-81)

But I believe that to see this as a negative comment upon Alcibiades would be a mistake, a mistake characteristic of an age that prefers not to speak of its bloodshed and atrocities. We should rather interpret these words as those of a man proud of his profession and dedicated to it. After all, the military has always been regarded, at least in times of war, as an honourable profession. What is perhaps more difficult to explain is that Alcibiades, who is later to assume a great importance in the play as a representative of rationalism and common humanity, receives such scanty treatment here. The solution to this problem may best be

illustrated by looking again to the Bastard Philip. Both he and Alcibiades know little of the games played in the corridors of power and wealth, but both men learn quickly and as they grow in knowledge they grow in maturity. Just as Philip develops from a devil-may-care countryman to a responsible leader upon whom the fate of England depends, Alcibiades develops from a swashbuckling soldier into a man of reason and moderation who will attempt to bring justice and order to Athens.

Alcibiades has said that he could wish his best friend at such a feast of enemies as he has described, and this is soon followed by Timon's definitive statement on friendship. It is prompted by a lord's request that he and his fellows be allowed to express their loves in some practical manner, and Timon's immediate reaponse is rather puzzling:

> Oh, no doubt, my good friends, but the gods themselves have provided that I shall have much help from you.
>
> (I.ii.91-3)

But Timon never elaborates on the nature of this help, and the only assistance they appear to give him is in helping him to spend his money. While he asserts that friends are "the most needless creatures living should we ne'er have use for 'em"(I.ii.101-2), the fact is that he does not make use of them save as objects of his own munificence. To be sure, he seems to be vaguely aware of some sort of barrier between

himself and his friends:

> Why, I have often wished myself poorer that
> I might come nearer to you.
> (I.ii.104-6)

But he is clearly ascribing the social distance to the magnitude of his wealth rather than to the way he uses it.

His erroneous interpretation of what is happening around him derives from his absolute idealism, and both are well expressed in what follows:

> We are born to do benefits; and what better or
> properer can we call our own than the riches
> of our friends? Oh, what a precious comfort
> 'tis to have so many, like brothers, command-
> ing one another's fortunes!
> (I.ii.106-111)

It is evident that Timon imagines he is living in a Golden Age of perfect brotherhood and universal altruism. The opposite view of the situation , and of what friendship has become in this society, is expressed by Apemantus during the masque:

> We make ourselves fools to disport ourselves,
> And spend our flatteries to drink those men
> Upon whose age we void it up again
> With poisonous spite and envy.
> Who lives that's not depraved or depraves?
> Who dies that bears not one spurn to their graves
> Of their friends' gift?
> (I.ii.141-7)

At this point in the play Timon's idealism may seem far more attractive than Apemantus' cynicism, for is not Timon's a noble vision? And is there any reason to see Apemantus as anything other than a bitter malcontent? But Timon's philo-

sophy has not yet been put to the test. That it is shortly to be so we learn from Flavius, who is the fourth important character in Shakespeare's scheme.

It is both in the interaction between him and Timon and in the contrast between the two characters that the importance of Flavius lies. Honest, faithful and generous, Flavius clearly has ideals, but he is not so blind as to imagine that they are shared by every member of Athenian society. After telling us that Timon is bankrupt but will not heed warnings of his financial problems, Flavius in his turn has something to say on friendship:

> Happier is he that has no friend to feed
> Than such as do e'en enemies exceed.
> (I.ii.210-211)

This is not the remark of a cynic, for the cynic would feel only contempt for Timon's foolishness, rather than the pain expressed by Flavius: "I bleed inwardly for my lord"(I.ii. 211). This is much the same kind of dedication shown by Enobarbus towards Antony, and Flavius will be no more effective than Enobarbus in saving his master from destruction.

Timon, oblivious of impending disaster, pursues his idealistic role of benevolent god:

> Methinks, I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
> And ne'er be weary.
> (I.ii.226-7)

And Apemantus pursues his self-appointed task of lecturing Timon on the true nature of friendship:

> Friendship's full of dregs.
> Methinks false hearts should never have sound legs.
> Thus honest fools lay out their wealth on court'sies.
> (I.ii.239-41)

To the cynical mind Timon is merely an honest fool who purchases flattery at great expense. For his part, Timon again shows that he has no true conception of Apemantus' cynicism, supposing that it can be spirited away by the magic of his bounty:

> Now, Apemantus, if thou wert not sullen,
> I would be good to thee.
> (I.ii.242-3)

But Apemantus will no more be bribed than Timon will heed his counsel. The fact is that the idealist and the cynic are so rigidly fixed in their own narrow visions of the world that they can neither understand each other nor conceive of any alternative point of view.

Act II is a short one and in some respects the most unsatisfactory act of the play. In the very brief first scene a senator reiterates Timon's foolish generosity in returning gifts of far greater value than those he receives, and he sends his servant to demand repayment of debts. The second scene deals with Timon's reluctant acknowledgement of his bankruptcy and his refusal to acknowledge the fickleness of his friends. It is difficult to know what Shakespeare had in mind for the sequence involving Apemantus and the fool, especially in view of the fact that the latter does not appear again in the play. The episode serves to bridge

the absence of Timon and Flavius, but its substance hardly justifies the eighty-four lines expended upon it. We learn nothing new about Apemantus, whose railing is perfunctory and wit pedestrian. Indeed, one can only surmise that the sequence was a false start that would have been eliminated in revision.

However, we do learn rather more of Flavius in this scene. His honesty is confirmed and we are left in no doubt of his sincere concern for Timon's welfare. We begin to see, moreover, that Flavius, a mere servant, has a far more valuable concept of friendship than that of Timon. For while Timon pursues an ideal of friendship that has no relevance to the real world, Flavius' quiet honesty, dedication and loyalty, unappreciated by Timon as they may be, serve as a potential counterbalance to the forces of opportunism and cynicism. Flavius has endured Timon's anger and continued to serve him, knowing that he, Flavius, would fall with his master. Furthermore, while he does not approve of Timon's behaviour, Flavius, unlike Apemantus, understands him. In response to Timon's assertion that it is unthinkable that his friends will not come to his aid Flavius conveys his own doubts and the nature of Timon's idealism very succinctly:

> I would I could not think it. That thought is bounty's foe;
> Being free itself, it thinks all others so.
> (II.ii.241-2)

Timon is no longer free in any sense of the word; besieged by creditors, he is now dependent upon the gratitude of his supposed frinds. The first three scenes of Act III show us, with a dark, satiric humour, that Timon's idealistic notions of his friendships are utterly erroneous. Lucullus will not lend him money "upon bare friendship, without security"(III.i.46-7). Though Timon is Lucius' "very good friend", his "very exquisite friend", he knows that "he that's once denied will hardly speed"(III.ii.69), and will not help him. In contrast to all this Timon's servants show their loyalty and compassion in their anger and contempt for these false friends, and with their sympathy for Timon's predicament. "I feel my master's passion," cries Flaminius. He will not be bribed by Lucullus, whom he calls a "disease of a friend"(III.i.56). Yet Timon will reject these faithful servants with the rest of humanity.

The remarks of the strangers in scene ii of this act must be accorded some importance for they are impartial commentators. The First Stranger has something to say on the depraved state of the world, on friendship, and on Timon, whom he appears to know very well. The world's soul is such that "policy sits above conscience"(III.ii.94), as it does in a number of Shakespeare's plays. In King John the Bastard is the only major character for whom conscience predominates over policy. In Coriolanus' Rome policy guides the

actions of everyone but Coriolanus himself and the common people whom he despises. In Antony and Cleopatra, Octavius Caesar's ruthless use of policy gains him the world, while in Troilus and Cressida Hector's total lack of policy against an enemy that lacks all conscience loses him all.

The First Stranger points to the dominance of policy and the consequent dearth of sincere friendship in Athenian society in an image that echoes earlier allusions to the Last Supper:

> Who can call him
> His friend that dips in the same dish?
> (III.ii.72-3)

By now we are prepared to accept this view of a debased world with a debased concept of friendship, but the stranger's assessment of Timon must seem somewhat inadequate. To be sure, Timon is a man of "right noble mind, illustrious virtue,/ And honourable carriage"(III.ii.87-8), but this hardly provides a total view of the man. Flavius, who is also a reliable commentator, has already made it clear that Timon can be stubborn - "There is no crossing him in's humour"(I.ii.166) - and that he is not a man who can pay heed to good advice when it conflicts with the ideal notions to which he clings so tenaciously. In fact, even the most sympathetic member of Shakespeare's audience would at this point be of the opinion that Timon's idealism is misguided, even foolish, and we cannot, therefore, take the

stranger's statement as the last word on Timon.

We were prepared for Timon's betrayal in the first scene of the play; in the first three scenes of Act III we witness it. The fourth scene shows us the effect of this betrayal upon Timon - the effect upon the idealist of sudden and total disillusionment. Everything is turned upside down. Timon, who has been "ever free", now finds himself besieged by the servants of his debtors, a prisoner in his own house. This house, that once "blazed with lights and brayed with minstrelsy", is now clamorous with usurers' men; even his house has betrayed him:

> Have I been ever free, and must my house
> Be my retentive enemy, my jail?
> The place which I have feasted, does it now,
> Like all mankind, show me an iron heart?
> (III.iv.81-4)

"Like <u>all</u> mankind" - this is the first indication that Timon has moved to the opposite extreme from his idealism. His idealism itself has been turned upside down. The scene closes with Timon's planning what is obviously to be some form of revenge.

In the following scene Alcibiades is given reason to seek revenge. The theme of friendship is an important one in this scene, for Alcibiades risks, and loses, both his captainship and his citizenship (his all, in fact) in his efforts to save the life of his friend. Clearly Alcibiades expects his request for mercy to be granted, especially

when he offers his own wounds and victories as evidence of a debt owed to him by Athens. He has obviously given much in terms of blood and valour, and received little in return - as Timon has said, he is "seldom rich". But in supposing that the senators will be willing to repay him for the security he has provided, any more than they are willing to repay Timon for his earlier generosity, Alcibiades shows something of Timon's naiveté. Certainly, Alcibiades is aware that the senators "love security"(III.v.80-1) - in both its concrete and abstract forms - but he errs in believing that their love of the gold which this security allows them to amass can admit of any considerations of gratitude. After all, Alcibiades' friend is a threat to security and thus to their financial well-being. It is such a threat as that posed by Lear's followers to his daughters, and these knights must therefore be dispensed with. Lear, like Timon and Alcibiades, is left with nothing; his world, too, is overturned. And Lear reacts characteristically to the destruction of his illusions with bitter curses.

The curses Alcibiades directs at the senators are similarly bitter and cynical:

> Now the gods keep you old enough that you may live
> Only in bone, that none may look on you!
> (III.v.104-5)

Like Timon, he plans revenge and, again like Timon, he sees himself at this point as being in some kind of divine role:

"Soldiers should brook as little wrongs as gods"(III.v.117). At this time in the play the similarities between the predicaments and attitudes of Timon and Alcibiades are marked; by the end of the play they will be markedly different.

The first part of Timon's revenge is effected in the second banqueting scene, which clearly invites comparison with the first. Timon is no longer playing at god, and is now apparently not "too proud to give thanks to the gods" (I.ii.62). But the grace he renders here is reminiscent of that given at the first feast by Apemantus and gives us a taste of the extreme cynicism that we are soon to witness in him. He refers, as Apemantus has earlier, to the untrustworthiness of men, to the corruption of women, to the worthlessness of friends. His friends that were once all to him are now "nothing". While his grace is somewhat similar in content to that of Apemantus, it is very different in tone. Both are cynical, but Apemantus' grace is not without a touch of wry humour, which is assisted by the nursery-rhyme couplets; Timon's grace is in prose, bitter, and without any trace of humour. The difference may at this point in the play be ascribed to Timon's being in the first throes of his rage over his betrayal, but in retrospect it will be seen to be symptomatic of a cynicism and misanthropy that is far more extreme than that of Apemantus. Timon's is, in fact, an anti-grace, and is followed by an anti-baptism in

the throwing of water, which is symbolic of his rejection of mankind.

We have not long to wait to see the depth of Timon's hatred. In the first scene of Act IV Timon, now self-exiled both physically and spiritually from Athens, rails upon his city and the whole world. Like that of Coriolanus, Timon's condemnation of his countrymen is general; the fallen idealist can allow of no exceptions. Timon calls down disease and confusion upon the innocent as well as the guilty, and in a bitter prayer that is the cynic's stock-in-trade he expresses the desire for general destruction and for an increase in that most destructive of human emotions - hatred:

> The gods confound - hear me, you gods all! -
> The Athenians both within and out that wall!
> And grant, as Timon grows, his hate may grow
> To the whole race of mankind, high and low!
> Amen.
>
> (IV.i.37-41)

In case our sympathy for Timon's plight should draw from us a corresponding sympathy for his attitude, Shakespeare immediately shows us that Timon's hatred is too extreme, and unjustified. His servants have their own problems - they are now unemployed and poor - but far from blaming their misfortunes on their master's foolish extravagance (for which they would have some justification) they express sorrow for him and contempt for his false friends. Moreover, the depth of their communal feeling is sufficient to invalidate the cynical view that sincere friendship is

no longer to be found in Athens. This is most apparent in the actions of Flavius, who shares a portion of his meagre resources with his fellow servants and determines to use the rest to aid Timon. Flavius is thus seen to be a man of principle, though his ideals are not founded upon ignorance of the real world. Indeed, it is his knowledge of the misery that wealth can bring that makes him value friendship more than gold:

> Who would not wish to be from wealth exempt,
> Since riches point to misery and contempt?
> (IV.ii.31-2)

There is a strong reminder in this scene of Timon's divine role-playing. Following the loss of their master the servants are, like Christ's disciples after the crucifixion, apprehensive and bewildered, but in words that bring to mind the communal feast of the Eucharist they show a desire not to lose the companionship they have found in Timon's house:

> Wherever we shall meet, for Timon's sake
> Let's yet be fellows.
> (IV.ii.24-5)

If Timon's house has been the incubator of such warm and loyal friendship we cannot see his earlier behaviour as being entirely negative in its results, but we should take care not to read too much into the religious undercurrents of this scene. For it must be stressed that we are not to see Timon as a god, but as a man who has tried to play at

god, and this, however sincere and altruistic his motives, is dangerous. He has lived in "a dream of friendship"(IV.ii. 34), which, noble as it is in itself, has led him to neglect his duty to the real world. Though not a soldier like Coriolanus and Hector, Timon, as a leading and influential citizen, can be seen as having no less obligation than these figures to the welfare of his state.

As we have seen, Timon's reaction to his betrayal is far from god-like, at least in terms of the patient and forgiving Christian god. But is his reaction human? Anger is indeed a weakness of humanity, but in Timon's blind and general hatred, as blind and general as was once his love, there is something inhuman, even satanic. Like Satan cast out of heaven he would like to destroy mankind, or see it destroyed through an escalation of its own innate wickedness. Indeed, in his utter misanthropy he can see nothing but wickedness in the world:

> Who dares, who dares,
> In purity of manhood stand upright
> And say "This man's a flatterer"? If one be,
> So are they all, for every grise of fortune
> Is smoothed by that below. The learned pate
> Ducks to the golden fool. All is oblique;
> There's nothing level in our cursed natures
> But direct villainy. Therefore be abhorred
> All feasts, societies and throngs of men!
> (IV.iii.13-21)

"All . . . all . . . all" and "nothing": for Timon there are no exceptions. The potential destructiveness of this totally cynical attitude cannot become actual through curses and

prayers, which are Timon's only weapons. Soon, however, he has a real weapon and ironically it is that weapon with which he has destroyed himself - gold. True to his new nature, he now sees the gold that was once the cornerstone of his existence as being utterly and invariably evil in its effects, and he determines to use it in pursuance of his revenge:

> Come, damned earth,
> Thou common whore of mankind, that put'st odds
> Among the rout of nations, I will make thee
> Do thy right nature.
> (IV.iii.41-3)

It is difficult to see how any critic could see Timon as a noble figure after this statement. He intends to use what he sees as a thoroughly evil weapon to destroy his society, which he also sees as thoroughly evil. It is at this point that Alcibiades enters and reminds us, but not Timon, that neither mankind nor gold is totally and intrinsically wicked.

"What friendship may I do thee?" asks Alcibiades, who at this time believes he has nothing to gain from any aid he might render to Timon. This genuine gesture of friendship is rebuffed by Timon, whose eyes are now as firmly closed to virtue as they have been to villainy. "None, but to maintain my opinion," he replies, that opinion being, of course, that there is no spark of goodness in humanity. In view of Timon's hostility towards him and his mistresses,

Alcibiades' compassionate understanding and generosity are of more than a little significance:

> Pardon him, sweet Timandra, for his wits
> Are drowned and lost in his calamities,
> I have but little gold of late, brave Timon,
> The want whereof doth daily make revolt
> In my penurious band . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> Here is some gold for thee.
> (IV.iii.88-92,100)

We should notice the contrast between Alcibiades' behaviour here and that of the earlier Timon, who would have been "good to" the cynic Apemantus, but only if he "wert not sullen"(I.ii.242-3). And Alcibiades wastes no rhetoric upon ideal notions of friendship; rather it is a part of his practical humanity. Part of his humanity, too, are Phrynia and Timandra, who may pose a problem for an audience not aware of the character contrasts operating in this play. Shakespeare did not intend that the presence of these women should be taken as an indication that Alcibiades is as corrupt as those who betrayed Timon; we know from his behaviour that he is not. The mistresses merely symbolize the human weakness of a man who knows the middle of humanity, as Timon never has and never will. Shakespeare's middlemen are not marked by an abnegation of human pleasures, including that of the company of women, but they never allow sensual pleasures to interfere with their duties. As that other middleman, Enobarbus, has put it:

> Under a compelling occasion let women die.
> It were pity to cast them away for nothing,
> though between them and a great cause they
> should be esteemed nothing.
> (Antony and Cleopatra, I.ii.141-4)

This attitude is shared by Diomedes who, unlike Troilus, does not allow his seduction of Cressida to interfere with his military duties. And Prince Hal enjoys the congenial life of the tavern but changes promptly from playboy to soldier when the state is threatened.

We may perhaps see Alcibiades' anger and desire for revenge as evidence of his subjection to human weakness: he would lay "proud Athens in a heap"(IV.iii.101). These emotions are shared by Timon, but in him they are a powerful and deadly obsession. Giving Alcibiades gold he bids him destroy all: "Let not thy sword skip one"(IV.iii.110). He would have Alcibiades put to the sword the aged, children, virgins and priests, but Alcibiades, taken aback by this destructive fury, rejects his advice:

> Hast thou gold yet? I'll take the gold thou givest me,
> Not all thy counsel.
> (IV.iii.129-30)

It is clear that Alcibiades feels a genuine concern for Timon; that Apemantus does so is doubtful. The alleged purpose of the cynic's visit is to vex Timon, but Shakespeare's purpose in bringing him on stage at this time is in part to provide us with another contrast with the newly-transformed Timon. What we also see here, however, is the inadequacy, the futility of the cynical attitude. In the confront-

ation between the two cynics it is made abundantly clear that not only do they have a distorted view of the world, but that also they do not even fully understand each other. Apemantus suggests that Timon is merely playing a role thrust upon him, that he is not a genuine melancholic. But Apemantus is in fact the one playing the role - and thoroughly enjoying it. Timon's may be a "poor unmanly melancholy" (IV.iii.203), but his immature sulking is no game, for his melancholy is also unmanly in the sense that it is inhuman, unnatural.

In view of his inability to comprehend Timon's essential nature, Apemantus often comes surprisingly close to the mark. After taunting him with the suggestion that he should become a flatterer, Apemantus says:

> 'Tis most just
> That thou turn rascal. Hadst thou wealth again,
> Rascals should have't. (IV.iii.216-8)

He is right, of course, but not in the way he supposes. Apemantus believes that being wealthy once more Timon would adopt his old ways, supporting an army of flatterers. We know, as Apemantus does not, that Timon is indeed wealthy, and is deliberately and maliciously giving his gold to rascals and to anyone else who might pose a threat to society. Cynic though he is, such an idea would never occur to Apemantus.

In fact, Apemantus has no use whatsoever for gold, and

this Timon does not understand. Had Apemantus had wealth, Timon believes, he

> wouldst have plunged thyself
> In general riot, melted down thy youth
> In different beds of lust, and never learned
> The icy precepts of respect, but followed
> The sugared game before thee.
> (IV.iii.255-9)

But Apemantus has earlier rejected Timon's offered bounty, and when he learns that he has gold again he will show no desire for it. Timon cannot comprehend that Apemantus enjoys his role as cynical philosopher that it pleases him to rail upon the pomp and vainglory and selfishness of conventional society. "Why shouldst thou hate men?" asks Timon, "They never flattered thee"(IV.iii.269-70). Timon cannot understand a man who hates society purely for what he supposes it to be, rather than for what it has done to him. The lack of understanding on both sides finally results in a complete breakdown in communication, with the hurling of abuse and the throwing of stones. This episode points as strongly as anything in the play to the utter futility of cynicism.

What is brought out here too, is that cynicism can be not only destructive, but also self-destructive. When Timon asks if Apemantus would have himself "fall in the confusion of men, and remain a beast with the beasts"(IV.iii. 324-5), Apemantus replies in the affirmative. Timon himself, more extreme than Apemantus, wishes for a death which he

sees as a triumph over the evils of life. Even the cynic Thersites, who glories in the destruction all around him, is human enough to wish to save his own skin.

The heavy drama of the Timon-Apemantus episode is somewhat relieved by the arrival of the bandits, three simple rogues who are yet not so simple that they cannot recognize and fear the terrible malevolence of Timon and of his advice. After all, what are they in their simplicity to make of a man who turns the natural world upside down and portrays nature as a thief rather than as a giver of life:

> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun.
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief
> That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
> From general excrement. Each thing's a thief.
> (IV.iii.439-45)

In contrast to this extreme cynicism, this utter despair with the world, comes the optimistic response of the bandits: "There's no time so miserable but a man may be true" (IV.iii.461-2).

Timon's first visitor at his cave was Alcibiades, a representative of the middle of humanity; his last visitor in this act is Flavius, who represents much the same thing. The steward's soliloquy restates his awareness of the failings of his society and his commonsense attitude towards it:

> How rarely does it meet with this time's guise,
> When man was wished to love his enemies!

> Grant I may ever love, and rather woo
> Those that would mischief me than those that do!
> (IV.iii.472-5)

Timon, however, must hate even those who have served him faithfully, must even deny that some have been honest with him:

> I never had honest man about me, I. All
> I kept were knaves, to serve in meat to villains.
> (IV.iii.484-5)

His blindness here may seem wilful in view of his earlier words to Flavius: "Thou art true and honest"(II.ii.230), but we should rather see Timon as a man who, like Coriolanus, is virtually unable to help himself, being as deeply committed to his extreme cynicism as he was earlier to his extreme idealism. This is made even more apparent as he is finally forced to recognize that Flavius is indeed honest, and here we have, I believe, the tragic turning point of the play.

Flavius' tears stir the vestiges of humanity in Timon, who bids his steward "Come nearer"(IV.iii.489). Here Timon has the opportunity to reach out and touch a man, a man who clearly loves him, but he cannot make that ultimate contact with mankind:

> Then I love thee
> Because thou art a woman, and disclaim'st
> Flinty mankind . . . .
> (IV.iii.489-91)

Flavius' love and loyalty "almost turns [Timon's] dangerous nature mild" - <u>almost</u>, but not quite. Timon will not be

turned from his cynicism by this man whom he determines to see, and whom he prays should be an exception:

> I do proclaim
> One honest man. Mistake me not - but one!
> No more, I pray - and he's a steward.
> How fain would I have hated all mankind!
> And thou redeem'st thyself. But all save thee
> I fell with curses.
> (IV.iii.503-8)

It is a basic tenet of the Christian faith that through his singular sacrifice Christ redeemed all humanity. Flavius offers a sacrifice: he would give Timon his "poor wealth" and would "still serve him with [his] life"(IV.iii.478). The goodness of Flavius should redeem mankind, should be the exception that destroys the rule of Timon's absolutist philosophy, but for Timon Flavius redeems only himself, for Timon's creed of general hatred is too dear to him. Timon, like Satan, is himself beyond redemption by the good, and wishes only for evil and destruction to plague mankind.

When he gives gold to Flavius it is the only time Timon gives it without a directly destructive purpose, but the instructions he gives along with the gold would, if Flavius were to heed them, have their destructive effect on society:

> Thou shalt build from men,
> Hate all, curse all, show charity to none,
> But let the famished flesh slide from the bone
> Ere thou relieve the beggar. Give to dogs
> What thou deniest to men. Let prisons swallow 'em,
> Debts wither 'em to nothing.
> (IV.iii.533-8)

Timon, like Thersites, would have others infected with his cynicism; he still desires, as he did at the beginning of the play, to create men in his own image. Indeed, in certain respects Timon has changed little with his fall. His knowledge of the depth and breadth of human nature is as limited now as it ever was, and his consequent isolation from humanity is greater only insofar as he has added to it a physical dimension. And just as earlier he had through his naive idealism unwittingly encouraged greed and exploitation in men, he would now use his gold to deliberately foster evil, or to infect others with his cynicism.

Fortunately, Flavius will not be infected, as we discover when he returns in Act V with the senators. Like the bastard Philip, Flavius recognizes his duty to the state, and he returns to the cave in an attempt to save Athens from what is thought will be a general destruction by Alcibiades. He suspects that the pleas of the senators will be in vain, and of course he is right, for Timon will offer them nothing but hate and a tree from which the Athenians may hang themselves.

Timon's final words provide us with a final comment upon his character:

> Lips, let sour words go by and language end.
> What is amiss, plague and infection mend!
> Graves only be men's works, and death their gain!
> Sun, hide thy beams! Timon hath done his reign.
> (V.i.223-6)

Language, as the Elizabethans well knew, is the mortar of society; it is what distinguishes men from beasts. It is what, ultimately, must make or break societies, but Timon would "mend" society with plague and infection. He can never come to terms with an imperfect mankind. In his idealism Timon must see men in his own image; in his cynicism he would have them also share his fate. If the world cannot conform to his ideals Timon wants there to be no world. He cannot live as man but must reign as God or Satan, and his choice of graves is therefore very apt, for the sea falls from high tide to low tide with never a pause between.

After Timon's death Shakespeare wastes little time in bringing the play to a conclusion. Alcibiades, whose hate and thirst for revenge are of more moderate and human proportions than those of Timon, states his intention to bring justice and law to Athens. He will use the olive with the sword and

> Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each
> Prescribe to other as each other's leech.
> (V.iv.83-4)

Of the "other" that Alcibiades speaks of, Timon was never truly aware; and he could imagine an interdependence only in wealth, never in human weakness. Alcibiades' image of healing makes it clear that he has no illusions about his society - it is subject to human diseases and must be cured by human co-operation. It is notable that in the words of Timon and Apemantus there has been much imagery of disease, but none

of healing. Neither saw the latter as a possibility, for the healing of social wounds and co-operation among men are things of the middle of humanity, and Timon came to abhor "human griefs" and the teardrops of "niggard nature".

Yet we cannot deny a measure of nobility to Timon, a man who had Plutus as his steward and Neptune as his mourner. We can deny it no more than we can deny a certain grandeur to Milton's Satan and Marlowe's Faustus and, indeed, Shakespeare's Coriolanus. But as we recognize the destructiveness of these figures, so must we ackowledge the destructiveness of Timon's blindness to humanity in both his idealism and his cynicism.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to establish that Shakespeare reveals in his work a continuing concern with the variety of human responses to societies which no longer have the stability provided by traditional moral and hierarchical laws, and to show that this concern is most apparent in Troilus and Cressida and Timon of Athens. I have attempted to show that there may be perceived in the poet's work a triadic division of attitudes among certain major characters, whom I have found it useful to call idealists, realists and cynics, while it has been acknowledged that this division does not have clearly defined boundaries.

Hotspur, Coriolanus, Timon and Hector may be seen as

idealists who, because they stubbornly adhere to absolute values or pursue obsolete goals, prove themselves inadequate as leaders in their societies. The key word here is "leaders", for while we may admire certain qualities in these idealists as individuals, we must accept the implication that aspiring political or moral leaders must be prepared to countenance a compromise of their idealistic values in the interests of the long-term good of the state. There is indeed a sense in which all absolute idealists are naive adolescents, for they have never developed a mature sense of social reality, of what is and is not possible in the social and political world of man. Shakespeare makes it plain that, whatever might have been possible in the Golden Age, the age of gilt must hope for mature leaders who have achieved the ability to adapt to current social conditions. Such leaders as the bastard Philip, Henry V and Alcibiades are seen to develop and to achieve a political maturity which takes into account ends as well as means, and which therefore holds out the prospect of survival for both themselves and their respective states.

Like the realists, the cynics have no illusions about the nature or potential of their fellow citizens, but they share with the idealists the tendency to view their world through a distorted mirror. Apemantus, Thersites and the later Timon, disillusioned by the corruption around them, feed their cynicism by seeing nothing but corruption, just

as the idealists feed their idealism by keeping their eyes firmly and exclusively fixed on their ideals.

While it is unthinkable that one should seek to analyse the complex and colourful tapestry of a Shakespearean play by attempting to compute the gains and losses of good and evil as the final curtain falls, it is nevertheless useful in some instances to put the poet's work into a perspective that goes beyond the tragic working out of individual destiny, and takes into account the significance of the outcome in social terms. We have seen that Hotspur, Coriolanus, Timon and Hector destroy themselves and accomplish nothing, while Thersites and Apemantus promote their own debilitating disease in those around them. We have likewise seen that Philip helps save England from a foreign invader; Henry V unites Britain and conquers France; and Alcibiades brings some hope of peace and justice to Athens. These are dramatic truths of no less validity or significance than is that of the nobility or heroism of Shakespeare's doomed idealists.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Peter Pauls, "Shakespeare's Timon of Athens: An Examination of the Misanthrope Tradition and Shakespeare's handling Of the Sources" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969), p. 58.

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