

FORESTS FULL OF BEASTS: ARISTOTELIAN ANALYSES OF  
ANTINOMIAN MADNESS IN 'KING LEAR' AND 'TIMON OF ATHENS'

by

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To Melpomene,  
To Icarus and to the Sun,  
To Madmen and Misanthropes,  
To my uncles, perhaps most of all, wherever they may be...

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## ABSTRACT

*Forests Full of Beasts* analyzes late-Shakespearean thought as represented in *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*, focusing on expressions of madness. Applying an Aristotelian framework, each chapter examines the two plays through a different lens, applying the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics* and *Poetics* in turn. Looking at these plays through the *Ethics* shows that Timon and Lear miss the mark of happiness through excessive action, and their madness is therefore construed as deliberately maintaining unsustainable behaviour. The *Politics* foregrounds humanity's social nature, and it is in their rejection of society's provisions and friendship that Timon and Lear are seen to be most mad. Following the *Poetics'* prioritization of plot, both plays are analyzed in terms of the unified whole, and their madness is seen as seamlessly interwoven with the overall action. The conclusion ties these analyses together, understanding Timon's and Lear's madness as the deliberate choice to pursue excessive, antisocial behavior.

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I would like most to acknowledge those left behind, the ones lost despite all efforts.

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And last but not least, a very special thanks to my good friend, caffeine.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear* through a variety of Aristotelian lenses, focusing on expressions of Timon's and Lear's madness as seen through the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics* and *Poetics*. As *Timon* is the least discussed of all Shakespeare's tragedies, this thesis aims to help fill one of the few remaining gaps in Shakespeare criticism; in particular, by examining Lear and Timon as they madly leave the social realm, this thesis aims to bolster the relative thinness of the commentary on a *Timon-Lear* comparison by analysing the similar forms of insanity represented in these plays.<sup>1</sup> An Aristotelian framework presents itself as a useful analytical tool, for *Timon* is often called Shakespeare's most Aristotelian play, but the criticism has not yet spelled out exactly what that entails. Comparing *Timon* with *Lear*, a play with a number of similar themes, consolidates many points drawn from Aristotle's works. Analyzing the two plays together also offers insight into Shakespearean thought at the time, given that both plays were likely written close to the same year, around 1605-6.<sup>2</sup> The proximity of and similarity of composition suggest a single expression of Shakespearean thought, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Many critics note the connection between *Timon* and *Lear*, but are like A. D. Nuttall who dedicates a mere three pages in *Shakespeare the Thinker* to the plays' similarities after noting their very strong connection (316-7, 320).

<sup>2</sup> Though there is still some debate, Dawson and Minton assess the dominant theories and postulate that *Timon* was written 1606-7 and *Lear* around 1605-6. They note that "*Timon* has often been seen as a kind of practice run for *Lear*, or alternatively a reprise of that play. The two plays certainly share some important features, most notably a tragic hero who suffers from ingratitude, retreats into the wilderness and rails against mankind; moreover each features a loyal servant's (Kent/Flavius) obsessive preoccupation with sexual diseases and animality, and a representation of the central male figure as in some ways maternal," though they think the "similarities are not sufficient evidence to support the view that the plays were written consecutively" (14). Whether or not they were written consecutively, they are written sufficiently close together to suggest some unity of Shakespearean thought at the time.



similarities in the plays' action reveal a particular expression of madness as the protagonists reject society.

The argument that the similarity between these two near-contemporary plays written indicates a particular instance of Shakespearean thought is complicated by the fact that *Timon* is thought to have more than one author. Thomas Middleton is currently considered the most likely collaborator, but it is important to note that I have not chosen to write an Aristotelian analysis of Shakespeare because he is considered, by any means, a follower of Aristotle: these works are analyzed, in part, to show that Aristotle can be applied to any representation of humanity, not merely to things that are trying to be Aristotelian. Thus the authorship question is of less interest, because I am not trying to show that Shakespeare himself (or Middleton) is Aristotelian — I am showing that any good theory can be applied to any text to yield fruitful results, not merely texts which are intentionally designed to uphold that particular theory. Analyzing the texts through three separate Aristotelian works is also a deliberate choice to show how any theoretical lens partially determines the conclusion of its analysis; I have chosen to employ three theoretical works from a single author so that testing the subject from three different angles would more likely be able to be unified into a single, coherent analysis, but I nonetheless make an effort to maintain separation between the *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Poetics*. As my intention is to focus on madness, the explicitly irrational, Aristotle's empirical method in each of these works is more applicable to the topic than any rationalist attempt. The congruencies yielded by analyzing actions empirically considered mad in *Timon* and *Lear* reveal a specific Shakespearean portrayal of madness, taking

“Shakespearean” as the product of the culture that produced the play, regardless of how many contributors there were.

In my analysis, I prioritize action over character along with Aristotle,<sup>3</sup> and the main characters' dominant actions consist in what I describe as “excessive giving” — offering too much wealth and power to the wrong people — followed by a rejection of society, and both characters' actions are called mad in their respective plays: as such, my analysis mostly focuses on Timon's and Lear's madness as excessive and misanthropic action. One of the main reasons for choosing to analyze Timon and Lear side-by-side is the similarities of their composition and portrayal of madness: both plays present a protagonist who undoes himself through excess and then madly leaves society's bounds, presenting a strong consideration of a madness related to society and excess. Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Politics* and *Poetics* all offer different means of understanding Timon's and Lear's irrational actions, and as each chapter analyzes both plays' actions, it explores the possible sources or contributing factors to their madness: Chapter 2 outlines their madness in terms of excessive and deficient actions which miss the mark of happiness, Chapter 3 provides explanation for their mad actions by situating them within their social context, and Chapter 4 considers the unity of the plays' actions through their direct

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<sup>3</sup> I do not plan to outright reject consideration of the central character's psychology, but I am focussing my assessments of these characters' madness based on their actions. This move goes against those like Dawson and Minton, who explicate Timon's character through Melanie Klein's theories of envy (51-4). By contrast, my goal is to analyze the ethical value of their actions, their actions in relation to their society, and the action of the overall plot; attempting to psychoanalyze characters based on a snippet of their lives presented on stage seems less empirically valid. I do, however, plan to avoid any clinical analysis: for such an undertaking, see Kaara Peterson (particularly 37-69), and Jacques Bos for a contextual analysis of humoral psychology in the Renaissance.

connection with the protagonists' madness, tracing the momentum of mad actions throughout the plays.

The second chapter examines individual characters' actions to uncover that which characterizes their madness, excess. Using Aristotle's explication in the *Ethics* that good actions aim for the mean between excess and deficiency (so that they are most likely to hit the mark of achieving happiness), I show that both Timon and Lear fall through excessive giving. When they have given away their wealth and power, they receive unexpected ill-treatment and respond rashly: both abandon their own society for a life with beasts and bare animals. Their decision to face nature's elements with deficient provisions is considered mad by other characters and within an Aristotelian framework, especially as both characters are given offers of rejoining the court or ruling class. Timon is absolute and more lucid in his rejection of all humanity, and his later misanthropy is as excessive as his preceding liberality; Apemantus wisely points out that both practices are mad because they failed to adhere to any middle path, telling Timon, "The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends" (4.3.300-1). Lear's madness is less rigid, waxing and waning throughout the play, but his madness is like Timon's in that it is connected to excessive behaviour.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the correlation between Timon's and Lear's unstable sanity and their relationship with their friends. Both characters madly embrace the wilderness when they discover the falseness of the flatterers' friendship, but both also have a few loyal friends. Timon, upon recognizing Flavius' true friendship, says that "It almost turns my dangerous nature mild" (4.3.487), but he maintains his misanthropic

abandonment of all society regardless: as Dawson and Minton put it, "he remains isolated" and

he is confined to a spot at the bottom, or more precisely, on the extreme margins. He is defined mostly by his invective against his fellow citizens and, indeed, all of mankind; he is a fount of magnificent, if ultimately fruitless, verbal abuse. More even than Lear on the heath or at Dover, more than Coriolanus in Rome or in exile, he is forever apart. (48)

Lear is not as rigidly fixed in his removal from society, and much less deliberate about his self-exile; while Timon chooses to reject everyone, Lear allows his wits to settle a little when embraced by friends like Kent and Poor Tom. Chapter 3 accordingly contrasts Timon's and Lear's relation to their society, understanding their madness through the relations to their friends. The core virtue of friendship for Aristotle is loving, and thus for my thesis "friendship" will refer to the love of both kith and kin — in this sense friendship varies only in degrees, not in kind. *Timon* is devoid of familial relations, but Lear's most important friendship is undoubtedly with his daughter Cordelia. Both characters' mental stability depends on their perception of their friends' love: as Lear is more accepting of companionship in the wilds, so too is his mind more capable of settling throughout the play.

Chapter 3 also looks at the criticisms these plays launch against society itself. In response to Apemantus' cynicism, a lord says he "is 'opposite to humanity' (1.1.280), but if being human means being either an 'ass' (as Apemantus has just called the lords), or a predatory beast, then being opposite to it is," as Dawson and Minton conclude, "not such a bad thing" (59). Lear's choice to leave the civilized world in favor of the storm may be mad, but the world of the court is not immune to criticism — *Timon* particularly satirizes society's flaws, and in the second half "the satire goes beyond social critique to a

condemnation of humanity *tout court*, an excoriating attack on the inescapability of depravity" (34). Both characters are seen as mad for their rejection of society's necessities offered by true friends, but the bulk of society's elites are less than genuinely friendly. The unfriendly societies are partly responsible for driving both characters beyond their bounds as nobles fail to uphold their bonds, revealing the falseness of society's flatterers. However, because both plays also contain true friends, the rejection of society is still portrayed as madness when it is excessively extended to include all friendship.

The first part of Chapter 4 looks at *Timon* and *Lear* in the context of their respective plays' plots, and the second section considers the unity of each play's plot. Both *Timon* and *Lear* make a tragic mistake, *hamartia*, that misses the mark through deficiency and excess, as discussed in Chapter 2. Their *hamartia* leads to their reversal of fortunes, which is construed as madly leaving society's shelter. Their reversal, however, comes with the recognition that society contains many false friends. Looking at the greater picture of the individual characters and their individual actions, the second part of Chapter 4 provides an appraisal of the two plays' plots. Aristotle denounces dramas with multiple plotlines as inferior, and both *Timon* and *Lear* can be read as presenting main plotlines and secondary plotlines. It may be true that the disunity of *Timon*'s misanthropy and Alcibiades' revolution make for a play that unravels clumsily, but the plotlines in *Lear* are far more finely interwoven: every event from *Lear*'s plot is integral to every other event in the play, thus presenting a single, unified whole. My Aristotelian critique

ends with a tentative postulate that *Lear* was perhaps favoured in its performance history over *Timon* because the plot is of substantially greater magnitude.<sup>4</sup>

Seen through an Aristotelian lens, madness is represented in these tragedies as excessive action that removes one from society — the more mad Timon and Lear are, the less connected they are to civilization, and though characters may be said to aim for the good, they suffer tragic *hamartia* when their actions are excessive or deficient. In these plays, sanity is intrinsically connected to social intercourse, and society is destroyed by immoderate action. Aristotle's analysis in the *Ethics* offers a means of evaluating Timon's and Lear's actions and describing their errors; his observations in the *Politics* are useful for analysing the political orders or constitutions that best provide for friendship and happiness, with an important corollary (for tragedy) about what can happen when these principles are violated; his evaluation offered in the *Poetics* provides insights into the structure of tragic *mimesis*, which in turn provides a useful lens for understanding Timon's and Lear's insanity. Applying his theories to *Timon* and *Lear* offers rational explications of their madness and a means of evaluating the plays as a whole, further challenging old traditions such as analyzing *Timon*'s characters purely psychologically and treating *Lear*'s plots separately.

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<sup>4</sup> We have no evidence that *Timon of Athens* was ever produced during Shakespeare's lifetime, but lack of evidence for a production does not negate the possibility that a production ever occurred. Lack of evidence does, however, negate the possibility that *Timon* attained any popularity — it would have been only minimally performed, if at all.

## CHAPTER 2: A LITTLE WIDE ON THE TURN Madness as Exceeding Rationality

*Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every action and choice, seems to aim at some good, and hence it has been beautifully said that the good is that at which all things aim.*

Aristotle 1049a1-3

If everything aims at the good, how is it that tragedies end up so badly? Tragedies teach us that, even if everything is aiming at the good, it is easy enough to miss the mark. Great actions can potentially bring about great good, but even the smallest mistake can throw off one's aim and result in great calamity. According to Aristotle, actions tend to miss the good by veering towards either deficiency or excess. Even things that sound inherently good, like liberality or magnanimity, can reach disastrous ends if they do not hit a happy mean. In true Aristotelian fashion, both Timon and Lear fall through excessive actions that aim to achieve goodness. They are undone by a lack of deliberation, putting excessive faith in flatterers' false friendship, and acting without contemplation. After realising their errors, however, both characters continue to behave excessively and drive themselves into an unhappy state removed from society. Their lack of deliberation may have led to their initial mistakes, but their continuing excessive behavior demonstrates their departure from sane thinking — their actions no longer aim at the good. Willfully choosing excess characterizes their madness, and other characters are quick to comment on the irrationality of their decisions. In both *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*, madness is at least in part the deliberate choice of excessive, unsocial action.

While he understands that particular actions aim at a particular good, Aristotle is also interested in defining the ultimate good for which all good actions are done. He

writes that "every kind of knowing and every choice reach toward some good" (1095a15-6), but goes further to explain that the "highest good" is the "end of things we do that we want on account of itself" (1049a18-24). By clearly delineating that which is good in itself, Aristotle aims to provide a model of virtuous action so that people, "like archers who have a target," are more likely to "to hit upon what is needed" (1049a24-6).<sup>5</sup> He rejects the notion that the highest good could be pleasure, though he admits that the majority assume "pleasure is the good and is happiness" (1095b14-6), and he also rejects the idea that accumulating wealth and honour are good (wealth is gained not for itself but for procuring other goods, while honour is gained by being virtuous and is therefore subservient to virtue). Even individual virtues cannot be good in themselves: courage, for example, is not good in itself. Intrinsically, it cannot be good in itself because courage enables action. If courage is good for enabling action, it is not good in itself but is good for something else (and action consequently aims for a higher good, being undertaken for an end rather than for itself). Courage is also not considered good in itself because courage taken to excess is no longer virtuous. A courageous action may aim at some good, but excessive courage becomes foolhardiness, which will not achieve the good. Dismissing virtues and pleasures as good in themselves, Aristotle looks beyond to see that virtuous or pleasant actions are chosen for the ultimate end of happiness. Happiness is self-sufficient, and is pursued for its own sake. Because pleasurable actions and virtuous actions aim at causing happiness, he posits that happiness is the good itself at which all things aim.

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<sup>5</sup> The *Nicomachean Ethics*, as a work, can be seen to fulfill its own ethical imperative: the highest acts are political (1.3), and he is aiding the *polis* by giving them a target at which to aim. The importance of this archery metaphor is highlighted later in the *Poetics*, as a character's tragic *hamartia* is translated as literally missing the mark.



The best way to achieve happiness, Aristotle argues, is to follow the virtuous path between extremes. Actions, characters and states are "destroyed by deficiency and by excess" (1104a12), and even things that seem to be inherently good, like exercise or eating, become vicious when deficient or excessive. Though drinking water is necessary and good, excessive drinking can harm someone just as much as dehydration,<sup>6</sup> and Aristotle reasons that virtuous action must be a mean "equally apart from either of the extremes" (1106a30-1). Because in any action "excess and deficiency go astray," and the virtuous action is one which hits the mark of the good, "virtue is a certain kind of mean condition, since it is, at any rate, something that makes one apt to hit the mean" (1106b25-8). Any action or condition which seems inherently virtuous, from drinking water to being generous, must aim for the mean to succeed in the good goal of happiness.<sup>7</sup> Even if one is trying to uphold a known virtue, like courage, one will still degenerate into self-destructive vice if one is too courageous. Virtue is itself found in maintaining the mean, and by maintaining the mean one is most likely to hit the good, happiness.

Although Timon aims for a good end in his generous actions, he misses the mark by taking his generosity to excess. Aristotle says that "those who give are called generous" (1120a19), and generosity is generally considered good and noble. For his great generosity Timon is considered to have "the noblest mind ... that ever governed

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<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Henson, for example, apparently died after drinking four liters of water in under two hours as part of her LighterLife diet plan. *BBC News: Woman Dies From Drinking Too Much Water*, December 12, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle further disparages excess by noting its connection to the most extreme criminal acts, noting that "the greatest crimes are caused by excess, not by necessity. Men do not become tyrants in order that they may not suffer cold; and hence greatest honour is bestowed, not on him who kills a thief, but on him who kills a tyrant" (1267a13-5).

man" (1.1.287-8) and his virtue is widely praised. Of all people who are "recognized for their virtue," according to Aristotle, "generous people are loved practically the most" (1120a22-3). Proving that epithet, everyone who tastes Timon's bounty is quick to laud his liberal heart and profess love for the noble man; Timon's great generosity touches countless Athenians, and for his generosity he is thronged by lovers who call him "Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon!" (2.2.168). If generosity is to be genuinely virtuous, however, it must be more than merely giving. Aristotle insists that "generosity is a mean condition concerned with giving and getting money" (1120b28-9), and because Timon neglects that latter point about acquisition, his excessive generosity becomes wasteful rather than virtuous. Timon has pious opportunities to acquire money, such as Ventidius' offer to repay Timon twice what was given, but he chooses to abstain instead of acquiring. Timon has an honourable reason, explaining that he "gave it freely ever, and there's none / Can truly say he gives if he receives" (9-11), and because he takes the time to explain his rationale, one can say that Timon has deliberately chosen to give excessively and acquire deficiently.<sup>8</sup> This is not uncommon among those who desire to be generous, because "not looking out for oneself is part of being generous," and as Aristotle explains, it is therefore "most definitely characteristic of a generous person to go to excess in giving" (1120b5-7). Although it is a common way for generous people to miss the mark, Timon's excessive generosity becomes viciously wasteful, and the excess

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<sup>8</sup> Flavius points out that Timon is "so senseless of expense / That he will neither know how to maintain / Nor cease his flow of riot. Takes no account / How things go from him, nor resumes no care / Of what is to continue" (2.2.1-6). Though Timon spends without deliberation, it still seems that he has deliberately chosen to do so, for Flavius has warned him many times and showed him the accounts, and he can give reasons for his deficient acquisition. His faulty reasoning shows the need for longer, more contemplative deliberation: his quick dismissal of Flavius' complaints may count as deliberation, but it is undeniably deficient.

compounds his culpability. Timon repays every gift "sevenfold above itself," breeding "the giver a return exceeding / All use of quittance" (1.1.283).<sup>9</sup> His bounteous feasts are far from moderate, and as Robert Miola says, "Shakespeare is careful to condemn the feasting as grossly sensual excess" (24). The excessive nature of his generosity is completely unsustainable, and racks up an unpayable debt. Flavius offers an acute analysis:

Being of no power to make his wishes good.  
His promises fly so beyond his state  
That what he speaks is all in debt — he owes  
For every word. He is so kind that he now  
Pays interest for't; his land's put to their books.  
(1.2.199-203)

His generosity has exceeded sustainable limits and can no longer continue. The jaws clamp down when Timon's creditors take issue with his excessively large debt and call for quick cash repayment, exposing his apparently noble generosity as the wastefulness it truly is.

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<sup>9</sup> John Ruszkiewics shows that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen Timon's excess as a vice, citing William Baldwin and Nicholas Breton who say, respectively, that when one gives one ought to "be mindfull of thine abilitie" (*A Treatise of Morall Philosophie*, London, n.d., p.182) and to hit a mean which is "not niggardly, nor prodigal" (*The Good and the Badde, or Descriptions of the Worthies and Unworthies of this Age*, London 1616, p.12) (4). It is important to note that the notion of aiming for a mean between excess and deficiency is not exclusively Aristotle's, and there was a strong social trend towards moderating behaviour among Shakespeare's contemporaries. As Rolf Soellner explains, Aristotle's analysis of liberality in the *Ethics* was part of "a discussion that influenced Renaissance notions of charity" and liberality was generally "the mean between the excess, prodigality, and the defect, stinginess: a liberal man is one who gives to the right people at the right time and fulfills the conditions of right giving." Accordingly, Soellner claims Timon fails to be liberal and instead "practices the vice that is the excess of this virtue, prodigality" (124). J. P. Brockbank agrees that Timon misses because he forgets the generally accepted advice (in both ancient Greece and Renaissance England) to aim for the mean, arguing that *Timon* appears to be "one of a sequence of didactic dramas about prodigality, *Liberality and Prodigality* (performed at court 1601) which draw both on the parables and on classical ethics" (11).

When Timon has unethically foundered, his former friends find fault with his excessive generosity and abandon him to the wasted estate he has wrought. Trying to teach ethical behaviour, Aristotle warns the generous that "it is not easy to give to everyone while taking from nowhere, for the resources quickly run out for those who give away their private property," which Timon does, lumping him in with "just such people who seem to be wasteful" (1121a17-9). Timon does not learn this lesson until too late, regularly hosting decadent feasts and showering every flatterer with gifts, and he gives free reign to his giving. Once his wealth is wasted, Lucullus claims he told Timon to "spend less" while lately tasting Timon's generosity (3.1.26),<sup>10</sup> just as Flavius "At many times" told Timon to "hold your hand more close" and check "the ebb of your estate / And your great flow of debts" (2.2.133-142). It is obvious to all that Timon's generosity "cannot hold" (2.1.4) and the unsustainability of his excessive giving has gone from virtuous nobility to vicious ignominy. Calculating the total sum of Timon's debt, a senator declares him to be in "raging waste" (2.1.4), fitting the Aristotelian definition of a wasteful person as "someone who has one vice, that of destroying his own property" (1120a1-2). It is not an excess of many vices that destroys Timon but an excess of one habitual action. He nobly aims for the good when he gives and, like most wasteful people, he therefore "does not seem to be base in character, for to go to excess in giving and not getting is a sign neither of a vicious person nor of bad breeding but of someone foolish" (1121a26-8); Flavius concurs with this sentiment, lamenting that "never mind /

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis Walker condemns his friends' hypocrisy when they criticize "Timon's bounty as foolish" and "in the same breath" indicate their "own willingness to accept that bounty" (592), pointing out that "The more Lucullus protests against Timon's 'honesty,' or liberality, the more he acknowledges his dependence on it" (593). It is Timon's failure to critically analyze this hypocritical enjoyment of his bounty that allows him to continue madly in his excessive giving.

Was to be so unwise, to be so kind" (2.2.5-6), suggesting that excessive generosity is unfortunately mere folly that fails to hit its good target.

Even though one might say that Timon has a noble character, his single decision to give excessively is still enough to breed a suicidal vice: Aristotle explains that "a wasteful person is someone who is ruined by his own act" and that ultimately "the destruction of one's property seems to be a kind of self-destruction" (1120a2-4). Generosity is only virtuous when one "spends in accord with one's means" (1120b24-5), and because Timon excessively "pours it out" (1.2.183) he is actually wasteful rather than generous. That Timon's generosity becomes a vice in its excess proves that generosity is not actually good in itself, but is only good when kept to the appropriate mean between deficiency and excess.<sup>11</sup> Giving will only foster happiness and goodness if it is moderated, for it becomes wastefulness when one "goes to excess in giving and not getting, but falls short in getting" (1121a13-4).<sup>12</sup> Ruskiewicz says that "Christian commentators with tighter collars" would call his excessive giving "downright evil,"<sup>13</sup> and that it is Timon's "riot of wanton giving that confirms the madness Apemantus notes"

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<sup>11</sup>Generosity can be good in itself, but because wastefulness is always excessive, Ruskiewicz says that "Waste, of course, is wrong in itself," and that therefore "In short, the Timon portrayed in Shakespeare's play shows all the faults of the typical sinner against liberality" (8-9).

<sup>12</sup> Ken Jackson argues that Timon's mistake is his attempt to uphold the possibility of the impossible gift, concurring with Coppelia Kahn that Timon believes in a magical bounty that will uphold any excess. He attempts to give genuinely and seeks "an impossible escape" from what Jackson calls "the circular economy"(48), and this belief in the possibility of an impossible gift serves as the core of Timon's deficient acquisition and excessive expenditure.

<sup>13</sup> He cites Thomas Cooper, *The Art of Giving, Describing the True Nature and Right Use of Liberality* (London, 1615). Aristotle's understanding of a virtuous mean in giving (giving the proper amount to the proper people for good reasons) is echoed very strongly in Cooper, demonstrating once again a strong presence of Aristotelian thinking among Shakespeare's contemporaries.

(6). Timon misses the good through excess, madly rewarding those downright evil flatterers, which proves that generosity will not hit the good unless properly restrained. Furthermore, his depletion of resources proves that, because generosity requires "money for performing generous acts" (*Ethics* 1178a29-30), generosity is not self-sufficient and cannot universally be good in itself. Timon's generosity becomes a vice in its excess, and his ruin demonstrates the dependence of generosity on maintaining other goods.

Instead of seeing that his own excess is to blame, Timon tries to foist responsibility on the flatterers that flocked to him.<sup>14</sup> He attacks the "knot of mouth-fiends" and "cap-and-knee slaves" as "Most smooth, detested parasites," and he claims that they are his "Courteous destroyers" (3.7.88-96) rather than admitting his own excess has destroyed him. Aristotle condemns flatterers as people who are only after "some benefit for [themselves] in money or what money can buy" (1127a9-10), and Aristotle agrees with Timon's assertion that flatterers are base people, wisely advising that one ought not give flatterers money.<sup>15</sup> However, he notes that most people "want to be loved more than to love" and are accordingly "fond of flatterers" (1159a15-6). Timon wants to be loved and enjoys the honor his generosity buys, and like many men who "delight in honor, trusting in the judgment of those who say they are good" (1159a23-4), he attracts flatterers through his reckless giving. Apemantus asserts that Timon fits Aristotle's description of a man who wastes money on flatterers to purchase pretended honor, proclaiming that "He that loves to be flattered is worthy o'th'flatterer" (1.1.229-31). Even though Timon is deceived by the fake friends who feign faithfulness, he is still culpable

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<sup>14</sup> A. Maac. Armstrong traces the origin of the flatterers to Lucian (7).

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Hadfield points out that King James "himself made the case that a monarch should avoid flatterers" (216), and Shakespeare's audience would not have likely accepted Timon's attempt to put all blame on the flatterers themselves.

for fostering their flattery and encouraging such base behaviour through his excessive giving. Timon, by giving to flatterers, actually undermines the nobility of his generosity, for "one who gives to whom one ought not, or not for the sake of the beautiful but for some other reason," Aristotle says, "would not be called generous" (1120a28-30). Timon may choose to blame the flatterers, but there would be no flatterers if generous people did not unduly reward flattery's empty words. By giving to those who are unworthy, Timon is actually corrupting his generosity to the point where it is no longer generous, to the point where it is excessive wastefulness fathering and feeding sycophants. He is undone by his undue "Reliance on a set of false friends," Clifford Davidson explains, "none of whom will live up to any ideal" (185). Timon is right to say that his flatterers are base and vicious, but he should not have trusted them initially: even Ventidius, whom Timon frees from internment, turns his back on Timon and illustrates Aristotle's argument that "vice-ridden people have nothing stable about them, since they do not even remain similar to themselves, though they become friends for a short time"<sup>16</sup> Timon believes he has bought true friendship, but Flavius knows money can only rent love for a while, explaining that "when the means are gone that buy this praise, / The breath is gone whereof this praise is made. / Feast won, fast lost" (2.2.166-71). Simko further argues that Timon "does not realize that his "friendships" rest of his incessant gifts and that his

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<sup>16</sup>When Timon proclaims, "I'll pay the debt and free him," Vendius' servant says that Timon's payment "ever binds him" (1.1.106-7). Ventidius does seem to honor his bond when he offers to requite Timon (after inheriting a great deal of money), but when Timon actually has to call Ventidius for help, the bond breaks and shows that utilitarian friendship can have "such a faint and milky heart / It turns in less than two nights" (3.1.52-3). Davidson notes that "The "bond" between friends ought to be as strong, and of the same quality, as the essential bonds of love and loyalty which cement together the social structure itself" (182), but Timon's fall shows that the bonds cementing society are actually economic and are less strong than one would hope.

unnecessarily excessive generosity has actually corrupted the recipients," but "Nothing of this could escape the attention of Flavius, his faithful steward" (324). Spilling his wealth around like seed on a shoreline, Timon's wasteful giving gathers a gaggle of fowl flatterers who fly the coop when he can no longer sustain free feasts for all.<sup>17</sup> He rightfully damns their wrongful desertion, but he is still blameworthy himself for having spent so excessively that his ship sinks from collecting an unbearable load of leeches.

Because his trust is crushed when his friends abandon him, Timon lashes out at everyone; some friends, however, are true friends, and proper deliberation would have weeded out flatterers in addition to taming his excessive generosity. After learning that some friends are flatterers, Timon hyperbolically condemns the whole world, declaring that if one man be a flatterer, "So are they all" (4.3.15-6).<sup>18</sup> This sweeping assessment of human nature fails to make the fine distinctions between types of friends, and proper deliberation would have shown Timon that not all of his friends were flatterers. Timon wants to befriend everyone, and though Aristotle admits that "it is perhaps not easy even for there to be many good people" to befriend (1157a16-7), people are not all bad, and

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<sup>17</sup> Aristotle warns against having an excessive number of friends, arguing it is best "in the case of friendship to be neither a friend of none nor yet a friend of excessively many" (1170b23-4), explaining that "it is a good idea not to seek to be a friend to as many people as possible, but with however many people are sufficient for sharing a life" (1171a8-10) and thereby maintain the mean even in one's friendships. Flavius points out Timon's excessive number of friends when he asks, "Who is not Timon's? / What heart, head, sword, force, means, but is Lord Timon's?" (2.2.166-7).

<sup>18</sup> Timon later admits that Flavius is the world's "singly honest man" (4.3.518), which Flavius earns by promising to "serve him with my life. -- My dearest master!" (4.3.466). Flavius may be the only character in the play who is Timon's truly good friend, for "only the good can be friends for themselves ... between these people there is a trusting, and a never doing each other wrong, and everything else people consider worthy in its true sense" (1157a 19-24); even if he is the only one, Flavius still offers an example of honest friendship that should make Timon pause before condemning all mankind (Timon's other servants also show similarly loyalty, refusing to accept large bribes from Timon's false friends).



Timon rashly fails to distinguish between friends who are interested in pleasure, utility, and goodness. Apemantus most obviously contradicts the axiom that all men are flatterers, churlishly pleasing no-one and accepting nothing pleasant. Flavius faithfully stands by Timon, even after Timon has lost all means to confer benefit on the stalwart steward — Timon has at least one good friend, who is useful, provides pleasant company, and, most importantly, has good character and loves Timon's goodness. While the poet and painter are flatterers fawning for money, the senators who taste Timon's bounty are friends interested in Timon for the pleasure he provides. Timon's most dangerous friends are in fact the friends only interested in his utility. The usurers tax Timon for the gifts he gives them, and the debtors use him until his tap runs dry. Aristotle warns that "Those who are friends on account of something useful break up at the same time the advantage comes to an end, since they were friends not of one another but of what they got out of one another" (1157a15-17). Timon mistakes his friends' allegiance, believing it based on reciprocated respect rather than base usage. However, it is easiest to find "people for usefulness and pleasure, since there are many people of those sorts," and because Timon fails to deliberate about his friends, his wasteful giving finds the multitude whom Aristotle calls the flawed friends whose "services are provided in short time" (1158a18-9) but do not uphold enduring loyalty. His excessive giving leads to an excessive number of people who are only friends for profit, and deficient deliberation is demonstrated in his failure to distinguish genuine friends from fiends.

Had Timon restricted his spending to meritorious ends and only given when he ought to whom he ought, he would not have attracted countless fair-weather friends; had he distinguished those who deserved his gifts instead of excessively giving to all, his

generosity could have hit the virtuous mean and brought sustained happiness instead of miserable destruction. Though Timon claims to have been deceived by flattery, he could have properly judged the recipients and amounts of his generous gifts by taking the time to rationally deliberate. "Practical judgment," according to Aristotle, "is a truth-disclosing active condition involving reason about human goods that governs action" (1140b21-2), and Timon takes no time to judge human good, dispensing commercial goods to all. His generosity is so excessive that he scarcely makes any rationalized judgments at all, and his impractical action is blind to the truth of his friends' instability. Flavius and Apemantus both warn Timon about the flatterers' deceitful 'friendship,' so Timon technically has the necessary premises from which to chart a rational course of action; he repeatedly ignores their warnings, however, and deliberately pours out an irrational deluge of gifts to the flatterers he will later claim deceived him.<sup>19</sup> Apemantus agonizes over the apparently willful ignorance, crying out, "O, that men's ears should be / To counsel deaf, but not to flattery" (1.2.256-7). Deficient deliberation enabled Timon's deception, crippling his capacity to practically judge the worthiness of his benefactors. Aristotle explains that one who is skilled at deliberation "inquires and calculates" while deliberating "for a long time" (11422b3-6), and the deficient amount of time spent deliberating leads to Timon's excessive faith in false friends. He makes no calculations in his spending, no inquisition before acquisition or dispensation, and he takes so little time

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<sup>19</sup> Jan Simko notes that " Timon is a rich man, whose ruin is brought about by his excessive and careless generosity as well as the falseness and ingratitude of his 'friends'" and argues that Timon "unknowingly" loses "his wealth" (321); however, because he ignores Apemantus and Flavius, one can say that he has at least willfully chosen his ignorance, if not that he outright chooses to ignore the knowledge his faithful friends provide. If he seems simply unable to believe his two true friends, then that inability to accept what others clearly perceive is another important feature of his madness.

that he can hardly be said to have deliberated at all. Aristotle asserts that "the one who deliberates badly errs" (1142b8), and Timon's insufficient deliberation demonstrates a terrible error in judgment. His generous actions aimed at the good of causing happiness, but deliberating poorly leads to a bad end. Even though Timon is aiming for a great good, his generosity is too excessive to be enduringly good, and, ethically speaking, through proper deliberation he should have limited his giving to a virtuous mean to hit a sustainable good.

Like Timon, Lear aims for a great good, choosing to manifest his goodness through a single great act of generosity (rather than through Timon's quotidian generosity), and his action also misses the mark through excess. Though Flavius says Timon could give away the whole world in a word, his property has been diminished by daily indulgence in excessive generosity; Lear, by contrast, actually does give away his entire kingdom in the space of a single speech. As a result, the excessive gift is more immediately portrayed, represented as one compact action that takes generosity to its most extreme heights. When the play opens, however, Lear appears to have carefully deliberated his magnificent action, in stark contrast to Timon's thoughtless generosity. Lear aims to give greatly, but not to a great number of people, and he appears to have carefully deliberated the proper portions, for the proper persons, for rational reasons. He explains that he is getting too old to properly rule his kingdom and hopes to hand the role to "younger strengths" who are more apt (1.1.35-9), and this rationalization is quite sound — Lear's unconstant starts throughout the rest of the play suggest he was no longer fit to rule an entire kingdom in his old age. His portioning of territories seems perfectly proportionate, demonstrating rational deliberation. The opening scene of *King Lear*

presents two gentlemen marvelling at how precisely Lear is about to divide his domains, for his rationing is so meticulously rational that "it appears not which of the dukes he values most, for qualities are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety" (1.1.4-6). Lear's precise division seems to show that he has deliberated well and that he illustrates Aristotelian magnificence, like generosity, a virtue concerned with giving but focused especially on "lavish expenditures" (1122a19-21). Aristotle tells us that the virtuously magnificent person "is able to contemplate what is fitting and to spend great amounts in a harmonious way" (1122a38-b1), and the fine balance established between the lords' inheritance presents Lear's division as a well contemplated act of magnificence. The love test likewise confirms careful, deliberate planning: because Kent and Gloucester already know the intended divisions,<sup>20</sup> the love test cannot actually be a measure to determine who will receive the most, but is a planned public ceremony in which his inheritors' profession of love acts as a contract that Dan Brayton calls a "ritualistic exchange of filial love for property" (400), which Brown describes as an attempt to establish a kingdom held together by "love, rather than in fear or ambition" (8). Giving his lands and powers to his own daughters, he gives his kingdom to those who will most likely reciprocate the loving gesture; by adding a public display of filial affection through the love-test, he reminds his children of their obligation in front of the

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<sup>20</sup> They may not know to whom Cordelia will be married, but the thirds of the kingdom are known — when Lear is giving out the portions, he gives Goneril a specific third before waiting to even hear Regan's answer ("all these bounds even from this line, to this"(1.1.61), and after their two portions are delivered, Cordelia's answer is expected to take the remaining the third. Guy Brown explains that "Lear's darker purpose is not the division of the kingdom itself" but is "something else, which he first presents in the guise of a desire for the grounding foundation of this new division in declarations of love" explicitly so that "The new tripartite or 'trinitarian' kingdom will be founded in love" (8-9) and thereby prevent "future strife" (1.1.43).

whole court, further cementing his security. When Lear says of Cordelia that he "thought to set my rest / On her kind nursery" (1.1.121-2), we can tell that his deliberation even included his children's characters and went beyond simply choosing to give everything to kin. Unlike Timon, Lear intends to give to a moderate number of people, after careful consideration of who those people should be and how to best balance their gifts. He has virtuously deliberated a precise mean to give, he thought of the best people to receive his gifts, and his magnificent act should logically lead to its good aim.

To clarify that Lear's plan was originally well deliberated, let us pause to consider the divisions of land and the recipients. The kingdom's precise divisions, publicly known among Lear's advisors and Cordelia's suitors before the ceremony, can be seen to tactically consider many possible threats to the kingdom's order, suggesting very thorough deliberation. Because Cornwall and Albany are given precisely equal portions, they are balanced against each other so that neither has incentive to attack — because neither is stronger, neither would perceive weakness in the other and conflict would result only in stalemate. That fact that Cornwall and Albany are antagonists halfway through the play implies that it would have been important to have as many checks as possible to prevent them from warring, and Lear's egalitarian division of their portions shows a deliberate means of maintaining their peace (rumours of "likely wars toward, 'twixt the dukes of Cornwall and Albany" have already arisen by the beginning of Act II (2.1.10-3), showing the importance of giving the two ambitious men portions that evince no partiality. The two daughters are also power hungry and prone to jealousy (evidenced by the fact that they kill each other for Edmund's love), and by ensuring that his divisions "are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety" (1.1.5-6),

Lear deftly avoids any potential strife arising from his eldest daughters' jealousy of each other. Though he loves Cordelia best, her two most eligible suitors are foreigners, and if he gave the kingdom away to a foreigner he would likely provoke rebellion — giving Cordelia a more opulent third allows her to check either of her sisters should one try to rise up, but she still implicitly receives less than half the kingdom so the majority of the kingdom is still under English rule (to diminish potential war with the continentals). As such, I maintain with Kent and Gloucester that the division of the kingdoms is perfectly portioned before Lear rashly changes the plan.

Though Lear opens the ceremony by speaking of a "darker purpose" (1.1.34), this darker purpose cannot refer to the division of the land: as I already mentioned, Kent and Gloucester know the intended divisions and cannot decide whether Cornwall or Albany is getting a better portion, and even Burgundy seems to have known the intended division of land, asking to have Cordelia along with the opulent third that was previously offered. The only unknown, the only wild card in the mix, is Cordelia's future husband, and thus the darker purpose is only Cordelia's marriage. The proclamation of love is explicitly to be made in return for land, for Lear asks Cordelia "what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters? Speak" (1.1.83-4). He is not asking her out of curiosity, or to validate their friendship, but for the explicitly stated purpose of returning love-proclamations for land. This trade-off may smack too much of utilitarian friendship, but to infer as much is to forget that the ceremony was likely supposed to continue by asking whether France or Burgundy loves Cordelia most. The marriage of daughters in the medieval period was almost entirely contractual and utilitarian, and if each of his three daughters professed absolute love, Burgundy and France would be pressured to do the

same, offering the greatest possible love as a marriage pledge (and presumably offering the greatest amount of land and wealth). Lear may well see his daughter's marriage as a means of purchasing foreign friendship, for if Cordelia professes to love him all, and France to love her all, then Lear is ensured all of France's love and need not fear England's recurring enemies in his retirement. His magnificence is set to purchase an ally as a third son in return for his fairest daughter and a third of England, and his plan is to set up a kingdom unified by love for him.

Cordelia's honesty, however, disrupts Lear's program, resulting in rash reaction: forced to respond improvisationally, Lear's lack of deliberation becomes apparent when he madly misses the mean, making his magnificent act mother monstrous outcomes. Cordelia's honesty suggests that no matter how well deliberated, an action may still overlook some details (such as Cordelia's obligation to give half her love to her husband as part of her marriage contract), but Lear did not actually ask her to say that she loves him all (it is only expected of her after her sisters set the bar). Because Cordelia refuses to follow suit and announce total adoration of her father, he doubts her ability to uphold a contractual obligation sworn before a court and his hasty response results in disaster. Lear's following insufficiently deliberated actions are so irrational that his sanity is instantly called into question: less than a dozen lines after Lear hastily divides Cordelia's portion (giving her two sisters excessive portions and Cordelia a deficient one), Kent exclaims that "Lear is Mad!" and he urges Lear to deliberate, to take "consideration" and "check this hideous rashness" (1.1.144-9).<sup>21</sup> The quick connection between madness and

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<sup>21</sup> Kent only objects to the division of the kingdom after the initial tripartite deal is dissolved into a dualistic nation, suggesting that he objects to the new imbalance in the division and not the division itself. It is not only the excessive gift which is mad,

insufficiently contemplated action highlights the Aristotelian importance on slowly deliberating in order to choose the mean: excessive, undeliberated, and hasty action is so shocking that it is bluntly called madness by the king's most loyal servant. Kent specifies that it is the excessively magnificent gift which needs to be restrained, yelling "revoke thy gift, / Or whilst I can vent clamor from my throat, / I'll tell thee thou dost evil" (1.1.162-4). Just as Timon believes his generosity will bring about good results despite any excess, so too does Lear believe that his magnificent act will end well, even though he gives a deficient portion to Cordelia and excessive portions to Goneril and Regan. Because magnificence, like generosity, is a vice when taken to excess, magnificence also cannot be a good in itself, and Lear's fall shows the self-destructive nature of immoderate magnificence. Magnificence only aims at the good (and is not good-itself); furthermore, its dependence on means for distributing magnificent gifts also shows that it is not self-sufficient. Magnificence must meet a moderated mean to be virtuous and sustaining, and Lear's failure to hit that mean shows that deliberation is essential for moderating a magnificent act so that it aptly aims at goodness. Virtue is once again a mean between excess and deficiency, and deliberation seems to be the best way to find that mean — at the very least, *Lear* demonstrates that insufficient deliberation and immoderation are to be avoided.

By giving too much power to his treacherous daughters, Lear also echoes Timon's excessive affinity for flatterers. A failure to deliberate on his daughters' proclamations once again shows the importance for slow contemplation before action. Lear's love-test,

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however, for Lear's punishment of Cordelia and Kent is also excessive, adding other layers of excess to Lear's actions. One excess is enough to be called madness, and Lear's excess of excesses certainly seals his insanity.



as mentioned earlier, is a public performance intended to add security to Lear's retirement: he is surprised when Cordelia does not seem to play along, and he naturally rewards those who seem to conform with his wishes most strongly. He does not recognize the possibility for insincerity in a public speech (evidenced when he tells Kent that he cannot go back on the oath he publicly swore to punish Cordelia). Kent's quick-wittedness allows him to see who truly loves Lear most, but in his old age Lear fails to assess the truth rationally and concurs with Goneril's pronouncement that Cordelia has her "obedience scanted" (1.1.278). Lear's lack of insight into deceptive flattery precludes realization that Cordelia actually confirms his contract most properly and honestly: Cordelia publicly promises to love according to her bond instead of making impossibly hyperbolic pronouncements of super-familial affection. However, Lear was looking for that "glib and oily art" (1.1.223) to grease his passing of power and ease his mind with flattery's promises. Mistaking friends for foes due to lack of deliberation, Lear excessively punishes both his best daughter and his best friend with exile, and despite good aims, his excessive unplanned actions bring ruin. Gloucester is amazed by Lear's lack of deliberation, wondering that Kent could be "banished thus" (1.2.23), and even the flatterers themselves are amazed by Lear's excessive punishments, commenting that "He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly" (1.1.288-91). Gloucester holds Aristotle's counsel to deliberate slowly before acting, calling particular attention to the lack of time Lear took to choose his excessive course of action, stunned that it was all done "Upon the gad" (1.2.26). France's outside perspective confirms the strangeness of Lear's excessive changes that occur in but a "trice of time" (1.1.214). Though Kent knows the two eldest sisters are

only flatterers, Lear cannot see it, and both Cordelia and Kent try to ensure that the flatterers uphold their vows: Kent tells them to approve their "large speeches" with fitting deeds "That good effects may spring from words of love" (1.1.182-3), and Cordelia likewise commands her sisters to "Love well our father" when she departs (1.1.271). Excessive faith in flattery confounds Lear's attempted social contract and causes his downfall by leading him to choose excessive actions.<sup>22</sup> Had he deliberated slowly and listened to the advice of friends like Kent and Gloucester, he could have tamed his immoderate actions and resumed his more thoroughly deliberated course — Lear's lack of deliberation is thus a determining factor in his fall, and virtue is consequently connected with a deficiency of rational deliberation. The contrast between Lear's excessive improvised choices with his previous, more reasonable plan showcases the necessity of deliberation for hitting the mean, but also presents deliberation's limitations: even one who can choose the virtuous path through deliberation may still choose the vicious path when he has insufficient time to deliberate or when he fails to attend to all of the relevant details.

Timon and Lear initially aim at goodness through generosity and magnificence but they miss the mark by acting excessively as a result of deficient deliberation; their

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<sup>22</sup> After he has fallen from eminence, he has the time to deliberate and recognizes that his two daughters "flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say "ay" and "no" to everything that I said "ay" and "no" to was no good divinity" (4.6.97-100). This conclusion comes after Goneril and Regan have proven their deceitfulness, but deliberation could have divined a similar conclusion: as Timon had Apemantus provide the proper premises about people's flattery, Lear has Kent's condemnation of the king's excessive magnificence and excessive punishment: Kent provides the proper premise that "Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least" (1.1.150). Lear therefore has everything he needs to reach the proper conclusion, but he does not take the time to deliberate about all of the facts and rashly selects an irrational course of action.

actions in the second half of the plays, however, challenge the notion that every action aims at some good, for even after recognizing their excessive error and deliberating, both characters continue to behave excessively. Aristotle lists "lack of self-restraint" next to "vice" as characteristics "to be avoided" (1145a16-20), but after recognizing the vicious nature of their excessive actions, both Timon and Lear abandon all self-restraint as they abandon society. Unrestrained people, according to Aristotle, are like those who are "asleep or insane or drunk" (1147a13), and Timon and Lear are both repeatedly called mad for their deficient restraint. Being unrestrained and being vicious are inseparable, for if virtue lies in following the mean path by avoiding excess and deficiency, then virtue will be intrinsically tied to restraint. Excess can be defined only in terms of a given limit that is being exceeded, and the virtuous restrain their actions to accord with that limit. Lear's actions are so excessive that Kent calls him mad in front of the court, just as Timon is called "a mad lord" by nameless lords after he lashes out (3.7.109). Apemantus, however, astutely points out that all of Timon's earlier excessive spending was insane, suggesting he was "A madman so long" as he behaved immoderately (4.3.219-20); Goneril and Regan similarly suggest their father's sanity has been questionable for some time (1.1.290-304). Both Timon and Lear can see that excess has led to their destruction, but instead of moderating their actions, they choose a new path of unrestrained excess and perpetuate and augment their madness.

Timon's time in the woods away from Athens is thoroughly characterized by unrestrained action. When Timon leaves the city, his first action is to unleash a completely unreserved tirade of abuses, spewing forth an unreasonably long lists of aspersions. He savagely attacks every class of society (from slaves to senators, along with

every mother, mistress, maid, father, child, and tradesman), and he wishes this excessive list of Athenians suffer the most excessive punishments: his curses cover human violence, like cutting banker's throats and beating out old men's brains with their crutches, and also extend to supernatural infestations of plagues (4.1.1-40). Timon tells Alcibiades to kill every Athenian (4.3.110), making no distinction between good of evil friends. Davidson argues that his unwillingness to accept any possible goodness is tied to his unrelenting excess:

From a picture of blind and excessive generosity, he falls to a representation of an excessive and alienated hatred which cannot be conquered even by the moving example of the good man, his former steward, who refuses to relinquish his loyalty to his former master. (182)

Even if he admits his Steward is a good man, he still condemns all of humanity in his absolute misanthropy, and he still continues down the path of excess. When he finds treasure in the woods, his generosity continues with renewed fury — he actually gives away large amounts of gold (with a side of hyperbolic condemnations) to everyone but Apemantus, showing that even after he has left the city he is still excessively generous. His mad misanthropy prompts Apemantus' apt observation that Timon never knew "The middle of humanity" and lives in vicious excess through "the extremity of both ends" (4.3.300-1). As he is the most philosophical character in the play, it is fitting that Apemantus be the one to criticize Timon's failure to hit the mark of happiness as a result of immoderate behaviour. As Timon goes from being society's greatest philanthrope to an anti-social misanthrope, his madness is exhibited as a bipolar swing passing over humanity's middle.<sup>23</sup> Because his earlier generosity led to vicious disaster, Timon should

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<sup>23</sup> This is not altogether uncommon, as Aristotle cites the expression "They who love in excess also hate in excess" (1328a17) when discussing the vicious nature of excess.

have learned to steer towards the middle, but instead he irrationally drives towards the opposite excess: he first loves too many people with his money, and then he hates humanity equally indiscriminately. His old excessive generosity was mad, and his new excessive abhorrence is madder still, suggesting that excess itself is a form of madness.<sup>24</sup>

Timon is not alone in his choice to maintain madly excessive behaviour, as Lear also continues to act excessively throughout the play; Lear's madness is less unconditional, however, and his sanity ebbs and flows in fits of excess, presenting a case that is more human and less adamantly ideological. When his daughters request he reduce his train, he responds almost as harshly as he does to Cordelia's honesty. Lear has been beating his daughters' servants and verbally abuses Oswald, and so Goneril reasons Lear's hundred knights need to be reduced because they are "so disorder'd, so debosh'd, and bold" that their riotous "epicurism and lust" is too shameful to endure (1.4.20-30).<sup>25</sup> Lear denies the charges, but we do see him physically and verbally attack Oswald (1.4.75-8), and his most loyal servant Kent also attacks Oswald more than once. The

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<sup>24</sup> This conclusion is adopted by modern psychoanalysis, where every excessive condition is considered neurotic. Even minor excessive behaviours, like Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Perfectionism are considered neuroses; excessive fears are also considered neuroses, such as Agoraphobia and Claustrophobia. Modern psychology has a label for any mundane behaviour taken to the extreme: bibliomaniacs, who simply hoard too many books, for example, are considered mentally ill if their behaviour becomes dangerously excessive. Caring for one's health can itself become excessive, as hypochondriacs show that even concern for one's health can be taken to neurotic extremes. Any behaviour, if taken to exceed culturally accepted bounds, is perceived as madness — Aristotle's consideration of excess is any behaviour that causes harm by missing the mark of happiness through extremes, concurring with modern mental analyses of neuroses as excessive behaviour. The inverse, of deficiency, also holds true (anorexia, learning disorders, etc).

<sup>25</sup> Though she omits mention of her own hand in provoking Lear's knights, she only gives the order to "let his knights have colder looks" (1.3.23) after they have already been rioting, and "colder looks" are hardly enticement to disordered "epicurism and lust."

second time we see Kent encounter Oswald, his abuse is astoundingly excessive, calling the servant

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, a base, proud, shallow,  
beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted stocking knave; a  
lily-livered, action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable, finical  
rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of  
good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar,  
coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch; one whom I will  
beat into clamorous whining if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.

(2.2.13-21)

That Kent calls him a knave three times denotes undeniable excess, and his escalation of violence in attacking Oswald with a sword is unjustifiable — even if his message from Lear has been poisoned, it is inappropriate to attack a messenger with a sword. He may have honourable motives, but Kent's belief that "anger hath a privilege" (2.2.64) is something that he cannot adequately rationalize when tried. At the end of the play, Lear confirms his favouring of disordered companions, saying that Caius is "a good fellow," clarifying that means "He'll strike, and quickly too" (5.3.285). If Lear's definition of goodness is striking quickly, one cannot wholly condemn Goneril for wanting his knights' number moderated: considering the evidence of unruly behaviour among Lear and his followers, it is reasonable for Goneril to hate having a hundred riotous Kents in her castle and to want Lear to reduce his train.<sup>26</sup> Lear has been behaving riotously with more men

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<sup>26</sup>I am not suggesting that Goneril and Regan are faultless, for they do deliberately antagonize Lear's men (scheming to more convincingly argue the reduction of his train). However, we are shown several acts of Lear's and Kent's excessive physical and verbal violence, and we should not doubt that Lear's knights are indeed riotous men who should be kept in check (especially given the examples of Kent's violent temper). Furthermore, the daughters do not order their servants to provoke Lear until they hear reports that his soldiers are engaged in violent, disorderly conduct. When they finally do decide to restrain Lear's riot, Goneril does not even ask Lear to immediately cast off all followers, suggesting politely that to restrain the shameful riot Lear should aim "a little to disquantity [his] train" (1.4.230) — for which Lear calls her a "degenerate bastard"

than Goneril can control, and when he is asked to restrain himself, he curses his own daughter to an extent that exceeds even Kent's rant:

Hear, Nature, hear dear goddess, hear  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful.  
Into her womb convey sterility,  
Dry up in her the organs of increase,  
And from her derogate body never spring  
A babe to honour her. If she must teem,  
Create her child of spleen, that it may live  
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.  
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,  
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,  
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits  
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel  
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child. (1.4.258-72)

This response is staggeringly harsh coming from a father, but Lear also responded harshly to Cordelia for an even smaller offense, suggesting that he is indeed prone to inconstant starts. Regan can provide several reasons for Lear to reduce his train — mostly revolving around the expense and the difficulty of keeping peace — but when Lear is asked to provide just one single reason why he wants one hundred knights, he cries out "Reason not the need!" (2.4.260). His desire to have one hundred riotous knights cannot be rationalized as necessary, and his reaction upon losing those knights is

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(1.4.235). He is offered the more moderate number of fifty followers, but initially will have all or nothing. When 100 are denied, he tries to backtrack and take all he can by claiming the 50, but they seize the opportunity to deny any followers to their father (a father who has publicly announced he loves them less than their younger sibling, and who has cursed them soundly for their original proposition that he moderate his riotous acts). They are not wholly innocent, but they at least behave more rationally than Lear, and they provide reasons for their requests. He believes they should simply be allowed, as they were stipulated in the contract and Lear tells his daughters "I gave you all" (2.4.244) and thereby held up his half of the deal, but that is only a reason why they should allow him to have them — it is a reason he feels entitled, not a reason why he should actually have 100 riotous knights.

unreasonable fury. Throwing a royal temper tantrum, Lear nurses excessive ire and leaves society of his own free will. It is important to note that both sisters offer to house Lear himself, and that his exposure to the elements is the reaction he deliberately chooses upon losing his riotous train. It would have been more reasonable to reduce his train a little and cease rioting to than to curse his offspring and leave the castle's protection. However, once he has done so, it would still be more reasonable to at least seek some form of shelter away from his daughters instead of eschewing shelter altogether and facing the storm. Lear never learns from his mistakes, continuously choosing one excessive action after another.<sup>27</sup> Choosing a path of generally immoderate behaviour is indicative of genuine madness, and his excess is one of the most essential traits of his particular madness. When his wits settle after encountering a few companions, he moderates his behaviour by entering the hovel, equating more moderate behaviour with increased mental stability.

Lear's and Timon's madness leads them to non-survivable conditions removed from society, though Lear regains some sanity as he partly reintegrates with society. Their time in the woods misses the mark to the extent that their actions can hardly be said to aim for the good. After discovering the true nature of his false friends, Timon goes "to the woods" to live with wild beasts (4.1.35), just as Lear leaves society when learning his

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<sup>27</sup> Tom Clayton notes that one of *King Lear's* "perennial truths — 'O, sir, to willful men, / The injuries that they themselves procure must be their schoolmasters' — is spoken just after Lear chooses to go "out of doors in a winter downpour" (186), and he summarizes the situation by pointing out that "The 'school of hard knocks' is a modern colloquial expression of the truism that many learn only from experience" and do so "painfully" (204). However, *Lear* does not actually learn from the hard knocks he takes in the storm — his most immoderate actions are responses perceptions of unfriendliness from his daughters, and his later moderation of behaviour is connected to his partial social reintegration with friends, as will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.



daughters' true nature. Aristotle tells us that "the happy life is pleasant" and that to be happy one needs "the goods of the body" (1153b15-8), and even *Timon's* Athenian thieves know that one "cannot live on grass, on berries, water / As beasts and birds and fishes." (4.3.417-8). Living outside of society is no mean feat, attested by Timon's extreme difficulty discovering edible roots.<sup>28</sup> In the woods, Timon identifies himself as "A beast" (4.3.200), and says he would be happier imitating a dog than a human.<sup>29</sup> "An animal-like state," according to Aristotle, stands next to vice and unrestraint as something one should avoid (1145a16-20), and when Timon and Lear choose to live away from society, they madly move towards unhappiness. Their bestiality is not unusual, for "animal-like conditions," Aristotle says, arise "in some people from insanity" (1148b25-6), and their trip to the forest forges a connection between madness and a deficient, animal-like state. Nature's inhospitality is even more pronounced in *Lear* due to the tempest, but despite the added danger from the weather, Lear madly goes "unbonneted" in "the fretful elements" (3.1.4-13). His remaining friends urge him to seek shelter from

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<sup>28</sup> He mimics Lear's excessive repetition of phrases when he asks a group of thieves why they are wanting, and he also displays a faulty perception of the forest which only provides him one meager root: "Why should you want?" Timon asks, "Behold, the earth hath roots, / Within this mile break forth a hundred springs, / The oaks bear mast, the briars scarlet hips, / the bounteous housewife Nature on each bush / Lays her full mess before you. Want? Why Want?" (4.3.412-6). The madness of this statement is confirmed by Timon's presumed starvation.

<sup>29</sup> Even though he professes a desire to live like a beast, he spends most of his time in the woods dispensing coin with his curses, showing that he is still maintaining his old civilized wastefulness. Aristotle says that a wasteful person "is easily cured by both age and lack of means, and is able to come to the mean" (1121a21-2), but Timon repeats his excessive behaviour when he finds treasure, madly continuing in his excess even after he knows it will bring no happiness. Timon is still excessively generous with the treasure, but along with every gift he adds a side of savage invective and importunes the recipient to attack civilization — he no longer gives money to be loved or to have friends, but to spread unhappiness and catalyze decay. Because his actions no longer aim at happiness, his actions are only understandable, according to Aristotle's ethical framework, as irrational madness.

the outdoor environment, but he does not care for comfort and would rather embrace "sulph'rous and thought-executing fires" (3.2.4) than return to civilization. When Lear exposes himself to the world, his actions are expected to cause harm and thereby negate the possibility for a good or happy end, and his actions are accordingly considered mad by all who witness him yelling at the storm — even his fool knows that staying outside is madness. Lear's mad rejection of society, however, is less rigid than Timon's: when he meets the naked Poor Tom complaining of cold, his sympathies rekindle his wits and he is sane enough to enter a shelter. He accepts a partial reconstitution of society, partaking of some friendship and provisions, and his rejection of society never fully rests in extreme misanthropy like Timon's. As Lear is less deliberately extreme in his rejection of society, so too is his madness less extreme than Timon's, dipping back towards sanity as he accepts a fragment of society that Timon intransigently spurns.

Both men miss the mark of happiness by following immoderate behaviour with further excess, even if they know it is likely to lead them away from the universal good of self-sustaining happiness, and are therefore marked as madmen. In the woods, Timon gives excessively for vicious ends, is completely unrestrained in both speech and behaviour, and tries to live like a beast completely removed from all society and friendship. The two men's madness arises when character (or *hexis*) loses sight of the good, when a person's *praxis* seems to be producing a result the opposite of what was intended. Both characters are brought to their low states through excessive actions, and when their attempts at virtue miss the mark, they only add more gas to the fire.<sup>30</sup> Their

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<sup>30</sup> Timon and Lear willfully follow choose vice, but in Aristotelian terms, they are mad more than bad. Davidson concurs, pointing out that "Timon's will is weak only on the side of generosity. As his Steward comments, he is 'brought low by his own heart, /

excess leads them away from society, showing that they no longer aim at happiness even though happiness is supposed to be "the end at which human things aim" (1176a33). Happiness consists "in activities in accord with virtue" and therefore "the happy life seems to be in accord with virtue" (1177a2-10); if virtue is hitting the mean, then the happy life is the one that follows the mean, which is mostly likely hit upon after contemplative deliberation. Aristotle explains that "there is a boundary marking the mean conditions which we claim are between excess and deficiency, a boundary in accord with right reason" (1138b25-7), but rational boundaries only exist for rational humans in rational societies — Timon and Lear live like mad animals who exceed all rational bounds. They expose themselves to unreasonable and unnecessary hardship in the wilderness, removing themselves from social protection as far as possible — both madmen unbutton and fully embrace nature.<sup>31</sup> Because they choose excessive, unsocial paths, both Timon and Lear miss the human good of happiness and they reduce themselves to bestial states through their insane actions. When Timon has lost his fortune he turns from excessive philanthropy to excessive misanthropy, skipping clear over the moderate middle and striving towards the inhuman. Lear likewise loses everything, including his mind, through a single act of excessive magnificence; his ensuing tempestuous temper tantrum in the storm shows that his continued mad behaviour is

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Undone by goodness' (IV.ii.37-38)" (186), and Miola adds that Timon is "victimized" but as much "by his own excesses and delusions" as by the Athenians (29). Timon believes in the goodness of his actions, saying "Unwisely, not ignobly have I given" which echoes Lear's belief that he is "A foolish fond old man" who is "more sinned against than sinning." Both recognize that they have behaved madly, but neither erred from malicious, evil intentions — they simply missed a good mark.

<sup>31</sup> For the excessive nature of Timon's and Lear's wilderness experience, see Tink, especially 49-51.

characterized by its essentially excessive nature. For Timon and Lear, being mad is thus, most simply put, the sustained, deliberate choice of unsustainable, antisocial excess.

### CHAPTER 3: MISANTHROPICALLY MISSING THE MARK Antisocial Irrationality

When Timon and Lear are hurt by those who owe them the most love, they reject the social world of the court and go madly into the wilderness. Betrayed by those who appear to be their closest friends, they misanthropically reject humanity and choose to endure nature as beasts. Aristotle argues in the *Politics* that one must live in a society with basic necessities and friends in order to be happy, but both characters reject a social life and pursue ends outside of the political world. Their rejection of society can be considered irrational in the light of Aristotle's abhorrence of beastliness, and both characters are indeed called mad for their choices. However, both characters offer similar reasons for going wild, suggesting that they have not completely abandoned all logic: the civilized world, in their eyes, has become overrun with beasts, and they hope to find nature's harshness more hospitable than the false friends back home.<sup>32</sup> Even though they may have reasons for going to the wilderness, neither Timon nor Lear can actually be said to be happy without friends, offering evidence for Aristotle's argument that friendship is essential to achieving happiness. They may seem mad for eschewing friendship (because their solipsistic aims bring neither character happiness), but they do not believe that society is peopled with good friends, and so they reason that they will be more happy with no friends, even if they will not be fully happy. Though they may be madly hyperbolic in their misanthropy, their assessment of society's overall unfriendliness is affirmed: the ruling order is overthrown by the end of both plays, both governments undone as the result of their base, unfriendly behaviour. The revolutions

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<sup>32</sup> Soellner notes the extremity of the usage of "beast" particularly in *Timon*, noting that the word "occurs 17 times in *Timon*" and only "8 times in *Hamlet*, which is next" (226).

that overthrow those governments are in turn dependent on friendship. As unfriendliness generates unhappiness in both *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*, these two plays offer evidence for Aristotle's arguments that friendship is integral to happiness for both individuals and states.

To understand friendship's central status in the pursuit of happiness, it is important to note that by 'friendship' Aristotle refers to something far deeper than is colloquially meant by the term. Friendship is more than companionship or fellowship, though it is found in these things, and indeed serves as the foundation of them. As he puts it simply in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "the virtue belonging to friendship seems to be loving," and in fact "friendship seems to be present in loving more than in being loved" (1159a34-5). Friendship, in its strongest sense, applies to the love of family, but it can also apply to friends — it is notably different from sexual love (*eros*), and though the two are not mutually exclusive, 'friendship' is preferred over 'love' for its lack of sexual connotation. In the *Politics*, Aristotle explains that societies arise through friendship and exist for the sake of friendship that sustains all:

there arise in cities family connexions, brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements which draw men together. But these are created by friendship, for to choose to live together is friendship. The end of the state is the good life, and these are the means towards it. And the state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honourable life. (1280b37-81a2)

As a political animal, man has an ontological being-towards society, according to Aristotle. As every action is chosen with the aim of causing happiness, and society offers the opportunity to have friends who make men happy, "A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature" (1253a30) and, therefore, they by nature choose to live in society

where they can be happy by loving friends. Aristotle is so insistent on man's social nature that he claims any "who is unable to live in society" must be "a beast" who could be "the best of animals" but by leaving society is "worst of all" (1253a28-33). Before he outspends his fortunes, Timon is made very happy by loving everyone who would be his friend, and in his excessive liberality he showers his friends with more love than he receives: the joy he feels in loving his friends is evidence for Aristotle's claim that friendship exists more in loving than being loved, and shows that friendship leads to happiness. Ideally, the state is filled with good people who love each other and are made happy by their virtuous love for each other: as friendship brings people together, so too should friendship maintain people happily.

People are not perfect, however, and both Timon and Lear are deceived by false promises of friendship. Timon initially believes that the friendship his flatterers profess for him is genuine, but when he turns to them for help, they abandon him to his creditors and prove the insincerity of their love: they prove themselves false friends. Lear is likewise let down by the flatterers who promise to love him most, deceived by Goneril and Regan who deny him his train. Those who ought to show Timon and Lear the most friendship actually show them the least, and both men respond by leaving all society and exposing themselves to nature like beasts. Both characters still have friends who love them, despite unloving treatment, showing once more that true friendship consists of loving more than being loved: Kent and Cordelia continue to love Lear even after he banishes them, just as Apemantus and Flavius offer Timon loving comfort in the woods despite the madman's abuse. Timon's choice to reject true friends is just as mad as Lear's choice to curse all three of his daughters, for Aristotle says that one should simply

"delight in loving" without insisting on being "loved in return if both are not possible," and particularly in the case of children, one ought to "love them even if the children, in their ignorance, give back nothing of what is due" (*NE* 1159a27-35).<sup>33</sup> Neither Timon nor Lear loves the flatterers who give back nothing that is due, choosing to leave society instead.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let us stop to remember that the most basic, utilitarian reason humans need society is for sustenance and shelter. Even though "no man can live well, or indeed live at all," according to Aristotle, "unless he is provided with necessaries" (1253b24-6), Timon chooses to abandon society's accommodations. He seems to believe that he will be able to find sustenance in the wild, as he explains to the poor thieves:

Why should you want? Behold, the earth hath roots,  
Within this mile break forth a hundred springs,  
The oaks bear mast, the briars scarlet hips,  
The bounteous housewife Nature on each bush  
Lays out her full mess before you. Want? Why want?  
(4.3.12-6)

The bandits respond that they "cannot live on grass, on berries, water, as beasts" (4.3.417-8), and Nature denies Timon's assessment of her great hospitality: the ground ironically yields far more gold than food, and Timon's tantalizing labour uncovers only one root.<sup>34</sup> He has gone into the woods to get away from the humans who betrayed him, but in doing so he has also removed himself from sustenance, misguided by his

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<sup>33</sup> All of the following Aristotle quotations in this chapter are from the *Politics*.

<sup>34</sup> In work on Shakespearean friendships, Tom Macfaul points out that "Shakespeare's plays show the dependence of even the most apparently self-sufficient individual on other people" (196), and Timon's failure to survive on Nature's bounty adds weight to his argument.



delusional faith in Nature's bounty. In his misanthropy he thinks leaving society is his best option, "but surely the good of things," Aristotle argues, "must be that which preserves them" (1261b9), and the wilderness offers only minimal nourishment. His misconception of Nature's generosity could be cured by a rational assessment of the difficulties he encounters, but he persists in his wild behaviour instead.

Timon is mad not only for his misplaced faith in Nature's bounty, but also for his outright rejection of necessary sustenance. Apemantus kindly offers Timon some food when he finds the wayward misanthrope gnawing on a dirty root, but Timon turns him down, refusing Apemantus' offer to "mend thy feast" by expressing a preference for solipsism: "First mend my company," he snaps, "take away thyself" (4.3.283-4). Timon rejects his friend's offer of sustenance in an effort to avoid all human relations, despite the fact that Apemantus never harmed him. The churlish thinker cannot be said to have deceived or flattered anyone, loudly reprimanding the sycophants for flattery and also warning Timon of his excessive generosity. He offered sage advice like a good friend, and in the woods he offers wholesome food in return for Timon's abuse; though he is well within his rights to abandon the man who called him a "churl" (1.2.26) and favoured flatterers over sound advice, Apemantus still offers food and companionship, forgiving Timon's earlier abuse and negligence. The philosopher could easily abandon Timon to the woods for the ill treatment he received, but he leaves Athens' walls and seeks his wayward friend, thereby proving his loyalty.<sup>35</sup> Despite the show of loyalty, Timon insists on being abandoned and he madly rejects Apemantus' sustaining friendship, just as he also rejects Flavius' friendship, resenting even true friends in his complete misanthropy.

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<sup>35</sup> Apemantus, in whose name lies the poorly hidden pun Ape Man, straddles the line between beastly cynicism and human compassion when he offers Timon friendship.

Though the true steward would serve him "with my life" (4.3.466), Timon does not accept his servant's offer of comfort. He does eventually realize that Flavius may be the one honest man in the world, but despite this he still rejects all friendship, Flavius included in the exclusion.<sup>36</sup> Both Apemantus and Flavius told Timon the truth about his excessive generosity and both offer comfort and companionship when he has gone to the woods — both would stand by him through thick and thin. Their loyalty proves that they honestly love Timon, and their friendship could provide him with the basic necessities he needs for a good life even outside Athens' walls. The extremity of his misanthropy, however, leads him to reject all friends, along with their offers of provisions: he irrationally chooses to live alone like a beast until he dies. Timon continues to reject aid from friends even after he realizes that he is driving himself towards death.<sup>37</sup> Rather than accepting the penitent Senators' offer of friendship and returning to society with honour and prestige, he writes his own epitaph. Apemantus and Flavius provide us with at least two examples of true friends, but Timon continues to reject all friends regardless. His excessive rejection of friendship leads to his unreasonable rejection of sustenance, and his choice to live like a solitary beast thereby misses the good of self-preservation. Because Timon chooses to abandon friends and self-preservation, his actions no longer

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<sup>36</sup>Flavius is not Timon's only loyal servant, and Nuttall believes the servants' refusal of bribes in their honest service serves "to show how Timon is loved by those who work for him, though not by the objects of his liberality" but still thinks that "one's credulity is stretched by these pathologically loyal persons" (*Timon* 88). Macfaul, however, argues that Timon's friendship with "such loyal servants" is still "the healthiest thing in the play" (93). Timon's dismissal of Flavius, despite the steward's honesty, is made all the more mad by his dismissal of an entire household full of loyal friends who would still continue to serve him; Macfaul can only explain his rejection of servants by calling Timon's ideals "crazed" (93).

<sup>37</sup>David Bevington categorizes Timon's self-destructive behaviour with that of Coriolanus, arguing that both plays "give us a similar impression of events that wind down without hope of recovery. Men are sometimes their own worst enemies" (72).

aim at logical ends, confirming Apemantus' and the Senators' assessment that Timon is truly mad.

Lear also adopts a beastly practice when he leaves civilization, but his actions are not so rigid in their extremity: as Lear's wits settle and unsettle, he becomes accordingly more and less beastly. From the moment he banishes Cordelia, Lear's actions are so excessive that they are called mad in court and connected to animal-like behaviour. The Fool lyrically implies that Lear has "grown foppish" and does not know how his "wits to wear," evidenced the fact that his "manners are so apish" (1.4.150-2). The Fool's quick connection of witlessness with beastly folly fits Aristotle's definition of human excellence as reason: as Lear loses his reason, he becomes more "apish" and inhuman. His banishment of Cordelia and his bisection of the kingdom are irrational in their excess, and even a Fool can see his mind has cracked like an egg and has begun its descent into beastliness; when his remaining daughters break their contractual agreement to allow Lear one hundred followers, his mind breaks a little more and he leaves Gloucester's shelter. The daughters initially offer to house Lear himself (ejecting only his followers), but he rejects their bogus friendship and abandons the court, just as Timon rejects friendship and disconnects from society. Remembering that "friendship" for Aristotle is an attitude that applies to family even more than to friends, Lear's rejection of kin is even more extreme and inhuman than Timon's rejection of his fellow Athenians. As they are his children, they owe him the greatest respect; as they are his children, they have wronged him more gravely; but as they are his children, Lear ought to offer them most forgiveness. Instead of acting like a loving father, he overflows with irate hatred that drives him to endure the elements like an animal, lamenting to his follower, "O Fool, I

shall go mad" (2.4.281) before leaving shelter. Lost in his madness, he abjures society's protection from the weather and yells at the storm to "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow, / You cataracts and hurricanos" (3.2.1-2), preferring nature's harshest wrath over humbled social intercourse with his daughters. When his mind first began to unsettle, he started to act apishly; after he personally acknowledges his madness, he goes wild.

Though the Fool fails to reign in Lear's madness and lead him out of the rain, Kent's friendship calms the king's madness enough for him to seek shelter. When Kent finds Lear unfit for the weather, he comments on the king's "bare-headed" state and tells the madman that "hard by here is a hovel. / Some friendship will it lend you gainst the tempest" (3.2.61-2). Kent's continued service (though he is disguised as Caius) shows Lear that he still has good friends, and he regains some sanity — even though he does not recognize Kent, he recognizes the friendship Kent offers and comes down out of the clouds.<sup>38</sup> As Lear announced his madness before abandoning society, he now admits his mind is settling as he starts to rejoin it: Lear's "wits begin to turn" (3.2.67), and he realizes his friends must be cold, admitting that "I am cold myself" (3.2.69). His sensory capacity returns with his mental senses, and he rationally decides to consider the "necessities" that "can make vile things precious" (3.2.71), accepting the hovel's friendly shelter from the storm. His friendship with Kent and the Fool brings him back towards sanity and civilization, and when they reach the hovel, the importance of friendship is

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<sup>38</sup> Macfaul considers Kent's friendship to be almost hyperbolic (like Antonio's in *The Merchant of Venice*), explaining that "Their life is that of actors trying to overplay the small roles they have been given" (13); he points out that Kent is introduced "as Gloucester's 'honourable friend' (1.1.28), thus establishing his position as a man of friendship, before he goes on to take a crucial role in the first action of the play, resisting Lear's folly" (111).

reinforced as the characters each implore the others to go inside and take shelter from the storm. The friendship offered only allows Lear's mind to settle enough that he considers his companions' coldness, and when they reach the hovel he tells them that once again, "The tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else" (3.4.12-3). He can rationalize the necessity for shelter, but his mind is still so stormy that he does not care for his own protection from the elements; he is still reluctant to give up his beastly and mad behaviour and accept the hovel's friendship. Before going indoors, he prays for "poor naked wretches" who like beasts "bide the pelting of this pitiless storm" (3.4.28-9), and the heavens deliver a mad friend who ironically leads Lear back towards a state of insanity: looking at the naked, mad Poor Tom, Lear sees people as animals when stripped of society's accessories, asking

Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm  
no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha?  
Here's three on's are sophisticated, thou art the thing itself.  
Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked  
animal as thou art. (3.4.96-101)

He immediately begins undressing, but his good friends stop him from eschewing all scraps of civility and convince him to enter the hovel along with Poor Tom.<sup>39</sup> He is not

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<sup>39</sup> He is eschewing civility as he disrobes, but it is to enter society with a naked, beast-like creature: leaving the society of men to socialize with a "bare, forked animal" (3.4.101) is not sane behaviour, but does perhaps still represent man's inner desire to be social. Lear is rejecting his courtly society, but as a social animal he still wants to socialize with *something*, choosing to join the company of a mad beggar; he accordingly exposes his flesh to the storm along with Poor Tom, rather than inviting Poor Tom to be civil and finding clothes for the beggar (which would be a more sane way to extend friendship to someone complaining of the cold). Lear's eventual acquiescence to entering the hovel's shelter may be a more reasonable expression of the same innate social impulse that drives his sympathetic commiseration with Poor Tom; nonetheless, befriending, imitating and commiserating with exiles and madmen is hardly sane behaviour. As Knight explains, "Lear welcomes [Poor Tom] as his 'philosopher', since he embodies that philosophy of incongruity and the fantastically-absurd which is Lear's vision in madness"

rejecting friendship altogether, but society's sophistication, and so he befriends the naked madman. Lear does not fully rejoin society (his party of fools, exiles and madmen in a condemned hovel can hardly be considered as a reintegration into the civilized world), but his partial step back towards society coincides with a partial step back towards sanity. Goneril's and Regan's unfriendliness drove him madder and drove him out the court, but his few good friends are able to keep him partly connected to society and partly sane. His madness is correlative to his rejection of society and his rejection by society, and his integration is contingent on his friends.

Lear's friendship with Cordelia is of even greater significance to Lear's sanity. He may love Kent, Gloucester and the Fool, but Cordelia is the one he loves most, and as loving is the core virtue of friendship, his relationship with Cordelia is his most significant friendship. When she professes to love only him according to her "bond, no more, no less" (1.1.97), he feels that she does not reciprocate the extremity of his love and he goes mad, excessively condemning his dearest daughter. Because he "loved her most," he hoped to spend his old age receiving society's provisions through "her kind nursery," (1.1.121-2), and when she does not respond that she loves him most he behaves irrationally and loses his most cherished friendship. After casting out Cordelia, it is a very brief time before Lear spirals out of society and casts himself into the storm. As I mentioned earlier, his sanity partially returns with his partial reintegration (through the friendship of Kent and the Fool), but his sanity does not stabilize until his reunion with Cordelia. When he awakes he knows he is still "not in my perfect mind" (5.1.65) and

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(167), and it thus only because Poor Tom is a mad philosopher that Lear is insistent on being his friend and philosophizing with him. As Laurie Shannon describes it, his friendship with Poor Tom and choice to join him in animalistic nudity actually "unravels the species pretensions of humanity" (168).

cannot recognize his companions, but when comprehension dawns, he sees and knows his daughter -- his insanity is relieved. When he banishes his closest friends, "Lear loses his wits, and only regains his sanity," as Emily Sun says, "after reencountering his courtier Gloucester" who was blinded serving Lear truly, "and after reconciling with Cordelia" (11-2). Reunion with his dearest friend brings back his sanity, if only temporarily. Even after Cordelia loses the battle against her sisters, Lear still loves her most and his happiness hangs on his friendship with her; when they are being led to prison he tries to comfort Cordelia by explaining that her company is all the society he needs to be happy. He predicts a life of deep contemplation with his best friend, showing reduced signs of sorrow and insanity. As long as he has a loving friend with whom he can "pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh" (5.3.12), he believes he can be happy.<sup>40</sup> Lear goes mad when he banishes the friends he loves most and he recovers when he rekindles their friendship, showing his sanity depends on his connection to society through friends. He has not reunited with all his old friends and he does not ever fully recover from discovering the flatterers' falseness, but reuniting with his most loved friend does the most to restore his sanity. Tragically, it is only a temporary restoration, as Cordelia is quickly executed and Lear lashes out in one last tirade of insanity.

Losing his beloved daughter to death, Lear completely loses his mind along with his language and devolves into bestial howling. Language is an important marker of societal belonging: it is through language alone that we can be political or rational, and language is thus the foundation for all cultural conceptions and valuations. Aristotle

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<sup>40</sup> His utopian description of their future may seem irrational, but he does not count on Edmund being such a bastard: without Edmund's treacherous order to execute Cordelia, the victorious Duke of Albany would have spared their lives and allowed Lear's honest daughter to nurse him in his old age.

explains that speech gives us the ability to define "the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and state" (1253a14-8). As language is essential for human ethical, familial and political relations, Lear's lack of human language foregrounds his lunacy through howling. Edgar wisely points out that one has not actually reached the worst state of being "So long as we can say, 'This is the worst'" (4.1.28), foreshadowing Lear's ultimate descent to the point where he has to "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" (5.3.257) rather than linguistically express his pain. It is the loss of his most beloved friend Cordelia that finally pushes his mind past the point of rational explication. After howling out his angst, his mind resettles enough for him to try to reckon that "She's gone forever" (5.3.259), speaking briefly with his few remaining friends — the thoughts his most beloved friend's death are, however, unbearable, and he does not continue living after confirming Cordelia's death, simply bidding his heart to "break" (5.3.314).<sup>41</sup> After losing the most valuable things in society (Cordelia's friendship and the necessities provided by her nursery), Lear goes mad by eschewing all marks of civilization in a fit of animalistic howling, and then finally leaves the world of the living.<sup>42</sup> Disconnecting from society, as both the cause and the form of

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<sup>41</sup> After going completely mad, he is unable to accept the kingship Albany would give him — as Brown writes, "With the restoration of his kingdom placed before him, Lear is now ready not merely to say the thing (III.iv.28-36) but to actually die to the world" (342).

<sup>42</sup> Timon deliberately chooses to let "language end" (5.2.105) as he too forgoes civilization's essential *logos*, but Lear's howling seems to be less of a choice — he is swept past the possibility of speaking by his overwhelming human emotions, pushed beyond possible speech to the brink of pure madness. Lear carried away from language by his insanity, in stark contrast to Timon's explicit choice to stop talking.



his madness, can be seen alongside excess as one of the most essential characteristics of Lear's madness.

Madness and sanity are therefore determined by the possibilities for social integration for Timon and Lear. Both characters adopt mad behaviour after being betrayed by their allegedly most loving friends, and they both choose to abandon the society that has shown them such poor friendship. Choosing to abandon all of society along with its provisions is insane behaviour that does not lead either character to happiness, and the form of their madness (along with the efficient cause of their madness) is directly representative of their connection to society. Timon tries to leave all humanity behind when he goes to the woods, but he is unable to prevent persistent visitors pleading for his friendship — though the other characters call him mad for attempting to abandon all friends, he is still able to argue and until his death he retains his linguistic capacity, indicating Timon retains some shred of sanity. Even beyond death he is able to communicate in writing, and even if he claims to hate all of mankind, his creation of an epitaph suggests a desire to continue connecting with people through communication. Lear's madness waxes and wanes as he connects with friends, and though he is not completely absolute in his misanthropic removal from the civilized world (accepting some mad and exiled companions instead throwing stones to drive away all friends), he eventually degenerates further than Timon. Lear's animalistic howling descends to a type of mad inhumanity, identifying insanity with a lunatic lack of language. For both characters, going mad is construed in important ways as leaving society, and Lear (at least briefly) loses himself completely to beastliness. Both characters' madness consists in

their rejection of friendship and human necessities associated with society, forgetting that man is a political animal and choosing to be mere animals.<sup>43</sup>

The choice to leave society and live in the wilds is irrational by social and Aristotelian standards, but Timon and Lear have similar reasons for leaving civilization, and (except for one exceptional moment of howling), neither character seems to be entirely insane: both see society as a habitat for worse beasts than those in the forest, and so both choose to leave society. Lear is technically given the option to stay with Goneril and Regan, but he spurns the "detested kite" (1.4.245) and "vulture" who have hurt him with "sharp toothed unkindness" (2.4.129).<sup>44</sup> When he is told to return Goneril with half his train, he says that he would rather befriend real beasts than the metaphorical ones who now rule his kingdom:

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<sup>43</sup> Edgar's actions after exile further corroborate and amplify the connection between beastliness, excess, and madness: when he becomes Poor Tom, he is acting in the way that he thinks madmen act, and describes himself as one who: "serv'd the lust of my mistress' heart and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust, and wak'd to do it. Wine lov'd I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramour'd the Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (3.4.81-9).

<sup>44</sup> The daughters' offer to stay indoors without any followers may seem civilized, but Lear sees his civilization as negatively as Timon does, for the society from which he "so vehemently dissociates himself is amicable," Nuttall elucidates, "only in appearance" (*Timon* 20). When they blind Gloucester, the daughters display such savagery that it would be very hard to see "without the realization," Northrop Frye argues, "that it was not really happening" (131). Frye concurs with the assessment of society's beastliness, explaining that after "Lear's abdication, a lower level of nature opens up, a parody of natural society in which the leaders are predators" (279) and he points to the ensuing "great rush of animals into the imagery, and the feeling that the animal world symbolizes the total breakdown of human life into something subhuman" (280). Edmund's monstrosity shows that Lear's daughters are not alone in adopting subhuman barbarity, and Lear is reasoning that this world of subhuman terrors is worse than the natural terrors of the storm.

Return to her, and fifty men dismissed?  
No, I rather abjure all roofs and choose  
To wage against the enmity o'th'air,  
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,  
Necessity's sharp pinch.

(2.4.203-7)

Though the choice to eschew all shelter is an extreme reaction, his daughter's diabolical actions suggest that he may have indeed been safer with Nature's beasts. Gloucester aids Lear for fear that their claws would "Pluck out his poor old eyes" and "In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs" (3.7.55-7), adding credibility to Lear's diagnosis of his daughters' beastliness. They immediately confirm Gloucester's worst suspicions of their condition and like vile birds of prey they peck out their old host's eyes. The two are repeatedly compared unfavourably to beasts, their actions making them "Centaurs" (4.6.122)<sup>45</sup> more barbaric than the "the head-lugged bear" (4.2.42) who treat Lear worse than "wolves" (3.7.62) or an "enemy's dog" (4.7.36). Lear's belief that society harbors friends who are worse than a storm may well hit the mark. His daughters who professed the most love, the greatest friendship, turn out to be false flatterers who rule by tyrannical violence. Their beastly behaviour makes civilization seem abhorrent, and Lear's choice to go into the wild is better than living with such 'friends.' He may be right that the elements are more tolerable than Goneril and Regan when he cries, "Rumble thy bellyful; spit, fire; spout, rain! / Nor rain, wind thunder, fire are my daughters"(3.2.14-5), but he does not need to tolerate fire and rain to preserve himself from his daughters. His decision to endure the "sheets of fire" and "bursts of horrid thunder" that "Man's nature cannot carry" (3.2.46-8) fails to fulfill the good of self-preservation, and his deliberate exposure

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<sup>45</sup> Bevington argues that "King Lear, in his madness, is obsessed with woman's sexual body as an image of the gates of the hell" (187), and the notion that they are fiendish makes them far worse than any natural beast.

to the elements is therefore still mad, showing that his decision to leave society is not necessarily mad in itself, but is only mad when taken to the point of ignoring all necessary social provisions like shelter: leaving Goneril and Regan may be reasonable, but unbuttoning in the tempest is not. Lear's decision to undress may be sympathetic and moved by feelings of friendship for Poor Tom, but it still is not a rational choice to expose one's body to a winter storm. Lear suffers far less physical torture in the wild than Gloucester does in his castle, suggesting he likely made the right choice in leaving society after being stripped of his hundred-man bodyguard. His actual practice may be mad as it becomes bestial, but if one's society is peopled with monsters worse than Nature' animals, then it is a reasonable response to leave society despite Aristotle's assertion that society is necessary to be happy.

Timon follows similar logic when he chooses to leave Athens, condemning his fellow Greeks as he soliloquizes his expectation of finding "Th'unkindest beast more kinder than mankind" (4.1.36). He misanthropically chooses to have no friends and reject all society, calling his old fellows "dogs" (3.7.84) and cursing them by imploring the gods to make "their society, as their friendship," nothing but "poison" (4.1.32-2). Apemantus agrees with Timon's assessment of Athenians' baseness, claiming that "The commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts" (4.3.346-7), and Timon's decision to leave society is grounded on the same premise as Lear's: his wealthy friends have betrayed him when he is beaten by debt, and he reasons that if society will offer only beastly friends, then one might as well live with the beasts.<sup>46</sup> Animals are, at least, more honest about their nature. Although Apemantus agrees that the Athenians' are unworthy,

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion on the falseness of the majority of Timon's myriad friends, see Nuttall's *Timon*, Ch. 5 - *Timon Slighted by his Former Friends*.

he still thinks that Timon's outright rejection of society is also based on the faulty premise that Nature will take care of Timon as the lilies in the field. He tells Timon to

Call the creatures  
Whose naked natures live in all spite  
Of wreakful heaven, whose bare unhoused trunks  
To the conflicting elements exposed  
Answer mere nature, bid them flatter thee. (4.3.226-30)

As Lear's excessive self-exposure denotes madness despite his rational reason for leaving society, so too does Timon's wild behaviour cross the boundary of sane action. Forgetting the good of self-preservation, Timon's attempt to evade false friends leads him to self-destruction as a result of hyperbolically rejecting all potential friends. His rejection of society is more excessive than Lear's and also seems more deliberate: while Lear is willing to keep the company of his Fool and the philosopher Tom O'Bedlam, Timon eventually drives off all visitors, madly refusing any goods brought about by friendship. Timon also has less reason than Lear for fearing his society, as England's tyrants torture Gloucester while the sinning Senators kill only themselves. The remaining Senators are not as unfriendly to Timon as the sisters are to Lear, suggesting that Apemantus' assessment of the Athenians' universal bestiality is as excessive as Timon's, and even though Timon may think he has a good reason for leaving all people, his assessment of all people's universal baseness is an insane misperception.<sup>47</sup> Lear becomes more of a beast in the nadir of his insanity, but he has more reason to do so than Timon: he has been mistreated by family members who owe more love, and his society is filled with worse beasts than Athenians. Timon may understandably balk at Apemantus' advice to return to

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<sup>47</sup> The perception is excessive in its universality, and moves him away from society, so within the context of this thesis, his misperception is undeniably insane, especially because he is given the evidence for proper perception in Apemantus' and Flavius' demonstrations of true friendship and good humanity.

Athens and survive as a sycophant, but his rejection of Flavius and the Senators' offer of full social restoration does not have the same justification as Lear's rejection of those who blind Gloucester.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, both Timon and Lear present the same rationalization for their decision to adopt a bestial practice in the wilderness: their rejection of society is taken to irrational extremes, but they do have a reason for their choice, confirming Edgar's perception of "matter and impertinency mix'd! Reason, in madness!" (4.6.168-9).

Timon's and Lear's rejection of their respective societies is justified by the fact that both of the rejected ruling orders are eventually overthrown. Aristotle discusses the possible ways that governments are toppled, "by force and by fraud"(1304b8) and facing enemies "either from within or from without" (1307b20-1), and both *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear* present rebellions from within enacted by force. In *Timon*, there is a single revolution led by Alcibiades, an Athenian who openly attacks his home city by force. His cause for revolution is relatively insignificant, but in a city of beasts it takes very little provocation for men to attack each other's throats: when he intransigently pleads for the forgiveness of a friend's homicide, he is banished by the senators. Instead of remaining exiled, he responds with a revolution. It is not altogether uncommon for small incidents to incite war amongst the notables, as Aristotle explains that "In revolutions the occasions may be trifling, but great interests are at stake" because "Even trifles are most important when they concern" the most important citizens, and "In general, when the notables quarrel, the whole city is involved" (1303b18-32). It is so common for small things to

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<sup>48</sup> Apemantus' offer may well be ironic: though I think he is honestly trying to get Timon to come back, the suggestion that he become a flatterer would be hard to deliver without at least a touch of sarcasm. Regardless, whether it is played straight or ironic, Timon's rejection of the advice is understandable. His decision to stay outdoors once he has found the gold and once the Senators offer redemption is much less understandable, much more irrational.

snowball out of control that Aristotle claims "in all states revolutions are occasioned by trifles" (1307a42-b1), which shows that even the notables have a hard time avoiding animalistic aggression instead of upholding the state through friendship. The conservative Senators in *Timon* seem to know how unstable their government is, and their decision to banish Alcibiades (which is what causes revolution) is actually chosen for the purpose of maintaining order: they are afraid to start a habit of ignoring laws, "For the law has no power to command obedience," Aristotle explains, "except that of habit, which can only be given by time, so that a readiness to change from old to new laws enfeebles the power of the law" (1269a20-4). When the popular Alcibiades challenges them, they exile him, perhaps following Aristotle's suggestion that "Especially should the laws provide against any one having too much power, whether derived from friends or money; if he has he should be sent clean out of the country" (1308b16-7).<sup>49</sup> Sending him clean out of the country is a dangerous decision, however, and it ends up provoking the wild man into a wrathful response — he assembles his powerful friends and besieges his old city. Aristotle says that "he who is unable to live in society ... must be either a beast or a god," and while Timon chooses to be a mad beast, Alcibiades ascends above the Athenian state and declares himself "worse than mad" (3.6.105). That he declares war should be no surprise, as Aristotle explains that the "outcast is forthwith a lover of war" (1253a5), and by denying one notable their friendship, the Senators unwittingly create an outcast who overthrows their rule. The alacrity of Alcibiades' assault shows how quickly society can descend into wolfish violence, and "wild Alcibiades' wrath" (5.1.88) suggests that

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<sup>49</sup> Aristotle seems to contradict himself when he says that the government "should never wrong the ambitious in a matter of honour" (1308a8), but it is most likely that the ambitious would be the ones with excessive power due to friends or wealth, just the sorts of people who should be wronged by exile...

Timon's assessment of Athenians' unfriendly, beastly nature may not be too excessive after all. Casting out their friend Alcibiades causes the Athenian revolution, and friendship is also considered crucial to the outcome of Alcibiades' revolution. Fearing "Alcibiades th'approaches wild, / Who like a boar too savage doth root up / His country's peace and shakes his threatening sword / Against the walls of Athens" (5.1.49-51), the Senators come to the woods to beg for Timon's friendship, believing he will be able to defend them from the rebellious beast. Alcibiades also sees the importance of friendship to the outcome of his war, offering Timon some gold even though he has so little that "The want whereof doth daily make revolt / In my penurious band"<sup>50</sup> (4.3.91-2). Even when he himself is wanting, he still offers whatever means he can to sustain Timon, showing that friendship is even more important to his revolution than his soldiers' payment. Just as the Senators hope Timon's friendship will foil Alcibiades' revolution, so too does Alcibiades hope Timon's friendship will be the linch-pin in his conquest. Friendship in *Timon* is therefore the issue that causes the rebellion and is also the issue that is seen to determine the revolution's outcome.

In *King Lear*, there are so many revolutions that it is difficult to sort them all out, beasts tearing each other apart all across the stage. The first overthrow is enacted through fraud, as Goneril and Regan profess excessive friendship for their father. They say that they "love [him] all" (1.1.98) and accept Lear's kingdom on the condition that they allow him 100 knights, but they strip him of his retainers as soon as they have power, putting him among those who "are deceived into ... a change of government, and afterwards they

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<sup>50</sup> His offer of money, even though he himself is quite poor, suggests genuine friendship. Quickly changes his tune: "Hast thou gold yet? I'll take the gold thou givest me, not all thy counsel" (4.3.129-30)



are held in subjection against their will" (1304b11-2). The sisters become tyrants, taking control of Gloucester's house and denying aid to their mad father. Their tyranny earns them few friends, incurring such hatred and contempt that they draw attack from all sides. As friendship holds states together, its opposites -- hatred and contempt -- are the "two chief motives," according to Aristotle, "which induce men to attack tyrannies" (1312b19). When Gloucester is suffering Draconian torture, a petty servant stands up and tries to overthrow the unjust tyranny. Aristotle warns that "he who would kill a tyrant must be prepared to lose his life if he fails" (1312a-31-2), and the servant does not survive his attempted overthrow: Regan condemns the "dog" (3.7.74) who kills Cornwall, then takes a sword and cuts him down herself. Gloucester himself confronted a similar danger when he chose to extend friendship to Lear in opposition to the tyrant's orders, accepting that even "If I die for't — as no less is threatened me — the king my master must be relieved" (3.3.15-6). The tyranny's unfriendliness is so contemptible that subjects of all ranks, from low servants to highborn nobles, are willing to lose their lives opposing it. The sisters' tyranny also draws attack from overseas, bringing French soldiers to British soil. Cordelia claims her assault stems from the very heart of friendship for her oppressed father: "No blown ambition doth our arms incite, / But love, dear love, and our ag'd father's right" (4.4.27-8). Aristotle points out that "tyrannies, like all other governments, are destroyed from without by some opposite and more powerful form of government," and he believes "That such a government will have the will to attack them is clear" (1312a40-b2): in the name of love, a neighbouring country rises up to war with the sisters, challenging the baseness of their tyranny. Goneril and Regan lead with behaviour so unfriendly that they are attacked from within and without, and they only hang on to power through force,

putting down Gloucester, the servant, and Cordelia's army. They are attacked by many enemies and, in the end, the two sisters even attack each other.<sup>51</sup> In effect, the court's rulers tear themselves apart through their unfriendliness.

The unfriendly character of *King Lear's* court is compounded further by Edmund's coincidental overthrow of Gloucester. The bastard Edmund believes that he is equal to his legitimate brother Edgar, but because he is born "some twelve or fourteen moonshines lag of" his brother, he is treated as lesser, even though his "dimensions are as well compact," his "mind as generous" and his "shape as true as honest madam's issue" (1.2.5-9). Aristotle says that "Everywhere inequality is a cause of revolution, but an inequality in which there is no proportion" (1301b26-7), further elucidating that "Inferiors revolt so that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind which creates revolutions" (1302a30-1). Edmund rebels when he perceives that he is being treated unequally due to circumstances beyond his personal control, with no proportion to merit. The ease with which he overthrows Edgar and Gloucester suggests that he may even be superior in his qualities, inciting him to rebel because is a superior receiving inferior treatment: he can be considered one of those who, "whenever their share in the government does not accord with their preconceived ideas, stir up revolution," and according to Aristotle, "Those who excel in excellence have the best right of all to rebel" (1301a38-40). He fraudulently usurps the position of his brother Edgar, framing the honest man for a plot against their father Gloucester; he then betrays

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<sup>51</sup> Aristotle notes that "Kingly rule is little affected by external causes and is therefore lasting; it is generally destroyed from within. And there are two ways in which the destruction may come about; when the members of the royal family quarrel among themselves, and when the kings attempt to administer the state too much after the fashion of a tyranny" (1312b38-1313a3). Furthermore, "tyrannies are destroyed from within, when the reigning family are divided among themselves" (1312b9-10).

his father to Cornwall, getting the old man's titles in the process. Edmund's unkind overthrow of kin parallels Goneril's and Regan's rise to power, showing that patricidal kids throughout the court are capable of behaving worse than beasts. Edmund himself is in turn violently overthrown by his exiled brother, Edgar, who has returned disguised. He duels the bastard to death, adding even more bloodshed to the courtly realm that Lear has abandoned. Though bearing the storm bare naked is mad, Lear's choice to leave this unfriendly society cannot be called altogether mad, and though it does not ultimately save him, it likely saves him from yet more monstrous treatment at home.

If society, as Aristotle supposes, is for making men good, then how is it these two societies are peopled with such poor friends? Even if cities arise from friendship for the purpose of happily sustaining people, they can still fall into animalistic behaviour. One of Aristotle's major claims is that "it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal" (1253a2-3). States arise because man is political, and his political nature leads him to seek friends for the purpose of happiness. However, because each individual person is made of different parts, so too will a state be composed of different parts, some of which are destined to rule the others. According to Aristotle,

the very constitution of the soul has shown us the way; in it one part naturally rules, and the other is subject, and the excellence of the ruler we maintain to be different from that of the subject -- the one being the excellence of the rational, and the other of the irrational part. Now it is obvious that the same principle applies generally, and therefore almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. (1260a4-8)

As man is a political animal, he is bound to form political societies in order to attain the goods of friendship and necessities -- but as man is a political animal, so too is he bound to a system of rulership and obedience. Timon presents a concurrent conception that things naturally rule and are ruled when he lectures Apemantus on his baseness:

If thou wert the lion, the fox would beguile thee; if thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee; if thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee when peradventure thou wert accused by the ass; if thou wert the ass, thy dullness would torment thee, and still thou lived'st but as breakfast to the wolf; if thou wert the wolf, thy greediness would afflict thee and oft thou should'st hazard thy life for thy dinner. Wert thou the unicorn, pride and wrath would confound thee and make thine own self the conquest of thy fury; wert thou a bear, thou would'st be killed by the horse; wert thou a horse, thou wouldst be seized by the leopard; wert thou a leopard, thou wert germane for the lion, and the spots of thy kindred were jurors on thy life -- all thy safety and remotion and thy defence absence. What beast couldst thou be that were not subject to a beast? (4.3.327-42)

He presents rulership as a completely natural phenomenon, agreeing with Aristotle's axiom "that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked for subjection, others for rule" (1254a21-2): as Macfaul puts it, "all dogs are not equal" (196). But rulership is intended to steer society towards a rational, virtuous course that ensures the happiness of every part. Aristotle's "conclusion, then, is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions" (1281a3-4) but societies inevitably deviate from the ideal simply because "all the constitutions which now exist are faulty" (1260b35-6). Societies should exist to promote friendship so that men may be happy and sustain each other, but unjust laws and human baseness prevent people from properly loving. Lear, for example, always loved Cordelia best and gave her more than her older sisters, while Gloucester seemed to love Edmund but still treated the bastard like a bastard; either through faults of their own or their respective society's, both fathers mistreat their children.<sup>52</sup> Those children rise up like

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<sup>52</sup> As a side note, Lear suggests he has mistreated the poor component of kingdom through neglect of the peasants' happiness. Aristotle tells us that "a state is composite, like any other whole made up of many parts -- these are the citizens, who compose it" (1274b39-1275a1), and in his desire to divest himself of official cares Lear took "too little care" of the poor naked wretches (3.4.28-36): he thus admits that he himself has

angry animals, tearing away social bonds and sending their parents out into the storm, and in doing so they make their power-hungry court a twisted parody of ideal society. Because of bad legislation and bad choices, the civilized world in these plays becomes more animal and less political. Lear would be mad if he were abandoning a good society that provided friendship and happiness along with physical necessities, but his choice to leave Goneril and Regan is a choice to leave a base society full of enmity and vice. As I said earlier, he is mad when he rejects shelter, but he is not entirely insane in his decision to leave society.

If all constitutions are faulty, then perhaps misanthropy is not so mad after all. If one agrees with Aristotle that "the life of the philosopher and the life of the statesman" are the lives that are "preferred by those who have been most keen in the pursuit of excellence," (1324a 28-31) then both Timon and Lear can be considered to still pursue some form of excellence even after adopting their mad practice. Timon is accused of adopting Apemantus' philosophical manners, though he takes temperance to a suicidal extreme. Lear likewise becomes a philosopher in the wilderness, eager to engage in philosophical discussion with the mad Tom O'Bedlam: he is more insistent on philosophizing than caring for his body, telling Gloucester to "First let me talk with this philosopher" before entering shelter (3.4.142). Aristotle explains that the philosophical and political lives are best because "the wise man, like the wise state, will necessarily regulate his life towards the best end" (1324a32-4), and it seems that Lear is perhaps

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been responsible for at least some of the state's unhappiness. It is the sight of eyeless Gloucester that is said to win the rebellion friends, not the mistreatment of Lear, suggesting that if he had been a better king to the people he would not have had to suffer being thrown out. Even after officially giving up his power, the will of the people could have been enough to consolidate his hundred knights.

choosing the wisest path of all: more than a mere philosopher, Lear also becomes a statesman in the mock-trial. Sadly, he is but a parodic version of both thinker and judge. Just as his choices while king led to a very poor end, so too do his choices as a homeless madman lead to a poor end. However, in light of Lear's particular end, a life of contemplation away from the court may have been best after all: Cordelia's quick dispatch and his own ensuing collapse show that he was better off debating justice with mad beggars — in the hovel he is at least alive, sheltered, and surrounded by good friends (who are so loyal they pretend to be mad and poor to continue serving him, risking their own lives by association with the fallen king). Once again, because all states are faulty, leaving society with only a few good friends and spending a life in contemplation is possibly the best and happiest life; Timon's time in the woods is only mad for taking philosophical temperance to an extreme and for misanthropically rejecting even true friends with whom he could contemplate, while Lear's time in the woods may be the most sane time in his life after his mad action of splitting the kingdom and banishing his best friends.

Timon and Lear may think they are being reasonable (leaving the worst by leaving society), but their rejection of human necessities is taken to irrational extremes, and both are mad when they reject provisions required for self-preservation. Timon is also mad for deliberately choosing to have no friends despite having good friends offer to help in the forest. If we recall that friendship consists in loving more than in being loved, his decision to become the misanthrope is mad, especially so because having no friends equates to having no happiness: the decision to have friends no longer aims at the good and is therefore mad. Lear's madness varies in correlation to his connection with friends,

and at its worst the lunatic loses his language after irreparably losing his closest friend. For both Timon and Lear, their connection to their friends serves as an index of their sanity, showing the correlation of friendship to one's mental health (as well as one's physical health in connection with society's provision of sustenance). As friendship is important for sustaining one's bodily and mental health, so too is friendship equally important to society's own sustenance and self-sufficiency, and both plays present societies that collapse through revolutions that are engendered by violations of friendship. Friendship is what makes men happy and maintains society: as loving is the heart of friendship, loving is therefore presented as that which makes men happy and sane, and loving concurrently maintains society.

## CHAPTER 4: UNSTOPPABLE BUTTERFLY MADNESS

### Insanity and Plot Integrity

One is seldom in complete control of one's mental state, nor can one control the entire outcome of one's actions: *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear* present a series of events started by irrational actions that carry the original mad momentum through to society's fall. Both Timon and Lear make a tragic mistake, *hamartia*, that misses the mark through deficiency and excess, as discussed in Chapter 2. Their respective *hamartia* lead to their reversals of fortune, construed as madly leaving society's shelter. Reversal, however, comes with the recognition that society itself contains many false friends who may be worse than wild beasts; Timon's and Lear's drastic changes of fortune therefore fit Aristotle's definitions of tragic *peripeteia*. Though I analyze both according to recognized standards of tragedy, I admit that the plays are not exclusively tragedies and that analyzing them as satires or morality plays is also possible — I aim only to show that applying Aristotle's principles of tragedy highlights important aspects of these works. I therefore consider the characters' sudden fall as tragic *peripeteia*, but acknowledge that, as Dawson and Minton argue, a character's sudden fall is a morality play trope, and may certainly be further analyzed in that context.<sup>53</sup> I am not choosing to analyze *Timon* and *Lear* through Aristotle's *Poetics* to brand them as unqualified tragedies, but to show that aspects of the *Poetics* can be profitably applied to them. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter examines the nature of both protagonists' *hamartia*, tracing the mistaken action to their *peripeteia* and recognition. I focus on *hamartia* because the mistake is typically an ignorant action, and as Timon and Lear are both told their actions will miss

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<sup>53</sup> That a sudden fall is one essential aspect of both genres suggests, perhaps, that plays cross boundaries of genres because the genres themselves are indicated by overlapping markers.



the mark, their decision to follow through with the doomed action is mad rather than uninformed. Looking at the way their mad *hamartia* leads to their tragic reversal yields insights into the shape of their madness, but each character's *hamartia* and *peripeteia* are only parts of the play's overall whole — the second half of this chapter thus considers the interweaving of all actions by examining the general plots of *Timon* and *Lear*. Such an analysis shows that both plays are complete, unified wholes composed of essential elements arranged in the most artistic and logical order; both plays are so unified that every event essentially connects to every other event, allowing Timon's and Lear's mad actions to ripple throughout the play's *praxis*.<sup>54</sup> Though *King Lear* trumps *Timon of Athens* through its overwhelming magnitude, both uphold Aristotle's artistic standards of unified plots, thus allowing both to present a concise picture of madness' disastrous impact on a world filled with beastly tension.

The best tragedy is not about a man whose own deficiencies destroy him, but is,

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<sup>54</sup> Arguing for unity in these plays presents some obvious critical problems concerning the texts. *Timon* suffers from multiple authorship disorder and *Lear* presents a Schizophrenic two-texts dilemma. For the issues concerning *Lear*, see Michael Warren's "Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar." Following Warren's preference for exclusively analyzing one text instead of a conflation of the two, I have dealt with the issue by severing the twins and examining solely the Folio text, though nearly all of my observations also hold true for the Quarto text. In *Timon's* case, because "Almost everything that has been written recently about the play's authorship has been devoted to sorting out which parts of the play were written by whom" (2), Dawson and Minton conclude that "Shakespeare probably took the lead" in the writing process, "not only contributing about 65 per cent of the whole, but also producing the overall plan" (4). As most of the writing is Shakespeare's and he constructed the plot, he can still be said to be thinking about the issues in the play, even if he is not contemplating them by himself. Furthermore, because the play's general scheme is seen as Shakespeare's, I am prioritizing analysis of the plot's actions; each chapter of my thesis focuses on actions and plot over character, rejecting the current trend of analyzing *Timon* in terms of his dominant character traits and instead analyzing his actions through comparison to *Lear's*. Lastly, I would contest that having multiple authors does not obviate a text's possible unity: many voices can harmonize into one whole.

according to Aristotle, about "the sort of man who is not of outstanding virtue and judgment and who comes upon disaster not through wickedness or depravity but because of some mistake" (1453a9-11). To clearly distinguish *hamartia* from the traditional mistranslation of character flaw, George Whalley explains that "Most modern classical commentators take *hamartia* to be a 'mistake' or 'error' — largely, I suppose, because that is what the word means ('missing the mark')" (94). It is important to note that the tragic character does not face destruction due to personal deficiencies or vices, but is instead a normal person who is aiming for happiness but simply misses the mark through a mistaken action that gets taken over by the rest of the play's *praxis*. Because *hamartia* is a mistake and not a flaw, Aristotle's analysis of a character's tragic fall maintains an emphasis on action over character.

It is Timon's giving that is mistakenly carried to excess, for generosity draws a deluge of flatterers who eventually erode his state. At some point he chose to start behaving generously, and his practice attracted the "confluence" of flatterers, the "great flood of" parasites that slowly wash away all of Timon's wealth (1.1.43). He is caught up in his generosity and seemingly cannot stop giving until he is unable to give any longer. It is not his generosity alone that undoes him, for the flatterers deliberately abuse his noble nature and milk his liberality dry, and their actions therefore merit some culpability. It is nonetheless Timon's initial act of generosity that leads the leeches to him. His *hamartia* comes from a failure to distinguish false friends from true friends — his generosity misses the mark by giving too much to too many. Timon has a noble aim in accruing friends through generosity, and he succeeds in achieving happiness as long as he has the cash to support his giving; a failure to moderate his giving, however, results in

a fire-burst happiness that just as quickly expires. His excessive generosity is not a character flaw, but is faulty action that only provides short-term happiness. His excess does not entirely miss the mark of happiness, but it does miss the mark of a self-sustaining happiness. Timon's *hamartia* is the excessive nature of his action, not his action itself, suggesting deficient deliberation about the long-term consequences of his actions.

If *hamartia* is an act of ignorance that creates the possibility of later recognition, then what are we to make of Timon's excessive giving considering that both Flavius and Apemantus warned of his actions' self-destructive nature?<sup>55</sup> Apemantus, speaking like a truly concerned friend, says "Thou giv'st so long, Timon, I fear me thou wilt give away thyself in paper shortly" (1.2.148-9). Flavius has likewise warned the noble lord of his giving's unsustainability, offering physical accounts of his generosity's folly. Timon ignores their advice and evidence that he is outspending his income; willfully maintaining a course of doomed behaviour, even in the face of evidence that the course is doomed, is madness (at least philosophically speaking). Apemantus warns Timon that he is surrounded by a multitude of "false hearts" (1.2.242), but because he says all Athenians are false, Timon allows himself to ignore the advice as mere hyperbole by saying, "an you begin to rail on society once, I am sworn not to give regard to you" (1.2.251-2); Kent's advice is also turned down because Lear cannot alter his sworn course, and Timon similarly seems unable to acknowledge his true friend's analysis as he swears to maintain

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<sup>55</sup> Dawson and Minton hold that his generosity's excess stems from "simple ignorance; he fails to see 'what a number of men' are eating him," somehow blind to the plethora of cannibals who "feed on his goods and end up consuming him wholly" (74-5). However, because the great number of lords consuming Timon are repeatedly pointed out to him, his failure to see the multitude devouring his estate is more than 'simple ignorance' — the negative hallucination of so many false friends, despite sufficient evidence, is madness.

his doomed behaviour. His *hamartia* is a missing of the mark through excessive action — giving too much to too many — but because he is repeatedly alerted to the excessive nature of his generosity and to the "false hearts" of his followers, his action is not quite ignorant: following through with a faulty *praxis* is mad if one has the knowledge and means to alter course. In his insanity, he is carried along his path of generosity and carried away by the sycophants sucking him dry. Lear's *hamartia* also arises through excessive action, which is immediately called mad but which he seems unable to escape. When he perceives Cordelia's speech as unexpectedly deficient, he reacts rashly and swears she is disinherited: Kent warns that this action is "mad!" but Lear cannot go back on his oath, saying that as king he will not "break our vows, which we durst never yet" (1.1.166-7), and Lear is thus doomed to endure the momentum of his hasty declarations. Lear's *hamartia* is the result of an excessive action made after practically no deliberation — though Kent asks Lear to reconsider, the king has sworn an oath (and has done so before contemplating the action with any advisors), and the deficiently considered action is believed to be irrevocable. What has been done, he thinks, cannot be undone. Banishing Cordelia is an action that is itself called mad, and Lear seems lost to his madness when he refuses reconsideration of a pronouncement because he perceives it as absolute. Like Timon, he is told by faithful friends that he has the power to change his excessive actions, but he too ignores wise advice and upholds his mad practice.

Despite sound advice, both Timon and Lear maintain faith in the flatterers until the false friends reveal their true nature. The two men are like those whom *Timon's* poet describes as favoured by Fortune and giving their entire fortunes to the flatterers who follow them. However,

When Fortune in her shift and change of mood  
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependants,  
Which laboured after him to the mountain's top  
Even on their knees and hands, let him slip down,  
Not one accompanying his declining foot. (1.1.96-90)

Aristotle explains that tragic plots will contain *peripeteia*, or a reversal, which "is a [sudden] change [over] of what is being done to the opposite" and, of course, "according to likelihood or necessity" (1452a23-4). Timon is allowed to maintain his generosity only until his creditors realize that he is likely unable to repay all his debts, and when Timon's friends fail to bail him out, he goes from floating in an ocean of rented friends to fighting off waves of loan-sharks. As soon as he has given all of his estate, his situation changes sharply. His doors were always open to all, but they must now be barred to lock out the persistent creditors and he rages, "What, are my doors opposed against my passage? 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?" (3.4.77-81). He has been allowed to fall from the mountaintop, dropped by those who professed to love him most, plummeting from society's heights to antisocial depths. Lear simply feels too old to play king of the hill and hops off the figurative mountaintop, hoping to land in Cordelia's dotting lap; banishing Cordelia and giving his power to her sisters, Lear loses the power to stop his fall and also loses the soft lap he hoped would cushion that fall. Giving excessive portions of his kingdom to Goneril and Regan and a deficient portion to Cordelia is a mistake that results in Lear's painful *peripeteia*, experiencing a sudden change of the way things were being done. As soon as he gives away power, his rank and title no longer command obedience and respect — so shocking is the reversal that Lear cannot believe his new treatment and assumes he must be losing his mind, pondering, "Does any know

me? This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his notion weakens, his discernings are lethargied. Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so" (1.4.206-10). Lear's *hamartia* allows his daughters, who previously spewed duplicitous flattery, to reveal the harsher halves of their two-sided selves, for once he has given his children the rod of power they quickly degenerate into tyrants. His *peripeteia*, like Timon's, is precipitated by the actions of flatterers who once professed the utmost friendship, and his *hamartia* results from his irrational faith in false adulation.

Aristotle alleges that the best reversals are accompanied by a 'recognition' that he defines as "a change from not-knowing to knowing, in [matters of] love or hatred"<sup>56</sup> that happens to "people who have been marked out for success or disaster" (1452a30-3). Timon's recognition of his supposed friends' duplicity comes not when he is told the truth by Apemantus and Flavius, but only when he experiences the truth of their impermanent friendship: Timon's is thus in the form of "The best recognition of all," which Aristotle says "[is] the one [that comes about] from the events themselves, when the shock of surprise arises from likely circumstances" (1455a17-9). He was earlier a fool for ignoring his faithful friends' advice to moderate generosity, but it is hard to believe something one has not experienced. After experiencing the blunt reality of the flatterers' insubstantial friendship, his understanding of man's capacity for duplicity, which was wanting like the Senators' appreciation of Alcibiades' power, ends up "coming in excess" (5.5.28). As he

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<sup>56</sup> Whalley clarifies that "*Philia* is 'love' in the specific sense of the bond implicit in blood relationship. *Echthra* is 'hatred' generally, but in this context it is also presumably meant to apply particularly within the compass of blood relationship" (86). *Philia* was discussed as the core virtue of friendship in Chapter II, and can apply to any close relationship. The closest relationships, however, will always be blood relatives: though both Timon and Lear reject friends, Lear's rejection of kin effects greater *pathos* than Timon's rejection of kith.

suddenly falls from his happy position, Timon recognizes the flatterers' falseness and swings from foolish philanthropy to mad misanthropy. Lear's *hamartia*, as noted earlier, lies in his decision to give excessive portions of his kingdom to the flatterers and a deficient portion to his only dutiful daughter, a decision resulting from insufficient deliberation on a mean path. Though Kent warns him that "Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least" (1.1.150), Lear continues to behave as though she does not properly love him — like Timon, he must experience the flatterers' falseness before he realizes the truth of the situation, and that experience can only come after it is too late to retake authority. Both Timon and Lear should have come to a recognition of the flatterers' nature because both were honestly warned by faithful friends; nonetheless both characters' recognition only comes from the events of the plot themselves.

The actions that lead to their *peripeteia* affect the other characters' actions, and because it is in part the reactions to their *hamartia* that causes their *peripeteia*, both the mistake and fall have meaning only within the context of all the play's interwoven actions. Whalley clarifies that *peripeteia* "is a special instance of the general change (*metabolē*)" (86), and that general change is constituted through play's overall *praxis*. A character's individual *peripeteia* is therefore a particular event woven into the play's single scheme, and the single scheme is of greater significance than the characters themselves. It may seem strange to say that the main character's *peripeteia* is only an event within "the general change," but Aristotle claims that the overall scheme is more important than character: the events ought to be unified by logical connection to each other, not simply by connection to the same character, "So it follows that the first principle of tragedy — the soul, in fact — is the plot, and second to that the characters".

Because tragedy "is *mimesis* of an *action (praxis)*" it will be "particularly [*a mimesis*] of men-of-action in action" (1450b3-5). Reminding us that the men-of-action are in action doubly highlights the importance of the action; it is specified that those men-of-action are contributing to the overall action, and should not simply act in themselves because it is the play's action that is of utmost importance.<sup>57</sup>

As A. O. Rorty explains, the logical structure of the whole action is more significant than any one constituent part:

While there is sorrow, grief, loss, and pain in life, there is tragedy only when the actions and events that compose a life are organized into a story, a structured representation of that life. A drama is not only the *mimesis* of an action, the enactment of a story that represents actions by actions and in actions: at its best, it also bring us to an understanding of the shape (*eidos*) and boundary (*horos*) of human action. Like all representation, drama selectively condenses and structures what it presents. It reveals the inner logic and causal organization of an apparently disconnected series of events, encompassing them to form a single extended, self-contained and completed activity. (3-4)

The tragedy's single activity is more important than any individual's action because its purpose is partly to condense life so one may see the connectedness between every action.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, characters' *hamartia* leading to their own reversals and

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<sup>57</sup> As a tangential note, my interest in the plays' plots coincides with the Renaissance fascination with 'plot' as a reference to a play's overall scheme: "Plotter was a very new word in 1606," Ian Donaldson explains: "the OED's first example of its usage as a synonym for 'conspirator' is from that very year, where it is used in relation to those involved in the recent 'Jesuits' treason', the Gunpowder Plot. Coincidentally, the word plotter had also just entered the language in another, dramaturgical, sense, to describe a writer who devises the action or 'plot' of a play: thus Frances Meres in 1598 could describe Anthony Munday to be 'our best plotter' in the realm of comedy. By 1606 the supreme plotter in the English theatre was not Munday but Jonson himself—the first known user, incidentally, of the word plot, in the sense of 'The plan or scheme of any literary creation, as a play, poem, or work of prose fiction' (whose first occurrence in the OED, sb. 6, belatedly dates to 1649)" (230-31).

<sup>58</sup> Paul Woodruff claims that "One of the products of *mimesis* is *understanding* (Poetics 4), and we may infer that this is at least part of the aim of *mimesis* and therefore of



recognitions are only part of "the general change," and it is thus essential for an Aristotelian analysis to look at the way each element affects the structure of that change.

Aristotle reinforces his focus on the single, general plot and lists some of the main ways to analyze the creation of plots. He firstly points out "it is clear that the plots" should be constructed "*dramatically*: that is, [built] around a single action (*praxis*) whole and complete, that has a beginning, middle, and an end, so that like a single and complete living thing it may produce its peculiar pleasure" (1459a18-22).<sup>59</sup> Because a tragedy is more than the sum of its parts, it can be analyzed according to both its wholeness and the composition of its elements.

As each play must be whole and unified for the position and scale of its elements to be meaningful, *Timon* and *Lear* should be first analyzed in terms of their completeness. Aristotle is very insistent on tragedy's need to contain a single and complete action, explaining that the plot should "be [a *mimesis*] of an action [that is] unified and whole in itself" and that it is considered unified and whole if all the events are constituted so "that if one of them is shifted or taken away, the whole [structure] is disrupted and thrown out of kilter. For a part that clearly does nothing by being present or left out is no *part* of the whole" (1451a30-7). A dramatic plot is united by the inherent and necessary relation of each action to each other action — it is not inherently unified by time or place. Jonathan

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tragedy" (612), so one could say that the aim of tragedy is not simply to represent life but to represent the structures and connections that lead to the understanding of life.

<sup>59</sup> Aristotle further clarifies that dramatic "structures [should] not be like histories, in which disclosure is necessarily made not of a single [line of] action (*praxis*) but of a single span of time -- everything that happened involving one or more persons in that [period of time], and each of these [events] bearing to the others an accidental [random] relation" (1459a18-25). Whalley notes that "This is the only hint in the *Poetics* of a passage that might have led to the false notion of "unity of time." Aristotle clearly regards time sequence as a weak link, no substitute for the logical *necessity* postulated for the unity of action" (126).

Barnes explains that "Classical modern tragedy obeyed — or paid lip-service to — the theory of 'the three unities': unity of time, unity of place, unity of action" but he points out that "Of these three unities, only the last is Aristotelian. If a tragedy exhibits, in addition, unity of time and of place, that will simply be the accidental consequence of the fact that it represents a single action" (281). Each action in a tragedy must be united to each other action by its connection to the overall plot, and any action that does not contribute to the general action is superfluous and detracts from the united whole.

Unity and wholeness are therefore essential to a good plot, but *Timon* and *Lear* are both typically considered as having multiple plotlines, suggesting possible disunity (and inferiority by Aristotle's standards). There is a long tradition of considering Gloucester's family's action as a secondary plot running concurrent with the Lear family's plotline, and if one really wants to split atoms, one could turn up myriads of plots in *Lear*: Lear begins with a plot to prevent future strife; Goneril and Regan plot to usurp Lear, just as Edmund plots to usurp Edgar and Gloucester; Gloucester plots to aid Lear and the invading French; Edgar plots to help his father and to requite Edmund; Cordelia likewise plots to avenge her father, though she fails and becomes a victim of Edmund's plot to kill her in prison. At a glance, it looks as though this play is overflowing with excessive plotlines. However, this overview of plots is mere equivocation based on the translation of tragedy's soul as 'plot' — using 'plots' as a synonym for 'schemes' misrepresents Aristotle's 'plot' as the play's *schema* or overall structure. There are a great many actions in the play, but as my brief overview already suggests, the individuals' actions are all tightly tied to the other actions. Edmund's action, for example, cannot be confined solely to a Gloucester 'subplot' because his actions depend on events in the Lear

'main plot.' When Edmund deceives his brother into fleeing their father's wrath, he learns that Cornwall is coming, which "weaves itself perforce" into the scheme. He asks Edgar whether he has spoken against either Albany or Cornwall, for Cornwall is approaching "now, i'th'night, i'th'haste" (2.1.15-26), and Edmund thereby uses the duke's arrival to escalate the threat and need for haste, causing Edgar to flee without pausing to deliberate. As he is innocent, Edgar may have stopped to talk things over with his father, but news of the duke's hasty arrival is enough to chase Edgar away — one father has already banished an innocent child, and with Lear's irrational actions in recent memory compounded with Cornwall's unexpected arrival, Edgar runs away without taking the chance to contemplate. Cornwall is not actually coming to pursue Edgar, as he is instead fleeing his duties to act as host for Lear, but the accidental relation between these two family's actions are already becoming interwoven. When Lear later leaves his daughters and sons to face the storm, Gloucester joins the aged king, and it is his decision to help Lear that leads to Gloucester's own *peripeteia*. As Gloucester connects himself with Lear, Edmund betrays his father to Cornwall; he undermines Gloucester's attempts to aid Lear and the French, helping Cornwall's plot to maintain power, for which Cornwall gives the bastard his father's place. Edmund's father is blinded facing Lear's foes, and it is Lear's foes who promote Edmund to earldom, showing the actions from one family are bound to the other family. It is important to note that Cornwall promotes Edmund solely to consolidate his own position — he is not intentionally helping Edmund realize the scheme to usurp Gloucester, but is merely surrounding himself with supposedly loyal allies, so the final step of Edmund's rise rests on the actions of others who are only aware that they are acting according their own particular trajectories. The outcome of Edmund's actions

are all, therefore, partly dependent on the actions of the Lear family, and so too are the Lears' actions determined by the Gloucesters'.

As the play progresses, Cornwall offers Edmund "a dearer father in my love" (3.5.23),<sup>60</sup> intermingling the families and defining the play as a struggle between the Lear-Kent-Gloucester-Edgar alliance and the Cornwall-Regan-Goneril-Edmund axis.<sup>61</sup> When Edmund betrays Gloucester's aid, he gives the English powers time to prepare for the French invasion — instead of besieging her older sisters, Cordelia must defend herself at Dover, making Edmund's betrayal a determinant factor in the French forces' failure. After the battle, it is Edmund who gives the order to secretly execute Cordelia, and the remaining sisters slay each other competing for Edmund's love: the bastard is thus the most responsible agent for all three of the Lear's daughters' deaths. When Cordelia is killed, Lear himself bids his heart break and gives up the ghost, so by ending Cordelia's life Edmund can be said to cause Lear's ensuing death. Edmund is himself killed by Edgar, who is then handed the reins to rule the entire kingdom; because Gloucester's good son becomes king, his 'subplot' is as integral to play's whole as any other set of actions.<sup>62</sup> Knight suggests looking at the two families in terms of interwoven themes that mirror each other, explaining that "The Gloucester-theme throughout reflects

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<sup>60</sup> As Cornwall adopts Edmund, that technically makes the bastard Lear's grandson-in-law. When Edmund and the daughters die in the final scene, Edmund says "All three now marry in an instant" (5.3.229), making him also Lear's son-in-law, so by the end of the play any attempt to describe Edmund's actions and Lear's actions as separate plotlines is undermined by the fact that they become, at least in some sense, one single family.

<sup>61</sup> It is a point of dramatic irony that Edmund will splinter the axis, but Cornwall nonetheless aims to align the characters along these lines.

<sup>62</sup> I confess that it may only be in the Folio text of *Lear* that Edgar becomes king, and that in the Quarto Albany speaks the last lines and inferably becomes the monarch. Nonetheless, Edmund's actions are still wholly integrated with the Lear family's, and even if Edgar does not become king, the plots are still unified as a single action.

and emphasizes and exaggerates all the percurrent qualities of the Lear-theme" (171). However, as the two themes are so thoroughly interwoven that their plots cannot be separated, the reflection of Gloucester-theme and the Lear-theme can be seen to create the play's overall theme of fathers' deterioration and usurpation. Both families are connected together by the play's *desis* (tying), and the outcomes of both families' *lisis* (untying) is the result of actions made by members from the other family: the two families' concurrent actions are so interwoven that removing elements from either would completely change the outcome of the other, resulting in a play that is perfectly unified. The general action of the play ultimately culminates as *the destabilization of the patriarchal government*; Jan Kott's appraisal that "*King Lear* is a play about the disintegration of the world" (178) may go a bit too far, for *Lear* is more specifically a play about the disintegration of rulership and paternity — the play ends palpably devoid of rulers and fathers.<sup>63</sup>

*Timon* is also conventionally accused of offering multiple plotlines, but if we consider each action in relation to the play's general change, then once again a unified whole emerges. Dawson and Minton, for example, address the possible incompleteness of *Timon* as work by pointing to its several plotlines, saying that "While the main trajectory of Timon's fall from Fortune's hill is clearly etched, the subplot concerning the warrior Alcibiades is not" (8).<sup>64</sup> However, Timon's *peripeteia* considered in the Aristotelian sense

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<sup>63</sup> Brayton argues that the issue is specifically the disinheritance, explaining that "By charting the course of banishment and social dissolution that follows the first act, the play becomes a cartography of dispossession" (401).

<sup>64</sup> Alcibiades is accused not only of destroying the plot's unity but of indicating incompleteness of the text: Soellner explains that "Critics frequently think him not fully developed," citing H.J. Oliver as one example for the remark that "It would be easy to compile an anthology of contradictory remarks about Alcibiades, and their very number

of an event within the overall change, suggests that the two characters' actions are intrinsically related by their connection to the play's general plot. Neither character's actions are subsidiary, and though one may speak of an individual *hamartia* or *peripeteia*, none of those actions should be seen as constituting a subplot — there is only one plot.<sup>65</sup> In the case of *Timon*, the general action involves the fall of Athens, a fall that is not caused by any sole character but by the interweaving of every character's actions throughout the play. Timon's misanthropic self-exile may not seem as though it directly contributes to the fall of Athens, for by removing himself from society he rejects both Alcibiades' and the repentant senators' pleas for aid, and that rejection negates any action which directly causes or prevents Athens' fall. Doing nothing, however, is still an action — because the senators seem to believe he can save them, Timon's refusal to do so is actually integral to their collapse. Had he not mistakenly spent his fortunes on flatterers, he would not have left society and he would have presumably stood in Athens' defense, so his *hamartia* leads to a *peripeteia* that diminishes Athens' ability to defend itself. Had he not mistakenly misspent his wealth, he would still be a loyal Athenian when Alcibiades revolts and he could save the city.

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is no doubt some indication that Shakespeare has not made his intention perfectly clear" (50). However, I would contend that Alcibiades is instead a character who is consistently inconsistent, and consistent with source material: Aristotle uses Alcibiades as an example of a person whose particular actions would be hard to universalize, and Whalley explains that "Alcibiades was chosen because he was a notoriously idiosyncratic person" (82). His historical idiosyncrasy negates the explanation of his textual idiosyncrasy in *Timon* as a result of incompleteness or clumsiness.

<sup>65</sup> In *Action at Distance*, Nuttall supports an analysis of *Timon* as unified plot following Greek structure, saying that "Timon of Athens is socially and economically English and yet its plot structure, considered abstractly, is strikingly Greek. Abstraction is perhaps the key" (219).

The Athenians surrender because they perceive themselves unable to withstand Alcibiades' siege, and their perceived inability to defend themselves is a result of Timon's estrangement. Seen in a broader sense, Timon's choice to leave the Senators defenceless and Alcibiades' choice to attack are both partly motivated by the Senators' own actions, conservative decisions they made for the express purpose of preserving the state. The Senators aim for self-sustenance through financial conservatism when they deny Timon's needed financial assistance; as Timon says, because "Their blood is caked, is cold, it seldom flows" and the Senators "answer in a joint and corporate voice" that they will not clear his debts (2.2.196-219); that cold, old blood also shows no mercy when Alcibiades begs them to forgive a murder committed over honour, and the conservative men exile the persistent captain for asking them to alter [what he perceives to be] an unjust law.<sup>66</sup> The Senators think that their strict laws and miserly policies will preserve the state, but their conservatism in both fiscal and legal matters misses the mark through excess, and their *hamartia* is thus the ignorant mistake of ruling too strictly in financial and legal matters from a self interest too narrowly conceived. Even if they only reduced the offending criminal's punishment — or still carried through with the capital punishment but at the very least restrained from exiling Alcibiades (whose only crime is acting as a defense lawyer) — they could have preserved their state by ruling more moderately. Overly strict financial actions deprive them of Timon's protective friendship, and their draconian punishments instigate Alcibiades' animosity. Their *hamartia* eventually leads to the recognition that they have undone themselves when Alcibiades beats the war-

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<sup>66</sup> Alcibiades points out the inconsistency of letting the city-state war abroad but insisting people bear wrongs without revenge at home (and murdering murderers for their act of murder).

drums, and that knowledge coincides with their sudden *peripeteia*. It is the combination of Timon's self-exile and Alcibiades' exile, both actions that result in part from the Senators' choices, that leads to the culminating action of Athens' fall. Without Timon's, Alcibiades' or the Senators actions, the general change of Athens' fall would not occur, demonstrating that all the characters' actions are ineluctably tied to actions of others to create the single, unified plot — as Rolf Soellner concludes, "*Timon* has an over-all imaginative unity and a grand tragic design" (29). Each action is a reaction that provokes further reactions, just as every choice results in future situations beyond any individuals' complete control, all of which is knit into the play's single plot.

Both *Timon* and *Lear*, despite containing many different actions, are therefore comprised of a single, tightly knit plot that transcends each individual action. Booth offers a unity test for analyzing plots, suggesting one check to see if every part is "in any way needed or useful — if it is, can it be scrapped without reducing the effectiveness of the whole implicitly aspired to by the other parts, or do we need some others that are not here (the power brakes)?" (396) By this rule, both plays are perfectly unified wholes, for removing any character's actions from either of these plays would drastically alter the outcome of the play's general change. Both plays thus give us men-of-action whose actions are so thoroughly contingent on each other's actions that no single character or action can be diminished to a 'subplot.' To see the single, unified plots in these plays, we must look beyond each individual's action to be able to see the tragic action as a whole; because critics usually look for a tragic hero who unifies the action, it may be hard to see that the unified action occurs at a level above any individual character. However, looking at the forest rather than the trees, both works do reveal one unified action.



The actions, moreover, are not randomly planted or simply connected by being part of the same forest — both plays present pristine ordering of those actions. As Booth offered analysis of a play's inherent unity, so too does he comment on a play's necessary ordering, asking, "are the parts here in the best possible order, or could the working of the whole be more powerful with a different ordering (would this marvelous family camper be improved by putting the refrigerator where the toilet is, and *vice versa*)?" (396). Both *Lear* and *Timon* pass this test with flying colours, consisting of escalating events that grow to the most powerful possible conclusion; both plays tie events together not only to increase the logical outcome of the interrelated actions but also to increase the dramatic impact of the plot's change. Timon's rejection of society increases throughout the play, dramatically increasing the magnitude of his madness. Though Apemantus philosophically reflects that Timon's excessive generosity was madness, Timon's mind is not publicly acknowledged as unhinged until he attacks his old friends at the banquet scene, showing a perceptible connection between his mental state and connection to his friends; as Apemantus is ever angry, so too is Timon's misanthropic rage incessant once awoken. Even after death, his final writings flay mankind with vitriolic invective, resulting in an unstopped downward spiral from the moment he acknowledges his friends' falseness. However, despite instantly adopting an extreme misanthropy as he leaves society, Soellner still notes that "generally there is a growing violence of themes and language" (79). While he is in the woods, his visitors provide the means for increasingly extreme rejections of society — his initial rejection of Flavius and Apemantus shows a mad rejection of true friends, but it is not until Timon turns down the Senators that his rejection is given its fullest vitriol. When Timon tells the Senators that he doesn't care if

virgins are raped or old men are murdered in the "contumelious, beastly, mad brained war" (5.2.59), he is talking about a real possibility: he is not joking, this is not empty invective. The Senators think that his earlier railings against society may have been insincere in their extremity, like a child yelling at his father that he hates him and wants him to die, but when the threat of rape and murder actually looms, Timon shows he *really* wants them all to die. Because the revolution occurs after Timon has gone mad, his rejection of society can be increasingly proven sincere, escalating both the scope and seriousness of Timon's choice to leave society as he sequentially rejects Flavius, Apemantus and the Senators. Escalating the action of his misanthropy to its greatest extreme, Timon chooses to die himself rather than endure an existence among men — his final curse is given to Athens' conqueror, the most powerful voice alive for delivering his harsh invective, escalating his rejection of society to the highest possible level.<sup>67</sup> The sequence of events therefore continues to increase appreciation of Timon's insanity till the very end of the play, demonstrating the most effective and logical ordering.

Though Lear seems desperate to stop his flood of insanity, repeatedly crying "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! Keep me in temper, I would not be mad!" (1.5.39-40), he is unable to keep himself fully sane. Admittedly, his wits settle and unsettle throughout the play, and his madness is so ordered as to present some reason mixed with madness while still moving toward a most extreme final madness. The play offers events wherein Lear could potentially resettle his mind as he resettles with friends, such as choosing to enter in the hovel and reuniting with Cordelia before the battle, but

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<sup>67</sup> As Soellner evaluates, "Certainly, everything that concerns Timon in the ending is handled skillfully. It is appropriate for the misanthrope who has rejected the world to die away from it" (48-9).

the tantalizing promise of redemption is pulled out of reach — when Cordelia is killed, Lear's madness reaches its height, and he howls for his horrific loss. The violence in *Lear* likewise escalates, going from the banishments of Cordelia and Kent in the beginning,<sup>68</sup> to the blinding of Gloucester and killing of Cornwall's servant, to the offstage war and Cornwall's death, to the killing of Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia in the final scene: the horror of each violent act escalates dramatically throughout the play, increasing the emotional affect to achieve the greatest potency in the final unravelling. Moreover, the order of events in both plays leads to a more logical inherent unity. Lear's *hamartia* starts an interconnected chain of events that flow logically from one to the next, and the proximity of actions makes the characters' reactions more plausible within the context of the whole: Gloucester, for example, may have been more sceptical of Edgar's alleged treachery, had it not immediately followed Lear's outrageous actions. After seeing the spectacle of a king going mad and banishing his most beloved friends, one knows that anything is possible — if a father can damn his best daughter, one's best son can betray his father.<sup>69</sup> Rashly deciding to prosecute Edgar is partially a reaction to his preoccupation with Lear's fall "from bias of nature" (1.2.104), evinced by the fact that less than half the lines in his speech on Edgar's betrayal relate to his own sons (1.7.97-110).<sup>70</sup> The order over events is equally significant in *Timon*: it is important that Timon asked for help with his debts before Alcibiades revolted, because the Senators do not yet

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<sup>68</sup> Severing them from the kingdom and from Lear's friendship is at least symbolically violent.

<sup>69</sup> As a tangential note, Aristotle cites Agathon as saying, "As you might expect, many improbable things do happen" (1456a25-6), and once one has experienced this axiom as true, it becomes easier to believe in things lacking plausibility.

<sup>70</sup> Edmund's success may not depend solely on his choice to act after Lear's mad banishments, but his success is at the least catalyzed by the position of his action so close to Lear's irrational behaviour.

realize they will need his help and they turn him down. After Alcibiades turns on them, they return to Timon with offers of wealth and honour, but it is too late to retrieve the intransigent misanthrope. If Alcibiades had been exiled before Timon exiled himself, Timon's faith in friends to keep him afloat would be upheld by the Senators' dependence on his friendship, and he would not have become a misanthrope —the order of events is therefore integral to the logic of *Timon's* overall development. In both *Timon* and *Lear*, the order of events follows logical necessity and also follows an artistic ordering that increases the power of the overall plot.

The last way to judge a plot's elements is construed as scale, "since something beautiful," Aristotle claims, "whether [it be] a living thing or a complete artefact, must not only have an orderly structure but must also have a size that is not arbitrary — for beauty is a matter of size as well as of order" (1450b34-7). I earlier argued that the scale of events within each play escalates appropriately so that the magnitude of each action contributes to the greatest possible dramatic effect; in this way, both tragedies are artistically woven, and uphold Booth's third measurement question, "Are the parts the right size (does this particular dune buggy need a lower chassis, to lower the center of gravity)?" (396).<sup>71</sup> All of the parts within each are play are the proper size in relation to each other and in relation to the order of their play's general action.

Though the plots of both are whole actions filled with appropriately scaled elements, *Timon* and *Lear* are of drastically different scales when compared to each other. England's division and invasion, for example, is of a much greater magnitude than

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<sup>71</sup> Booth further points out that "These three criteria, addition/deletion, transposition, and expansion/contraction, will always — yes, always, give us something worthwhile to say about any form we meet, especially whenever we are challenged to make explicit our intuitive likes and dislikes" (396).

Alcibiades' revolution: the English state is much larger than the city-state of Athens, and the fall of England involves much greater violence. Lear's bisection of the kingdom and banishment of Cordelia is a worse mistake than Timon's overspending, a greater *hamartia* contributing to its play's greater overall action. Furthermore, Lear's betrayal by his kin constitutes a greater *pathos* than Timon's betrayal by kith, for the daughters' duty to their father is intrinsically much stronger than the Senator's duty to Timon. As Lear receives a dearer wound from those who should be most tightly bound, his madness consequently reaches greater depths — though both reject civilization and go mad outdoors, the torrential downpour thrashing Lear in his madness shows a much greater detachment from society than Timon's desperate digging for roots. In the physical exhibition of their madness, Lear genuinely loses all *logos* at least momentarily when he descends into lunatic howling, while Timon says he will "let sour words go by, and language end" (5.2.105), but his epitaph continues to spew angry words at the world regardless, suggesting enough reason for him to communicate with future people through writing. The brutal violence and bloodshed in *Lear* also generates greater *pathos* than the ambiguous threats of violence ending *Timon*. Moreover, the numerous characters' *peripeteia* in *Lear* all amplify each other to generate an even greater impression of the action: as Lear and Gloucester are both undone by treacherous children, the general change of the dissolution of patriarchy is amplified because each father's reversal echoes the other's.<sup>72</sup> As the great many actions in *Lear* tie together, they constitute a single, great

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<sup>72</sup> The many familial relations in *Lear* stands in stark contrast to *Timon* which has no blood relations. Aristotle explains that the audience is most strongly affected "when the tragic acts (*pathē*) happen within [the bond of] blood-relations -- for example, when brother kills brother, or son [kills] father, or mother [kills] son, or son mother" (1453b15-

whole impressive for the sheer volume of interrelated actions and for the way those actions magnify general change. Though *Timon's* plot is well knit with an orderly structure, it is dwarfed by *Lear's* colossal soul composed of greater madness, violence and general action.

Though *Lear* is undeniably of a greater magnitude, it is not necessarily *better* than *Timon*, for there is a chance that *Lear* is actually excessively large. A. C. Bradley, for example, calumniates *Lear* by calling it "too huge for the stage" (175). Excessively large plots may well be worse than smaller ones, for magnitude (like all things) can miss the beautiful mark through excess, and Aristotle explains that

beauty is a matter of size as well as of order, which is why an extremely small creature does not get to be beautiful (because you get a close [enough] look [at it] just at the moment that it goes out of focus), and neither can a very huge one be beautiful [be beautiful] (because then a [single] view is not possible at all -- its unity and wholeness elude your vision) as would be the case if a creature were a thousand miles [long] — so, in the same way that with [inanimate] bodies and living creatures [a just] size is needed ([a size] that can be well taken in at a single glance), so also with plots. (1450b37-51a5)

*Lear* is indeed a Leviathan of a tragedy, but I would contend, that *Lear* is not too large — those who say so simply have minds that are too small. Anything can be seen as a whole in a single glance, provided one finds the right lens and perspective. By seeing *Lear* as a play unified by the interrelation of all actions rather than unified by its main character, one can see the play's general shape as *the fall of patriarchal rule* — if a shape can be summarized in five words, I'd say that's sufficient to claim it visible in a single glance.<sup>73</sup>

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23), and for this reason the wrongs Gloucester and Lear suffer at the hands of their children are far more tragic than exile faced by Timon and Alcibiades.

<sup>73</sup> Aristotle asserts that dramatic plots "must have a length as can be readily held in memory. The limit of the length is established in one sense by [the conditions of] the

The statement may lack detail, like a picture of the Earth from space, but such a picture nevertheless condenses the titanic magnitude into a single frame. Lear's and Gloucester's *peripeteia* mirror each other and thereby amplify the general fall of the patriarchy, but as discussed earlier, the actions that cause each character's reversals of fortune are so tightly woven to each other's action so their fall is a single action and as such the plot unfolds in the most condensed way possible. As Aristotle claims that the greater the plot, "provided it is perfectly clear [as a whole], the more beautiful [it is]" (1451a11-2) and *Lear's* magnanimous plot makes it as beautiful as possible. *Lear's* grand beauty may dwarf *Timon's*, but the fall of Athens is in its own right a great and beautiful act — it is by comparison with *Lear* alone that *Timon* could be counted diminutive and of deficient beauty.

In both plays, the main character's madness leads to an excessive action that eventually contributes to the state's collapse. Timon's mad *hamartia* leads to a solipsism that exposes Athens to Alcibiades' revolution, and Lear's illogical *hamartia* leaves England open to civil war and foreign invasion. Their actions do not constitute the entirety of their play's plots, but their irrational actions form a part of the whole and are carried away through connection with the other actions. Irreversibly stuck spiralling down the track of insanity, Timon and Lear are lost to the whirlpool of their madness; as a result of events enacted out of both characters' madness, insanity ripples across the web of tightly interwoven actions, and society's stability collapses. Their madness does not

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dramatic [contexts] and [the scope] of [human] perception" (1451a5-7). He lived before telescopes, microscopes and supercolliders revealed that human perception is almost unlimited with the right tools; nonetheless, even by Aristotelian standards, it is sufficient to note that actors regularly memorize the entirety of King Lear and empirically prove that it is not too large to be held in memory, even if it is not summarized to my simple statement of the general plot.

destroy the world itself, but their madness allows the violent forces of their worlds to break free from the usual bonds and devastate social bounds by overthrowing the ruling order. The mad choices they make also reveal the difficulty of controlling a play's *praxis* once it gets rolling — Lear repeatedly claims that he does not want to go mad, but after splitting the kingdom, events play out in such a way that his attendant mental collapse seems inevitable. In this way it is valuable to understand any character's *hamartia*, *peripeteia* and recognition, but to understand their full significance, it is imperative to consider them within the context of the play's overall plot. Seen as a unified whole, the actions reveal their complete picture, and it is the culmination of all acts that creates the magnificence of tragedy's beauty.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### Without Friendship, We're All Just Animals

In both *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*, madness is portrayed as a movement away from society stemming from some kind of excess, presenting a strong case for a later-Shakespearean interest in excess connected with madness. Excess is called mad when enacted within society, but it is proven mad by the fact that it destroys Timon even though he breaks free from societal bounds (as excess of emotion is furthermore said to kill Gloucester). Excess is typically defined as mad only in respect to a given limit determined by a culture's *logos* (as Aristotle defined the most important aspect of language as its ability to define justice),<sup>74</sup> but in more general terms, deliberately

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<sup>74</sup> As Foucault explains, “There is not a single culture anywhere in the world where everything is permitted. And it has been known for some time that man does not begin with freedom, but with limits and the line that cannot be crossed” (544). Aiming for the good of self preservation, every society defines its own boundaries, its own laws and customs, and excess is determined in relation to these — it is by creating a line that cannot be crossed that one is able to define, socially, any particular behaviour as excessive. The Athenian Senators, for example, believe that killing abroad is not excessive but killing at home is, and they exile Alcibiades when he tries to defend a man who kills at home. The nature of excess is thus generally considered in its relation to social harm rather than personal harm, exhibited by the fact that Timon is not called mad by anyone except Apemantus until he starts throwing stones and water in people's faces. Philosophically speaking, willfully choosing an excessive path that leads to self-destruction can be considered madness, but generally speaking it seems excess and madness are condemned only when they threaten to harm society at large *and* cross a delineated boundary (as the Senators can see that warring with other nations does not directly hurt Athens but murdering Athenians within the city walls does and so punish a soldier for killing at home but not abroad; ironically, they do not see their punishments as excessive, as their punishments do not go against the established lines of social action. The senators may be unwise for their excess, but because they do not exceed legal norms they are not called insane). Lear's actions, like Timon's, are called mad only when their excess threatens social stability: after Lear gives excessive portions of land to Goneril and Regan and a deficient portion to Cordelia, Kent calls his sanity into question, and Lear is indeed mad for rashly exposing the country to future strife through his distribution of power. In a Foucauldian analysis, excess would be considered mad for crossing a social line that must not be crossed and thereby endangering society's sustenance.

pursuing excess is mad because it is likely to result in harm instead of self-sustaining happiness. Madness in these plays can be seen as taking actions considered likely to harm either one's society or one's own person. It is most fundamentally the unsustainability of excess that construes madness, and societal limitations are accordingly intended to restrain excess (and focus action toward the mean for the end of preserving both society and its citizens). Excessive giving in these plays perhaps offers comment on King James' notorious liberality,<sup>75</sup> but considering the plays' actions reveals aspects of early modern thinking that go beyond specific social context: the examination of beastliness is particularly pronounced in these works, a perspective that may well transcend Shakespeare's particular historical situation. Both plays present societies' ferocious nobles as flatterers who respond viciously to Timon's and Lear's gifts, eventually driving these two men to animalistic madness: that they are injured by beastly people and then adopt a beastly demeanor themselves doubly reinforces the ease with which man slides into beast. The societies are full of beasts, people who turn on those who have helped them and who are capable of barbarically torturing enemies, but as Timon and Lear increasingly distance themselves from society they themselves become increasingly like beasts, degenerating until they are unable to converse with other political animals. Because it allows for a definition of justice, *logos* is one of the most important structures maintaining society, and because beasts are without *logos* they are unable to delineate limits through laws and social norms: survival is the only index of an animal's rationality, reason reduced to instinct. By this evaluation, Timon and Lear are insane even for beasts, for Timon is unable to subsist on roots and Kent points out to Lear that creatures "that

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<sup>75</sup> For comparisons of these plays with the court of James I, see Hadfield.

love the night love not nights such as these" and "man's nature cannot carry th'affliction" of nakedly enduring the storm (3.2.42-9). Though they behave like beasts, they do not become acclimatized to beastly behaviour, and both Timon and Lear ultimately expire. Like werewolves torn between two worlds, the political animals reject society for its beastliness, but in becoming like beasts themselves, they show that they cannot actually subsist without society's sustaining friendship and die detached from their closest friends.

Timon's and Lear's excessive faith in false proclamations of friendship is one of the most crucial aspects leading to their mad self-destruction, and their mad actions also start a chain of events that entail the government's destruction. As the main characters are pillars of their respective societies, their madness leads to society's self-destruction through revolution. One can extrapolate a Shakespearean preoccupation with humanity's falseness in the creation of societies filled with beasts, but despite this preoccupation, turning away from friendship itself is shown as irrational and beastly. Because both plays present, in contrast to the flatterers' false friendship, the loyalty of Gloucester, Kent, Apemantus, the Fool, Flavius, Edgar and Cordelia — a whole host of individuals who remain true friends and try to return their wayward madmen to society — we have no reason to believe that Timon's excessive misanthropy wholly reflects Shakespearean beliefs. We are given a more moderate view that society is not inhabited exclusively by monsters, but nonetheless face the recurring suggestion that one should not judge solely by proclamations of loyal love.

When madness leaves a crack in society that weakens its integrity, the wolfish beasts in both plays come out to tear the world apart.<sup>76</sup> These plays present a fear of society's instability and a fascination with humanity's potential to descend into beastly states of being. *Timon* treats the topic more philosophically and offers Apemantus' explicit condemnation extreme behaviour, while *Lear* connects excessive action to madness and beastliness through spectacle: Lear's raging in the storm is more visibly mad than Timon's time in the woods digging for roots (though Timon's language may be equally terrifying), just as Gloucester's torture and the many staged murders in *Lear* visibly enact the depths of man's monstrosity far more spectacularly than the Senators' excessively conservative decrees. Whether through philosophical dialogue or sheer spectacle, both plays nonetheless present a strong contingent of beastly people lurking in society's shadows under false pretences of friendship, and also show that moving away from friendship toward even greater beastliness is a mad response — Lear's animalistic witlessness waxes and wanes in direct correlation to his connection with friends, and Timon is ever mad as he maintains his beastly, absolute misanthropy despite discovering at least one honest man. The line between man and beast thus becomes difficult to discern<sup>77</sup>: beastliness in these plays is not necessarily opposed to being human, but is construed as at least partly equitable with unfriendliness. Good friendship reveals itself as

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<sup>76</sup> Though Alcibiades is stopped before destroying Athens by the Senators' surrender, the sword still hangs in the air and violence is still expected to take a dreadful toll of lives vengefully punishing the false friends.

<sup>77</sup> Shannon notes that Shakespeare generally does not accept a man/animal binary, pointing to the fact that "while his works contain 141 instances of the term 'beast' and 127 instances of term 'creature,' the word 'animal' appears *only 8 times*. For each of these three terms, Shakespeare's reference is sometimes to 'humans' and sometimes to 'animals'" (174), showing that the binary between man and beast is not a concrete division in Shakespearean thinking, and certainly is not portrayed as such in *Timon* or *Lear*.

the crucial determinant of a healthy mind and a healthy society, and in both of these plays deficient friendship degenerates into madness and social revolt. Whether the characters are inside or outside of society's bounds, deficient friendliness denotes beastliness, suggesting that without friendship, we're all just animals.

*We imagine Plato and Aristotle only in long pedants' gowns. They were upright people like everyone else, laughing with their friends. And when they were amusing themselves by writing their 'Laws' and 'Politics' they did it light-heartedly. It was the least philosophical and serious part of their lives, the most philosophical part being to live simply and calmly. If they wrote about politics, it was as if to provide rules for a madhouse. And if they pretended to treat it as something important, it is because they knew the madmen they were talking to thought they were kings and emperors. They connived with their delusions in order to restrain their madness to as mild a form as possible.*

— Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* 457.

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