

The Relation of *Parade's End* to the Misanthrope Tradition

The dramatic character of the misanthrope has often been used to represent the ideals of an older society opposed to a new and emerging one. David Konstan characterizes the misanthrope as one who consistently sees himself as belonging to a former age, who "perceives himself as the representative of a social ideal which others have betrayed, and codemns his fellows for their perversity and hypocrisy" (97). The misanthrope is in many ways a feudal lord who finds himself to be an anachronism in an age that no longer shares his values. J. W. Draper, for example, called *Timon of Athens* "a dramatic elegy on the ideals of chivalry that were succumbing in a capitalistic age" (20). In Moliere's play *Le Misanthrope*, the main character, like Timon, also belongs to a former age. Paul Benichou has pointed out that he is alone among the submissive nobles tamed to the reign of pleasure under Louis XIV in expressing the proud independence of the old feudal nobility (238).

We see the tension between the end of the feudal age and the advent of a new era portrayed on stage not only in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, but also at the beginning of the Twentieth Century in the events of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, in which the hero, Christopher Tietjens, is a representative of the old system. A Tory "of an extinct type" and the English country male *pur sang*, he makes devoted vassals of those on his estate. Ford calls him "the feudal system all complete" (112). But like Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*, he is already out of place in a changing world; he is extinct, "like a mastadon" (762), after the "parade" that has been England comes to an end with the events of World War I. In reinserting the dramatic type of the misanthrope into the context of the novel, Ford redefines the scope of the character to some extent; however, the basic drama of the misanthrope remains remarkably similar to earlier dramatic representations, and in particular to Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* and Moliere's *Le Misanthrope*.

Throughout the four novels that make up *Parade's End*, Ford gives tantalizing, if inconclusive hints that he might consciously have had in mind the character of the misanthrope when writing the novels. There are, for example, numerous dog images associated with Christopher Tietjens and his brother Mark, that recall some of the diogenic imagery of the exchanges between Timon and Apemantus. Christopher's double—Mark—has "atrabilarian eyes" (277), a description which, given his misanthropy, might recall *L'Atrabilaire amoureux*, the subtitle of *Le Misanthrope*. Mark naturally disapproves of Christopher's disloyal wife Sylvia who resembles Moliere's coquettish Celimen.

It is in the personal characteristics of the hero and the shape of his story, however, rather than in the imagery or the allusions that one may see most clearly the resemblance of *Parade's End* to the earlier treatments of the misanthrope archetype. If we construct a portrait of Christopher Tietjens by drawing on those elements found

in common with Timon or Alceste, we find a complex personality that follows a definite pattern: he is a sensitive young man inclined to melancholy; he is passionate and idealistic, yet proud and egotistical, needing the recognition that he receives from others for his superior qualities. He is a member of the upper class who feels and expresses contempt for his peers' betrayal of aristocratic ideals, for their lack of virtue, and for their descent into bestial depravity. He sees himself as the only innocent in a corrupt and cowardly society, finding nothing to praise in any of his contemporaries. But, in spite of his rude contempt, Christopher is a magnet for the attentions of others, and he is loved by the most desired women of his circle. Morally, as well as artistically, he wants a masculine ideal, which he sets against the weak and cowardly traits he finds in his contemporaries. His spiritual alienation from his contemporaries eventually results in a physical separation, through a process of betrayal and martyrization. In his exile, Christopher is pursued by friends and enemies alike, and before the conclusion of his story, there is a certain vengeance visited on his enemies. In spite of his sufferings, he is not altogether the innocent victim of a vicious society; he participates actively in the process of his isolation by systematically rejecting money, friendship, political responsibility, language, and, in the case of Timon and of Christopher Tietjens' double, Mark Tietjens, life itself.

The character of the misanthrope and the drama that is determined by his character from a work of social criticism; *Timon of Athens*, *Le Misanthrope* and *Parade's End* contain criticisms of their contemporary societies. The attacks are aimed primarily at the upper classes, whose besetting sins are the twin vices of cowardice and corruption. The 'coeurs corrompus' and 'lache flatterie' (93) that revolt Alceste are the trademarks of Christopher's contemporaries in Edwardian England and of the "coward and lascivious town" (V, iv., 1) of Athens. The extremity of the misanthrope's position, however, reveals him as more than a social critic; he is also a critic of human nature who is so unable to bear with equanimity the weight of human corruption that he must inevitably separate himself from it in the end as from something unclean. In *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare uses animal symbolism to characterize the degeneration of man into beast. Timon says, for example, "The commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts" (IV, iii, 5-6); and Apemantus states, "The strain of man's bred out/Into Baboon and Monkey" (I, i, 259-260). Christopher echoes this sentiment when he describes men in society as "Cats and monkeys. Monkeys and cats. All humanity is there" (79). 3.

Soellner has argued that the pessimism in *Timon of Athens* should be seen in the context of a general European crisis characterized by disorder rather than order, a time when both society and nature were thought to be in a state of decay (13-14). In *Parade's End*, Edwardian England is portrayed as being in a similar state of social decadence. In addition to the beast imagery that characterizes man's degeneration, there are also images of rot that echo those in *Timon of Athens*, symbolizing the decay of the world. The diogenic claim that there are no honest men in contemporary society is a shaping theme of *Parade's End*, and if Christopher Tietjens' denunciations of

dishonesty and its attendant vice of hypocrisy form a milder echo of Timon's diatribes, they nonetheless warn of a civilization that is on the brink of destruction. Early in the first novel, Christopher announces that England will be involved in the coming war "Simply because you fellows are such damn hypocrites." He adds, "We're always, as it were, committing adultery—like your fellow!—with the name of Heaven on our lips" (20). As a corollary to the beast imagery, there is in *Parade's End* an even more dominant imagery that links man's animal nature with his corruption and his sexual vices with the deterioration of society. A.C. Bradley has noted the loathing with which Timon curses sexual vices and corruption; he finds the same loathing in speeches by Hamlet (97) and Lear (376), both of whom Soellner characterizes as partial misanthropes (12). Ford's portrait of Daniel Gabriel Rossetti almost amounts to a parody of some of these speeches, but his objection to Rossetti's work is aesthetic as well as moral. Intensely hostile to the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ford consistently derides what he considers a weak and decadent art that he finds concomitant with moral decadence.

The misanthrope stands apart from a decadent society and is a critic of his peers both through his language and his conduct; his virtuous and heroic stances form a silent reproach to accompany his verbal recriminations. The superior quality of the hero is perhaps the most basic tool of social criticism in these works. Soellner writes that *Timon of Athens* "is in a very eminent way Timon's play," and he cites not only Timon's share of the dialogue, second only to Hamlet's, but also the absence of any important secondary characters (83). He concludes that Shakespeare was obviously intent on "painting a comprehensively dark picture of Athenian society without giving strong dramatic prominence to anyone but Timon" (84). Although the secondary characters in *Le Misanthrope* have more relative importance than those in *Timon of Athens*, the play nonetheless centers around the hero, representing, as Janet Morgan writes, "in its purest form this conception of dramatic action which finds its *raison d'être* and logical unity in the character of the hero" (295).

In *Parade's End*, Ford concentrates on the character of the hero to such an extent that the other characters lose some of their reality, receiving their function largely in terms of the psychological necessities of the hero and his drama. The stylization of the misanthrope's story approaches allegory. The characters may be divided according to the way they relate to the ego of the hero: there are those who represent a doubling of his personality, those who admire and love him, and those who contribute to his victimization. While it is possible to see the secondary characters in *Timon of Athens* and *Le Misanthrope* sometimes in terms of these categories, we see them as such mainly through the perceptions of Alceste and Timon. What Shakespeare and Moliere accomplish to a greater extent through character, Ford tends to accomplish through plot. Alceste's wish to be distinguished, to be avenged, and to have his low opinion of others confirmed is in Moliere's play a reflection of the darker side of the misanthrope's personality, an indication of his selfish egoism. In *Parade's End*, the author realizes the wishes of the hero through his manipulation of the plot, leaving

him more innocent than Alceste or Timon.

While some critics have claimed that Ford clearly showed his hero's weaknesses, *Parade's End* is often criticized for the unrealistic perfection of the main character. Although Christopher's strengths and weaknesses are similar to those of his misanthropic predecessors, there is a disproportionate amount of time devoted to his strengths, even allowing for the portion of his portrait that may be satirical. The endless stream of praise supplied by a coterie of admirers is something of an expressionistic exaggeration of the more subtle testimonies to the superior qualities of Timon and Alceste. Christopher, who realizes that "he needed that sort of worship" (599), has been granted beyond all measure Alceste's wish to be distinguished by his friends above others, a wish that causes Moliere's hero, unlike Ford's, to appear somewhat naive and petulant.

Supremely confident in the knowledge of their superiority and cynical about the weaknesses of others, Christopher and his brother Mark treat other members of their class with a consistent and undisguised contempt. They find no good Englishmen of their own class, and the only men for whom they feel affection are seen in some way as socially inferior or not quite English. Just as Timon and Alceste refuse all offers of friendship, Christopher rejects out of hand the possibility of friendship with an equal, finding that "close mental communion" with a man of his class would be "intolerable" (752).

It is not surprising that these old-fashioned warriors find no communion with peers in the context of a polite society, which by its very definition is antipathetic to their natures. The dissimulation of one's real opinions and, worse, the use of flattery to rise socially are proof to the misanthrope of the dishonesty and cowardice of his peers, which he considers to be opposed to a masculine ideal. The vehemence of the misanthrope's refusal to flatter is manifested in his rudeness. Christopher, although not as extravagantly rude as Timon, is at least as much so as Alceste. His friends, who worry that his brusque honesty will be socially disadvantageous to him and who counsel him to moderate his criticism, echo the admonitions of Alceste's friends. The misanthrope's discourtesy is symbolic of his alienation in a society that will ultimately reject him, and society's rejection of the misanthrope is also pictured as a rejection of the heroic impulse. Both Christopher and Timon are military heroes who find themselves social pariahs rejected by a hostile civilian population.

Although *Timon of Athens*, *Le Misanthrope* and *Parade's End* all contain indictments of a society that rejects heroism, the final rejection is that of the misanthrope. His self-exile is motivated by a sense of betrayal, financial and social problems, a spiritual alienation from peers, and a wish to be separate from a corrupt society. It is an act of betrayal that sets in motion the events that eventually lead to his withdrawal from society. Timon's friends turn on him "with clamorous demands of broken bonds" (II, ii, 38) which result in his financial ruin. Alceste uses again and again forms of the work *trahir*, declaring himself betrayed by his friends, by the woman he loves, and by society in general. His frustration culminates in his final

speech, where, seeing himself betrayed from all sides, he announces his intention to go into isolation. In a similar fashion, Christopher is systematically betrayed by a whole society before he finally decides to separate himself from it.

Of all the characters who betray Christopher, none surpasses his wife Sylvia in the ability to cause him pain. It was Moliere, according to David Konstan, who probably added the problem of infidelity to the misanthrope's woes (113); indeed, his portraits of the coquettish Celimene and of the sincere Eliante, the woman Alceste turns to for revenge, may have influenced Ford's portrait of Sylvia and of Valentine Wannop, who resemble the women in Moliere's play both in their personalities and in their roles in the misanthrope's life. Both Alceste and Christopher break out of the net of an unfaithful love and take their revenge by turning to other women. Alceste states quite plainly that he wants to punish Celimene by proposing to Eliante. Although Christopher never admits that he wishes to punish Sylvia, again preserving his innocence, his actions accomplish this in a terrible way. Alceste's moment of revenge, when he rejects Celimene and turns to another woman, lengthens in *Parade's End* to a period of several years, at the end of which Sylvia is the sole figure whose fate borders truly on the tragic. The misanthrope's relationship with an unfaithful woman reflects his conflict with society as a whole. His hurt demands a certain revenge. Christopher is absolved of feeling that ignoble passion, however, and is avenged by "Provvv." Timon and Alceste are avenged to a certain extent through a version of providence—the arrival of Alcibiades to punish the Athenians in *Timon of Athens* and the public humiliation of Celimene in *Le Misanthrope*—but Timon and Alceste themselves also demand vengeance.

Rejection of an unfaithful love is but one aspect of the misanthrope's pattern of rejection. Another reflection of his wish to turn away from the world is his wish to break off communication. Alceste repeatedly says that he does not want to hear or to speak and only wants to be left alone. Before his suicide, Timon says, "Lips, let sour words go by and language end" (V, i, 218). In *Parade's End*, the search for silence is a major theme. Christopher's "terribly silent personality" (299) seeks from the beginning a "quiet place." Christopher's brother Mark plays out the misanthrope's role by turning away from language completely. When a friend, echoing Philinthe's advice to Alceste, tells Mark that "one must adapt oneself to one's day; the times were changed" (778), Mark suffers what seems to be a stroke and never speaks or moves from that day forward. We learn later that his withdrawal is voluntary; it is not that he is unable to speak or move but that he refuses to do so. What he wants, like Christopher, is to be out of the world, to be "out of a world that he found almost more fusionless and dishonest than Christopher found it" (740).

Because rejection is a basic impulse of the misanthrope, his persecution by society is an ambiguous affair; he is too anxious to be a victim, rejecting all opportunities to save himself. One of Christopher's fellow soldiers expresses his regret that such a good man should have so many troubles; he tells Christopher that "the only use we can make of you is to martyrise you" (454). A short time later, however he says "Your

mania for sacrificing yourself makes you lose all... all sense of proportion" (460). Timon, Alceste, and Christopher have in common what John Simon calls Alceste's "spiritual masochism" (409). Suffering seems to them to be a necessary step toward purging themselves of the corruption of the rest of humanity. It is partly in this light that we may view the misanthrope's financial problems, which are not entirely caused by the greed of others. Like Timon, Christopher gives money away freely and refuses repayment, like the lord of the manor conferring gifts, and then has trouble later collecting loans when he is in need. For Christopher, this is another proof that society must ostracize goodness. However, his friends, like Timon's, reproach him for this reckless philanthropy even while lamenting the fact that others take advantage of him. For his part, Alceste simply wishes that others will take his money unjustly so that he may be confirmed in his misanthropy. The misanthrope must purge himself of money, instrument of the world's corruption, in order to see himself as innocent.

Preferring to turn away from the world rather than to engage in its struggles, the misanthrope rejects opportunities to save himself or others. Timon rejects a chance to save Athens, Alceste rejects his right to defend the justice of his cause, and Christopher rejects his role as a member of the ruling class. As David Konstan says, the misanthrope rails but refuses to engage (98). He leaves society and returns to the isolations and innocence of the country. Unlike the other misanthropes, however, Christopher undergoes a transformation before his retreat to the country that makes his exile seem a heroic effort to found a new society as an alternative to the old corrupt one. During the war he sheds his chivalric prejudices and assumes responsibility, takes action to save himself and others, begins to care about money as a necessary means of survival, and in an exultant mood goes off to live with Valentine in the country.

This mood is not sustained, however, in the last novel of the tetralogy, *The Last Post*, which portrays a domestic world dominated by women, where the hero struggles to retain his heroic qualities. The only image we have of Christopher is one of defeat, when he appears at the very end of the novel with a piece of the Great Groby Tree, symbol of his family, which has been cut down and has brought with it a large part of the family manor house. One cannot help but think of the tree that is cut down by Timon, just before his suicide and also of the imagery provided by his broken house. With the hero left in an attitude of defeat, and the potential end of the misanthrope's story realized in Mark's seemingly self-willed death, the tetralogy ends without fulfilling the promise of a blissful new society outside the bounds of a corrupt civilization; and while not tragic, it ends at least on a tentative note that leaves no doubts about man's ability to live happily in any sort of social arrangement.

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