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INTRODUCTION

Date

Since we have no knowledge of *Timon of Athens* having been performed in Shakespeare's lifetime, dating it will always remain a matter of conjecture. Arguments have been based on various assumptions. One possibility is to consider the play's sources. Shakespeare used Thomas North's translation of Plutarch for *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. For *Timon*, Shakespeare used the *Lives* of Antony and Alcibiades, whom Plutarch coupled with Coriolanus. Thus he may have composed *Timon* within the same period of time – that is, 1607–8.[1] Bullough places the play after *Antony and Cleopatra* and before *Coriolanus*, on the hypothesis that Shakespeare may have realised the thinness of the Timon subject matter and then turned away from it to work on *Coriolanus*.

Another point of orientation is provided by the play's thematic affinity with *Lear*, but it is an open question whether to place it before this play or after it. Maxwell lists a majority of critics favouring an earlier dating of *Timon*, amongst them J. Dover Wilson and P. Alexander, who considered *Timon* to be 'a tentative treatment of the theme so majestically handled in *Lear*'.[2]

Reflections on the comparatively 'free' versification and the rough nature of the blank verse[3] have led some scholars to place it close to the romances. Bertram and Brownlow take it to be Shakespeare's last play, written after 1614, and think that its unfinished state is due to Shakespeare's death.

The play and its themes

ASPECTS OF FORTUNE

In the play's first scene the Poet's description of Fortune is conventional, recalling the Goddess Fortuna in medieval writing.[4] The most common attribute is the picture of Fortune's Wheel with four riders sitting on its spokes, signifying the stages of their rise and fall. The concept of the hill with Fortune's throne on top of it, signifying inaccessibility and adversity, is also not uncommon.[5] These portrayals of Fortune's impact on people's lives are both sombre and stereotyped; the fact that the Poet adopts such a model emphasises the conventional nature of his art: the stereotypical *de casibus*

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[1] These points were made by Honigmann, 'Timon', and by Oliver, p. xli.

[2] Maxwell, pp. xii–xiii.

[3] See Textual Analysis, pp. 193–5 below.

[4] An extensive account is given by Patch, ch. 2. For a representative view of Fortune's power at this period see Sackville's 'Induction' in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell, 1938, pp. 298–317.

[5] See Patch, pp. 132–6, and Chew, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 53–4. However, Chew, 'Fortune', says that 'the image of Fortune seated upon a hill is one that does not occur . . . anywhere in the graphic arts'.

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tale; the mechanistically conceived patterning of an individual's life; and the didactic stance of a narrator telling a cautionary tale.

Frederick Kiefer has demonstrated how the portrayals of Fortune were modified during the latter part of the fifteenth century.[1] What had formerly been essential implements of her activity – above all, the wheel – were discarded. Many conventional features signifying Fortune's absolute authority over men's lives were replaced by others which allowed man scope to choose and to decide for himself which course to take.[2] These modifications in the iconographic representation of Fortune have their correlative in new descriptions of her power and influence. Machiavelli devoted chapter 25 of *The Prince* to the problem of 'How much Fortune can do in Human Affairs, and in what Mode it may be opposed'. He strongly argued against the belief 'that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God, that men cannot correct them with their prudence'.[3] The way to exercise one's prudence was to act out flexible responses to changing situations, and not cling to absolute and rigid norms of conduct.

Telling the story of a man's life with these considerations in mind would require far greater complexity, and far less rigidity, since it would have to accommodate his own initiatives, all the measures and countermeasures which someone takes against Fortune's dealings. Only then could he be judged prudent or imprudent.

Montaigne, too, asserts that we should not attempt to find excuses in external determinants such as Fortune for things turning out badly for us. 'Our good, and our evill hath no dependancy, but from our selves. Let us offer our vowes and offerings unto it; and not to fortune. She hath no power over our manners.'[4] Francis Bacon, in his essay 'Of Fortune', also argues in favour of man's ability to control his own fortune: 'It cannot be denied, but Outward Accidents, conduce much to *Fortune*: Favour, Opportunitie . . . But chiefly, the Mould of a Mans *Fortune*, is in his owne hands. *Faber quisque Fortunae suae*; saith the Poet.' And he goes so far as to claim that 'the Exercised *Fortune* maketh the Able Man'.[5]

This concept of Fortune, which does not completely rule out Fortune's power over man's life, but expresses confidence in man's ability to meet adversities and at least partly shape his own fortune, is 'new' when compared with the medieval concept which makes man acquiesce far more in what Fortune has in store for him. In an article on the impact of the Christian idea of Providence, disseminated by Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, upon the concept of Fortune, F. P. Pickering observes that 'there was some notable advance from *simple* medieval ideas towards a final sophistication in the Renaissance'.[6] The driving force in this development is a growing determination to

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[1] Kiefer, 'The conflation of Fortuna and Occasio in Renaissance thought and iconography', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979), 1–27.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 3–5.

[3] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. H. C. Mansfield, 1985, p. 98.

[4] Montaigne, *Essays*, 1.50 ('Of Democritus and Heraclitus'), trans. John Florio, ed. G. Saintsbury, 3 vols., 1892–3, 1, 349 f.

[5] Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan, 1985. The author of 'Each man is maker of his own fortune' is either Plautus (see *ibid.*, p. 264) or Sallust (see Harry Levin, *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher*, 1961, p. 206).

[6] Pickering, *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages*, 1970, pp. 182–91, p. 185.

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diminish the idea of Fortune's power and authority. 'The old tag that a man may "fashion" his own fortune (*as faber fortunae suae*) becomes an influential philosophy. This is, in a way, a return to the classical conception of Fortune . . .'[1] Juvenal's Satire X gives a striking example: 'Thou wouldst have no divinity, O Fortune, if we had but wisdom; it is we that make a goddess of thee, and place thee in the skies.'[2]

These changes in the conception of Fortune's power have repercussions on Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The focus shifts away from Fortune's dominance and man's submission and stresses instead man's ingenuity and scope in creating his own identity and shaping his own life. The dramatic hero negotiates new relationships to society and to metaphysics. In turn new and different responses are prompted from audiences and readers. There is a wide range of alternatives in the approach and interpretation of a text: to assume that Fortune has a governing power over men's lives will lead to a corresponding view of the text's cohesion, thereby reducing the significance of other features of the dramatic action. The dramatic function of the Poet might be – has been – taken as a guide to interpreting the whole dramatic action. The Poet certainly does impart a schematised picture of the course of man's life, modelled after the rise-and-fall pattern of medieval tradition. The Poet's message, also, is that his poem should be understood as a warning. This didactic impact is corroborated by the Painter's reaction: 'A thousand moral paintings I can show, / That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's' (1.1.93–4). Yet as we have seen, the original Jacobean audience had an alternative idea, in which man had freedom to choose, and from this point of view the Poet must appear rigidly dogmatic and old-fashioned. It is therefore rather surprising that the Poet has so frequently been accepted by critics as making sense of Timon's career. His 'moral' poem, corroborated by the Painter's 'thousand moral paintings', provides easily applicable terms, and there are copious examples of critics reading the Poet's concept of Fortune as a straightforward guide. Maurice Charney understands the Poet's speech on Fortune as 'the central fable of the play',[3] and, correspondingly, he reads the whole play as a 'dramatic fable like an allegory or morality play, the structure of which is schematic'.[4] Kenneth Muir, writing 'In defence of Timon's Poet', maintains that the 'rough work' that the Poet has composed 'consists of an allegory of Fortune, designed, apparently, to warn Timon . . . The Poet . . . presents the moral of Shakespeare's play.'[5] Other critics writing in this vein simplify character and action so that they fit into a schematised concept denying the possibility of self-determination to characters: 'many of the play's peculiarities result from Shakespeare's attempt to demonstrate the operations of the goddess through dramatic action . . .';[6] '[t]he emphasis is not on what Timon does or has done, but rather on what Fortune does to him and what she causes to be done by others . . .'[7]

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[1] *Ibid.*
[2] II.365–6, in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G. G. Ramsay, Loeb Classical Library, 1918.
[3] Charney, p. 136.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
[5] Muir, 'In defence of Timon's Poet', *EC* 3 (1953), p. 121.
[6] Lewis Walker, 'Fortune and friendship in *Timon of Athens*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 18 (1976), p. 577.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 578.

Interpersonal relations, such as Timon's relations with his so-called friends, are also seen as determined by Fortune: 'Shakespeare is showing how Fortune affects relationships between human beings by presenting a thorough perversion of the ideal of true friendship.'[1]

A modern recasting of this rigid view of Fortune and her role in the play by Kahn and Adelman emerges in readings that explore the psychological dimension of her impact.[2] In these readings, Fortune's traditional role of shaping human destinies is seen as infused with the notion of Fortune as a mother-figure, with a mother's nurturing capacities. The conventional qualities of the medieval Fortune are retained in the mother's dual role of both dispensing bounty and practising betrayal. From this vantage point, the Poet's account of Fortune's residence on a 'high and pleasant hill' (1.1.66), with all kinds of people thronging to catch her attention, turns into the notion of a female body, which 'all kind of natures . . . labour on' (68–9) to get their share of nurture.[3] Lord Timon, as Fortune's elect, at first takes on the role of a child '[t]o climb his happiness' (79) and is thus portrayed as being completely dependent on Fortune/mother.[4] In the Poet's account, this phase of Timon's dependence is followed by one in which he deals out favours to other people; that is, he has created for himself the image that he most enjoys: that of Fortune/mother dealing out favours and nurturing others. This deep-structure reading sees Timon casting himself in the role of a nurturing mother as a way of becoming independent of Fortune's unreliable and treacherous dealings, even going so far as to excise all signs of women's presence and of female nurture.[5] As the Poet's fable shows, however, this attempt to overturn Fortune's female domination ends in disaster: Fortune's elect is spurned (87–8), but this means that Timon fails to play the role of a nurturing and all-sustaining mother.

These psychoanalytical readings are in their own way deterministic, structurally similar both to the medieval concept of Fortune having power over men's lives and to the critical assumption that the Poet's fable provides the key to Timon's history. In his attempt to usurp the mother's nurturing role, Timon is just as doomed as any of Fortune's elect. Viewed within these modern parameters, the history of Timon closely resembles the conventional rise-and-fall pattern and still lends itself to being read as a cautionary tale. An altogether different view of both the Poet's and the Painter's frame of reference is given by David Bevington. According to him, 'both Painter and Poet take as their most axiomatic assumption the ability of art to communicate through fixed correspondences connecting signifier and thing signified. This correlation depends on readily understood truisms about human behavior.'[6] What results is 'that their fine neoplatonic truisms have encouraged the Painter and Poet to bring forth works that are hollow ceremonial forms. Their ability to achieve a "pretty mocking of the life" (1.1.36) takes on a double meaning, of imitation and of travesty.'[7] In short,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 598.
[2] See Kahn, *passim*; Adelman, ch. 7.
[3] Kahn, pp. 36–7, and Adelman, pp. 167–8.
[4] See Kahn, p. 37.
[5] Adelman, pp. 166–8.
[6] Bevington, p. 28.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9.

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their generalised and simplified interpretations of life cast in the form of allegorical frames cannot be taken as a guideline for an audience's reaction. Bevington points out that '[w]hen Shakespeare most wishes to criticize the myth of correspondences, he chooses allegory as the kind of art most given to complacent generalities'.[1]

MONEY/GOLD

The play gives special emphasis to wealth in the form of money/gold and the language is full of allusions to commerce, cash and finance, but nowhere is this done in the explicit manner of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* or Jonson's *Volpone*.

In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas is introduced to us counting his gold and expatiating on the ethical implications of his amassing of riches: 'And thus methinks should men of judgment frame / Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade, / And, as their wealth increaseth, so inclose / Infinite riches in a little room' (1.1.34–7).[2] Volpone holds forth in a similarly declamatory fashion on his veneration of gold and wealth – 'Thou art virtue, fame, / Honour and all things else! Who can get thee, / He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise' (1.1.25–7)[3] – which, by way of inversion, has much in common with Timon's curses on gold. The Merchant praises Timon's moral eminence (1.1.10–12), using expressions like 'goodness' and 'He passes', which, however, simultaneously signal solvency and credit-worthiness.[4] The same applies to the Poet when he speaks of 'minds' who 'tender down / Their services' (1.1.54–7), and to the Old Athenian using 'thrift' in its double sense (1.1.122) and sealing his deal with Timon, about giving away his daughter, by asking for Timon's honour as a 'pawn' (1.1.151). Alcibiades when defending his case in the Athenian senate is ready to 'pawn [his] victories, all [his] honour' to the Senators (3.5.82).[5] The Senators are particularly infected with these habits of language, as can be seen in 5.1.133–45, when one of their ambassadors speaks to Timon of 'their sorrowed render', and uses terms like 'recompense', 'weigh', 'dram', 'heaps and sums of love and wealth'. Even this group of characters who give the impression of being non-calculating are in fact deeply immersed in such language. Examples of this are Flavius's complaint about Timon's reckless generosity (1.2.180–92; in particular 187), and Timon's assurances to the flattering Lords: 'I weigh my friends' affection with mine own' (1.2.204).

The only character in the play who takes issue with these superficially harmless and inoffensive turns of speech is Apemantus. He reveals, at least in linguistic terms, what he regards as the state of this society governed by cupidity, veiling avarice behind a mask of courteously correct behaviour.

Our perception of Apemantus as diagnosing the darker sides of the rituals and linguistic courtesies is at its strongest in 1.1 and 1.2 when he disturbs the smooth

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[2] Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane, 1969.

[3] Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Philip Brockbank, 1968.

[4] 'A most incomparable man, breathed, as it were, / To an untirable and continuate goodness; / He passes.' For a detailed account of the ambiguities see the Commentary.

[5] See 3.5.81 and 83 nn.

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linguistic surface of his various interlocutors, saying to the Merchant 'Traffic's thy god, and thy god confound thee' (1.1.239); commenting on the lords present at the reception 'to see meat fill knaves, and wine heat fools' (1.1.261); and generally on Timon himself throughout 1.1 and 1.2.

Given the structural importance of the money/gold theme in the rituals and language of Timon's society, one might assume that in it human and personal values are not only obstructed in their growth, but infected at their very roots. As early as the beginning of the sixteenth century this issue was raised by Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516), when he made Hythloday expatiate on the social effects of valuing gold more highly than human qualities: 'They [i.e. the Utopians] wonder, too, that gold, which by its very nature is so useless, is now everywhere in the world valued so highly that man himself, through whose agency and for whose use it got this value, is priced much cheaper than gold itself. This is true to such an extent that a blockhead who has no more intelligence than a log and who is as dishonest as he is foolish keeps in bondage many wise men and good men merely for the reason that a great heap of gold coins happens to be his.'[1] Almost a century and a half later, Thomas Hobbs analysed human value or worth in terms of how these qualities can be seen functioning in response to patterns of interest at work in society: 'The *value* or WORTH of a man is as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another . . . The manifestation of the value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called honouring, and dishonouring. To value a man at a high rate, is to *honour* him.'[2] Thus, human qualities like personal worth or honour are not seen as having an intrinsic value, but, like money or gold, their estimation is a matter of pure expediency.[3]

Apart from Apemantus's caustic remarks, there is no other character who reveals a clear awareness of the power factor that resides in the possession of riches ('Riches, are honourable; for they are power'),[4] nor of the manipulative implications in the rituals of bestowing gifts. 'To give great gifts to a man, is to honour him; because it is buying of protection, and acknowledging of power . . . Magnanimity, liberality . . . are honourable; for they proceed from the conscience of power.'[5] Flavius, for all his criticism of his master's liberal spending, is not aware of the human damage caused by Timon's way of being sociable. He is only concerned about Timon's imminent bankruptcy.

It is only with Timon's diatribes against Athenian society in the second part of the play that the perverting influence of gold and money on society is brought into the

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[1] Thomas More, *Utopia*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, ed. E. Surtz and J. H. Hexter, IV, 1965, p. 157. Hibbard ('Sequestration') exposes the damage that money was supposed to be doing to a commonwealth by quoting another passage from More's *Utopia*: 'where moneye beareth all the stroke, it is hard and almoste impossyble that there the weale publyque may iusteloye be gouerned and prosperouslye floryshe' (p. 217).

[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott, nd, p. 57. See also Ulysses' manipulative way of arguing in *Troilus and Cressida* 3.3.95–102 and 115–23.

[3] A striking example is the discussion between Timon and the Jeweller about the value of the jewel in 1.1.168–77.

[4] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 59.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 59.

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open. Timon is the principal spokesman for these ideas. He speaks in high anger. But however emotionally overstated in manner it may be, it remains valid in matter – indeed, his anger actually functions positively, enabling him to focus on the disarray in Athenian society to which he had previously been blind. There are two passages in 4.3 in which his indictments of gold and its uses in society are concentrated. In the first passage (26–45) he places emphasis on the transforming power of gold, turning negative qualities like 'black', 'foul', 'wrong', 'base', 'old' into what seem to be their positive counterparts (29–30). Ethical values supposedly fixed and ideal are exposed as actually contingent on the fluctuations of material interest.

The second passage (377–88) like the first focuses on the disruptive effects that gold and the desire for gold can have. The examples given of gold's disruptive energies culminate in the vision of human society being transformed into an empire of beasts (387–8).

Karl Marx quoted Timon's speeches, using them (together with a passage from Goethe's *Faust*)[1] as show-cases for his notions of the alienating effects of gold and money in early capitalist societies.[2] He asserts that in this play's money-dominated society, as in all societies of this type, there is a disjunction between what an individual is capable of doing by virtue of his own personality, and what he can achieve through the power of money:

> That which is for me through the medium of *money* – that for which I can pay (i.e. which money can buy) – that am *I myself*, the possessor of the money. The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power. Money's properties are my – the possessor's – properties and essential power. Thus, what I *am* and *am capable of* is by no means determined by my individuality . . . Does not my money, therefore, transform all my incapacities into their contrary?[3]

And in a different context, Marx focuses on the same idea: 'How little connection there is between money, the most general form of property, and personal peculiarity, how much they are directly opposed to each other was already known to Shakespeare.'[4]

Marx sums up by asserting that 'Money is the alienated *ability of mankind*.'[5] One might say that money's power is both alienated and alienating: what human beings can accomplish through the power of money is alienated from their personal capabilities and characteristics. By the same token, money has self-alienating effects on those who utilise its power as a substitute for their personal faculties.

'Shakespeare', Marx maintains, 'stresses especially two properties of money: it is the visible divinity – the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things.'[1] In Timon's speeches, gold is addressed as the 'visible god' (4.3.382), and its divine power is realised in several acts of perversion which suggest that its divinity is itself of a perverted nature. Thus it is addressed as a 'king-killer', but a 'sweet' one (377); it brings about a 'divorce / 'Twixt natural son and sire', but this divorce is 'dear' (377–8); it is a 'defiler / Of Hymen's purest bed', but a 'bright' one (378–9). This listing of acts of perversion finally leads to the climax 'that beasts / May have the world in empire' (387–8). Marx's idea that money has an enormous potential for perverting people's realisation of their social selves provides a criterion for assessing the social structures of this 'moneyed city'.[2] Money's distorting influence on the fabric of the social interactions of characters becomes apparent all through Act 1. Not that they themselves appear in their words or actions to be aware of these perversions; rather, their self-knowledge does not extend beyond what they see as opportune for furthering their moneyed existence. So, whilst the Poet's remarks in 1.1.57–60 may be intended by him to extol Lord Timon's superior status, the nature of this relationship is evidently alienated: 'His large fortune, / . . . Subdues and properties to his love and tendance / All sorts of hearts . . .' The Lords' comments on their host's generosity in 1.1.276–81 may be not quite as portentous as the Poet's utterance, since they may be thought to be informed by a shot of cynical awareness: 'no meed but he repays / Sevenfold above itself; no gift to him / But breeds the giver a return exceeding / All use of quittance'. This is then topped by the remark of First Lord, whose designation of Timon's mind as 'noble' may be as sincere as it is unconsciously revealing:[3] 'The noblest mind he carries / That ever governed man.' The implicit cynicism becomes blatantly explicit in the behaviour of the three Lords in 3.1–3.3, whom Timon approaches for a loan.[4]

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[1] Mephistopheles argues that whatever money can buy adds to its owner's personal capabilities. 'Six stallions, say, I can afford, / Is not their strength my property? / I tear along, a sporting lord, / As if their legs belonged to me' (J. W. v. Goethe, *Faust* I, iii, trans. Philip Wayne, 1949, p. 91).

[2] Marx's comments on the money/gold complex in the play have been widely discussed by, amongst others, Kenneth Muir, '*Timon of Athens* and the cash-nexus', *Modern Quarterly Miscellany* 1 (1947), 67–76 (repr. in K. Muir, *The Singularity of Shakespeare and Other Essays*, 1977, pp. 56–75); Lerner, pp. 106–22; Berry, ch. 7; and Brockbank, ch. 1.

[3] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Collected Works*, 1976, III, 324.

[4] Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works*, V, 230. This is followed up by quotations from the two passages mentioned above.

[5] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 325.

It is not only Timon's entourage who induce this atmosphere of alienation; he himself is most active in generating it. Shakespeare orchestrates Timon's first entrance in 1.1, preceding it by the attention-focusing remarks of his expectant guests. Timon's gracious public manner gives the impression that what matters most is belonging to this elect group, seeing and being seen on occasions like this. Shakespeare's emphasis is on the requests for money the guests make to Timon – for instance, by the messenger of Ventidius and, more indirectly, in the complaints of the Old Athenian. The Jeweller hopes to find in Timon a financially reliable customer; the Poet and the Painter hope that he will be a liberal patron of the arts. All, including the Lords with their obsessions about gifts, fix their attention on Timon as a magnate and a social tycoon, not as an individual. They address his alienated self, alienated from his individual personality. Timon himself does everything to present his alienated self to them, calling this friendship. Paradoxically, in his speech on friendship (1.2.81–96) he formulates an image of his guests that suits his own needs: 'I have told more of you to myself than you can with modesty speak in your own behalf' (84–5); that is, he produces a stylised picture of what he considers friends should be; in this picture, there is no understanding of the 'otherness' of a friend, nor is there any positive recognition of a friend's idiosyncrasies; rather it tends to make the other subject to Timon's 'needs'.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 324.
[2] The phrase is Brockbank's, p. 12.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] See Brockbank's interpretation of Sempronius's cultivation of hypocrisy (*ibid.*).

The second point that Marx makes in his comments on Timon concerns the condition of general venality and prostitution which is consequent on money being the 'alienated ability of mankind'. In a marginal note on *Timon* 4.3.26–33, he calls gold 'the universal agent of corruption and prostitution'.[1] In the *Preparatory Materials* to *Capital*, he quotes the same passage after having analysed the nature of money and its impact on man's potential: 'Money, as purely abstract wealth – in which every specific use value is extinguished, and hence also every individual relation between possessor and commodity – comes under the power of the individual likewise as an abstract person, relating to his individuality as totally alien and extraneous. At the same time, it gives him universal power as his private power . . .' And after the *Timon* quotation 4.3.26–33 he concludes: 'That which yields itself to all, and for which all is yielded, appears as the universal means of corruption and prostitution.'[2] Shakespeare in *Timon*, however, gives prominence to the sexual aspects of prostitution, whereas Marx does not. In Marx prostitution is placed in the wider context in which almost everything, women included, can be procured by the power of money. Timon denounces gold's perverting power comprehensively but he reserves special venom for prostitution and women's debauched sexuality, which, he says, spread all kinds of disease, disorder and disruption.[3] In 4.3.43, Timon addresses gold as 'Thou common whore of mankind'. For him gold represents the personification of a prostituted self, alienated in its doings from private incentives and subjected to other-directed interests. It is a self that does not even have a language of its own, 'that speak'st with every tongue / To every purpose' (4.3.384–5). This is what Timon's friends have been doing all along, throughout their 'better days' (4.2.27). Although they spoke of and to Timon in language full of admiration, veneration and gratitude, they were concerned with setting up a flattering glass. Timon, for his part, was as hungry for praise as his friends were eager to dispense it. What Phrynia and Timandra say very bluntly – 'Believe't that we'll do anything for gold' (4.3.151) – Timon's friends prefer to disguise under polite forms of discourse, but with a comparable attitude of complaisance and venality.[4] There is no difference in kind between prostituting acts in the service of friendship and those in the service of whoring.

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[1] In his *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857–8), Marx argues: 'The exchangeability of all products, activities, relationships for a third, *objective* entity, which in turn can be exchanged for everything *without distinction* – in other words, the development of exchange values (and of monetary relationships) is identical with general venality, with corruption. General prostitution appears as a necessary phase in the development of the social character of personal inclinations, capacities, abilities, activities.'

[2] Marx, *Collected Works*, XXIX, 451–2.

[3] 4.3.38–42, 4.3.84–6, 4.3.152–67. An act of prostitution occurs only in the verbal exchanges between Timon and Phrynia and Timandra, in the sense of demanding and complying with venal services; 4.3.49–177, in particular 134, with Phrynia and Timandra imploring him 'Give us some gold, good Timon; hast thou more?'; 150–1: 'Well, more gold! What then? / Believe't that we'll do anything for gold' and 168: 'More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon'.

[4] It would be worthwhile considering playing the role of Timon's friends as if they were saying: 'We'll do anything for gold.'