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The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 34

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON

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Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108006064

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1957
This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00606-4

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TIMON OF ATHENS

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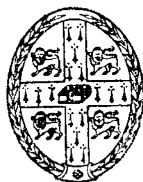

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
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Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521095013

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First published 1957
First paperback edition 1968
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-07558-9 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-09501-3 paperback

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PREFATORY NOTE

In *Pericles* Mr Maxwell tackled the insoluble problems of a thoroughly bad text. In *Timon of Athens* he was confronted with something texually better but dramatically scarcely less baffling. An unfinished Shakespearian play offers of course an almost unlimited field for speculation. Who for example was to bury Timon, and presumably rear his gravestone? And if the faithful Flavius be suggested as a not improbable candidate, that only provokes further questions. Would he not then have been given a funeral oration in soliloquy? And if so might he not have furnished us with a clue, perhaps the master clue, to the enigma of the misanthrope's character? Mr Maxwell wisely leaves such questions to the type of amateur novelist who finishes *Edwin Drood* to his own satisfaction but no one else's. Yet I think many readers of pages xxii–xlii below will agree with me that he has come nearer to fathoming Shakespeare's intentions than any previous critic and probably as near as will ever be possible.

J.D.W.

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INTRODUCTION

Authenticity and Date

The Life of Tymon of Athens was first printed in the 1623 Folio, in the space in the Tragedies left by the temporary withdrawal of *Troilus and Cressida*.[1] It is at least possible that it was not originally intended to print it at all,[2] and the rough condition of the text has given rise to many speculations. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the blame was generally laid on actors, transcribers and printers,[3] and Charles Knight in the *Pictorial Shakespeare* (1838) seems to have been the first to suggest the presence of a second hand other than that of a mere garbler. His view was that our text represents Shakespeare's partial rewriting of an earlier play, and since his time all possible variations have been devised on the disintegration theme. Some have agreed with Knight; others, following Verplanck's edition of 1847, have thought that an unfinished or mutilated play by Shakespeare was botched up by a later hand. The two views can even be combined. Thus G. Kullmann solemnly argued that Shakespeare began to rewrite an earlier play, that the manuscripts of both

[1] See Note on the Copy, p. 87.

[2] W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio* (1955), p. 411; this suggestion is also made in the edition by W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill (1942).

[3] Thus Steevens, on 5. 2. 8, talks of many passages which 'have been irretrievably corrupted by transcribers or printers', and Coleridge, if J. P. Collier's report is to be trusted, held that 'the players...had done the poet much injustice' and that 'only a corrupt and imperfect copy had come to the hands of the player-editors of the Folio of 1623' (Collier's 1842–4 ed., VI, 501–2; T. M. Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism* (1930), I, 85).

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versions were somehow preserved together, and that a 'redactor', the real villain of the piece, conflated them and added further confusions of his own.[1] Almost all dramatists active in the first decade of the seventeenth century have at one time or another been called in to take a hand in the making or marring of *Timon*. In general, the belief that Shakespeare's was at any rate the first hand at work on the play gained ground, and received its best formulation in 1910 in E. H. Wright's monograph, *The Authorship of 'Timon of Athens'*, which gave Shakespeare more of the play than had most earlier disintegrators. But by the very thoroughness of his analysis, Wright demonstrated the weakness of his theory. A second writer had been called in to remove irregularities and inconsistencies in the play as Shakespeare left it, but all the irregularities and inconsistencies which Wright detected arose, according to him, precisely from the process of addition and revision.

Meanwhile another theory about the play had been put forward from time to time. In a sense, it was the natural successor of the older view which attributed the whole play to Shakespeare, chastened by greater scepticism about the ravages likely to be caused by actors, transcribers and printers. *Timon*, it was suggested, was a Shakespearian rough draft that had never been completed. Sir Edmund Chambers[2] credits this view to Ulrici, but he expressed himself fairly vaguely, and the first writer[3] I have found who clearly states that the

[1] *Archiv für Litteraturgeschichte*, XI (1882).

[2] *William Shakespeare* (1930), I, 482.

[3] The view that it is an unrevised and 'imperfectly *thought-out*' play is stated in the brief remarks in *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare* [1864–8] by C. and M. Cowden Clarke, who show no signs of believing in the presence of a second hand. A. Müller, *Über die Quellen, aus denen Shakespeare den Timon von Athen entnommen hat* (1873),

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play is, in substance, faithfully printed from a draft left unfinished by Shakespeare is W. Wendlandt.[1] His long-winded but often acute essay at first attracted little attention—E. H. Wright described him as 'arguing as feebly' as the egregious Kullmann—but the tide soon began to turn. F. S. Boas in 1896 was very chary about admitting the presence of non-Shakespearian matter,[2] and K. Deighton in the Arden edition of 1905 gave more of the play to Shakespeare than any previous separatist, including (in agreement with Boas) Act 3, scene 5. Finally E. K. Chambers in the *Red Letter* edition[3] (1908) came out explicitly for Wendlandt's view, and his opinion, restated in *William Shakespeare* (1930), has been generally accepted, and has been further elaborated by U. M. Ellis-Fermor in *The Review of English Studies*, XVIII (1942). The one notable dissentient since 1930 has been T. M. Parrott, whose account of *Timon* in *Shakespearean Comedy* (1949) merely summarizes his own Shakespeare Association Paper of 1923.

The date of *Timon* is uncertain. Little help can be drawn from metrical tests with a text in such a rough state, and the student of the play is left very largely to his personal sense of the fitness of things. The most obvious affinities of *Timon* are with *King Lear*, as a

p. 5, regarded it as possible that the play was unfinished, but also thought that the Folio had to print from an imperfect copy.

[1] *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, XXIII (1888).

[2] He held that though the Folio text 'cannot represent a complete, genuine Shaksperean work', yet 'all attempts to rigidly separate the genuine from the spurious parts of the work must be viewed with suspicion' (*Shakspere and his Predecessors* (1896), p. 495).

[3] The introductions to this edition (1904–8) are reprinted as *Shakespeare: a Survey* (1925).

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number of scholars, most notably A. C. Bradley,[1] have pointed out. Bradley noted that metrical tests, for what they were worth, suggested a place 'between *King Lear* and *Macbeth*', and added that 'this result corresponds, I believe, with the general impression which we derive from the three dramas in regard to versification'. Sir Walter Raleigh, in my opinion more plausibly, thought *Timon* 'a first sketch of *King Lear*, set aside unfinished because the story proved intractable and no full measure of sympathy could be demanded for its hero'.[2] A radically different view of its place in Shakespeare's career was taken by Sir Edmund Chambers, both in his introduction to the *Red Letter* edition, and in *William Shakespeare*. For him, it comes between *Coriolanus* and the Last Plays, and he even suggests, with a flight of fancy which is unusual in his work, and which he admits may be judged 'subjective', that Shakespeare 'dealt with it under conditions of mental and perhaps physical stress, which led to a breakdown'.[3] Among more recent scholars, there is perhaps a slight preponderance of opinion, with which I am in sympathy, in favour of the earlier dating. Dover Wilson writes that 'unless [*Timon*] be the still-born twin of *Lear* then we may give up talking about Shakespearian moods altogether'.[4] Alexander thinks that the two plays 'cannot be far apart in date',[5] and in his most recent account seems to agree with Raleigh in particular, describing Timon as 'a tentative treatment

1 *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), note S.
2 *Shakespeare* (1907), p. 115.
3 *William Shakespeare* (1930), I, 483; cf. C. J. Sisson, 'The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xx (1934), 49–50, with quotation from Henry Hallam (1837).
4 *The Essential Shakespeare* (1932), p. 131.
5 *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939), p. 187.

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of the theme so majestically handled in *Lear*'.[1] Willard Farnham,[2] like Bradley, places it between *Lear* and *Macbeth*, *c.* 1605, and the most recent general study of Shakespearian chronology, by K. Wentersdorf,[3] accepts a date close to that of *Lear*. Chambers's chronology is favoured by Clifford Leech, who sees *Timon* as 'containing the germ of the romances',[4] and as representing 'a stage in Shakespeare's development that is logically if not chronologically subsequent to'[5] that of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. He suggests that here, as in the romances, 'characters are good or bad simply because they are constituted that way',[6] and less influenced by their environment than in the major tragedies. Sisson also prefers a date 'during the years of his close study of Plutarch for dramatic purposes and near to the years of *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Alcibiades is a first sketch for Coriolanus'.[7] The use of Plutarch is, indeed, the only thing that seems to me to make such a late date at all plausible. It would give a neat pattern to believe that Shakespeare got the first idea of *Timon* while reading the life of Antony for *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that a reading of the life of Alcibiades stimulated by work on *Timon* was in its turn responsible for taking him to the parallel life of Coriolanus. But there is no obligation to believe that Shakespeare read the life of Antony carefully only when he had *Antony and Cleopatra* in immediate prospect,

[1] *A Shakespeare Primer* (1951), p. 115.
[2] *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (1950), p. 7.
[3] *Shakespeare-Studien: Festschrift für Heinrich Mutschmann* (1951), p. 180.
[4] *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth Century Drama* (1950), p. 113.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 114.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 117.
[7] P. 910 of his edition [1954].

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and he had certainly already consulted it for *Julius Caesar* (especially 4. 1). Topical allusions seem to be almost entirely absent, but it is only fair to mention one which may tell against the view I prefer, as favouring a date not earlier than 1606. In my note on 3. 3. 32–3, I have suggested that an allusion to the Jesuits may be intended, and this would perhaps be more apt after than before the Gunpowder Plot.

The Sources

The story of Timon was widely familiar during the Renaissance in England and elsewhere. It has been admirably sketched by Willard Farnham,[1] whose account I follow.[2] The earliest substantial account of Timon occurs in a digression in Plutarch's *Life of Antony* (ch. 70). As this is the only existing version which Shakespeare quite certainly used, I quote it in full.

Antonius followeth the life and example of Timon Misanthropus the Athenian.

Antonius, he forsook the city and company of his friends, and built him a house in the sea, by the Isle of Pharos, upon certain forced mounts which he caused to be cast into the sea, and dwelt there, as a man that banished himself from all men's company: saying that he would lead Timon's life, because he had the like wrong offered him, that was before offered unto Timon: and that for the unthankfulness of those he had done good unto, and whom he took to be his friends, he was angry with all men, and would trust no man. This Timon was a citizen of Athens,

[1] *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (1950), pp. 50–67.
[2] In *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 1 (1954), 16, I have added a few minor details relating to William Paynter.

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Plato and Aristophanes' testimony of Timon Misanthropus, what he was.

that lived about the war of Peloponnesus, as appeareth by Plato[1] and Aristophanes' comedies: in the which they mocked him, calling him a viper and malicious man unto mankind, to shun all other men's companies but the company of young Alcibiades, a bold and insolent youth, whom he would greatly feast and make much of, and kissed him very gladly. Apemantus, wondering at it, asked him the cause what he meant to make so much of that young man alone, and to hate all others: Timon answered him, 'I do it', said he, 'because I know that one day he shall do great mischief unto the Athenians'. This Timon sometimes would have Apemantus in his company, because he was much like of his nature and conditions, and also followed him in manner of life. On a time when they solemnly celebrated the feasts called Choae at Athens (to wit, the feasts of the dead, where they make sprinklings and sacrifices for the dead), and that they two then feasted together by themselves, Apemantus said unto the other: 'Oh, here is a trim banquet, Timon'. Timon answered again, 'Yea,' said he, 'so thou wert not here'. It is reported of him also, that this Timon on a time (the people being assembled in the market-place about dispatch of some affairs) got up into the pulpit for orations, where the orators commonly use to speak unto the people: and silence being made, every man listening to hear what he would say, because it was a wonder to see him in that place: at length he began to speak in this manner. 'My Lords of Athens, I have a little yard in my house where there groweth a fig tree, on the which many citizens have

[1] The comic dramatist, not the philosopher.

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hanged themselves: and, because I mean to make some building on the place, I thought good to let you all understand it, that, before the fig tree be cut down, if any of you be desperate, you may there in time go hang yourselves.' He died in the city of Hales, and was buried upon the seaside. Now it chanced so, that, the sea getting in, it compassed his tomb round about, that no man could come to it: and upon the same was written this epitaph:

The epitaph of Timon Misanthropus

Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft,
Seek not my name: a plague consume you wicked wretches left.

It is reported that Timon himself when he lived made this epitaph: for that which is commonly rehearsed was not his, but made by the poet Callimachus:

Here lie I, Timon, who alive all living men did hate,
Pass by, and curse thy fill: but pass, and stay not here thy gate.

Many other things could we tell you of this Timon, but this little shall suffice at this present.[1]

It will be seen that this version, though it refers in passing to the 'unthankfulness...of those whom he took to be his friends', contains no suggestion that he had fallen from great wealth; and far from living in the wilderness, he practises his misanthropy in Athens itself. Plutarch's other reference, in the *Life of Alcibiades*, adds nothing of moment. It is Lucian's dia-

[1] *Plutarch's Lives of Coriolanus, Caesar, Brutus, and Antonius in North's Translation*, ed. R. H. Carr (1906), pp. 229–31 (a modern-spelling reprint of the 1595 edition, which I have corrected from the original).

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logue, *Timon, or the Misanthrope*, that introduces us to Timon as a prodigal reduced to poverty by flatterers who now neglect him, but who flock back to him when he digs up a treasure of gold. He drives them off, and announces his intention of continuing to live a solitary life in a tower built upon the place where he has found the treasure. Farnham notes the references to Timon's false friends as beasts and birds of prey—a theme prominent in Shakespeare's play.

The earliest Renaissance treatment is Matteo Boiardo's play *Timone* (*c.* 1487), which is based on Lucian. The picture of the solitary life Timon proposes to lead on the mountains or in the forest carries us nearer to Shakespeare's version. The next important account is that of Pedro Mexía in *La Silva de varia lección* (1540). Mexía's Timon lives alone in the neighbourhood of Athens, and never visits the city unless he has to. The cutting-off of his tomb by the sea, an accident in Plutarch, now becomes something deliberately planned by Timon himself. Mexía's version came to England, through the French translation by Gruget (1552), in William Paynter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566), Novel 28, with the heading 'Of the strange & beastlie nature of Timon of Athenes enemie to mankinde, with his death, buriall, and Epitaphe'. The other French and English versions, stemming ultimately from Mexía, need not detain us. It is enough to note with Farnham the constant emphasis on the beast-like nature of Timon. None of these versions introduce the Lucianic theme of Timon's lost wealth and discovery of gold. This, however, is again the basis of the anonymous academic play of *Timon*, which must be discussed in connection with the question of Shakespeare's immediate sources.

It is clear from this brief sketch that, besides having read the account in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, from

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which the two epitaphs are taken with the alteration of only one word, Shakespeare had a general familiarity with the Lucianic version, on which, indeed, his plot is based. No English translation of the dialogue is known to have existed in the early seventeenth century, but it was accessible in Latin, French and Italian, and there was nothing to prevent Shakespeare from consulting some more learned friend if he found it necessary. Close parallels to Lucian's text are few, and none of those noted, for instance, by Deighton in his Arden introduction is verbally striking. But the mention in chapter 47 of the toady Philiades who received two talents as dowry for his daughter as a reward for praising Timon, and in chapter 49 of Demeas who was freed from a debtor's prison, make it, on the whole, rather more likely that Shakespeare read Lucian for himself than that he merely knew of his version at second hand.

The secondary authorities can be divided into the Plutarchan (by way of Mexía) and the Lucianic. Of the former, Shakespeare had probably read Paynter's version in the *Palace of Pleasure*, which he had used for *All's Well* and probably for *Romeo and Juliet*: see the note on 5. 1. 214–18 for a fairly close verbal parallel. The Lucianic derivatives are more of a problem. Richard Garnett's *obiter dictum*[1] that Shakespeare had read Boiardo has been defended by R. Warwick Bond,[2] but the evidence is not strong. Some of Shakespeare's references to life in the wilderness and to man's defencelessness have fairly close parallels in Boiardo, who also has the ideas '(1) that beasts have more feeling for their kind than man for his, (2) the wish that earth would pervert her nature to man's destruction'.[3] But the resemblances are by no means

[1] *Italian Literature* (1898), p. 230.
[2] *Modern Language Review*, XXVI (1931), 52–68.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 63.

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beyond the range of coincidence—the first is a commonplace and the second is found in Shakespeare as early as *Richard II*, 3. 2. 12 ff.—and Bond's claims for an influence exercised by Boiardo on the plot of *Timon* are much less plausible. An additional reason for scepticism is that no edition of Boiardo's play later than 1518 is recorded, and none at all published outside Italy.

The most puzzling relationship is that between Shakespeare's play and the anonymous *Timon* preserved in manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Dyce MS. 52) and first published by Alexander Dyce for the Shakespeare Society in 1842. Like Shakespeare's play, this shows Timon both in his prosperity and after his fall, the ending keeping very close to Lucian. There are minor resemblances between the plays; in both, Timon immediately decides to bury again the newly discovered gold, which he does not do in Lucian. But the two most notable links are the banquet to the false friends, at which, in the anonymous play, Timon pelts his guests with stones painted as artichokes, and the presence of a faithful steward, Laches, who is insulted and dismissed by Timon (1. 5), but returns to serve him in disguise (2. 2), and remains with him after his ruin. This is beyond coincidence; one play must be indebted to the other, or both to a common source. It is unlikely that Shakespeare's play was accessible before it was printed in the Folio, so that the choice lies between the other two alternatives. The date of the anonymous play is uncertain. G. C. Moore Smith,[1] pointing out a borrowing from the Cambridge Latin drama *Pedantius* (*c.* 1581)—a play on words that might in fact have an earlier source—suggested that it also was of Cambridge origin, and dated it

[1] *Modern Language Review*, III (1907–8), 143.

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1581–90. J. Q. Adams[1] linked it with such school plays as *Roister Doister*, and, also favouring an early date, thought that it was written for presentation in London rather than in a university town. Certainly a passage such as he quotes from 2. 4 has, as he says, 'the ring of the metropolis'; and the final lines of the epilogue, 'Let louing hands, loude sounding in the ayre, | Cause Timon to the citty to repaire', are apter for London, as a parallel to Athens, than for Cambridge. Dyce had suggested a later date, *c.* 1600, and Malone[2] had written that the play 'appears to have been written after Ben Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), to which it contains a reference'. The relation of the play to this and other plays of Jonson has recently been discussed in the Herford and Simpson edition of Jonson,[3] but the passages cited do not clearly prove indebtedness either way. The faithful steward Laches, returning to serve his master in disguise, reminds us also, as Steevens noted, of Kent in *King Lear*. Kent derives substantially from the Perillus of the old *Leir*, but, unlike Perillus and like Kent, Laches has actually been driven away by his master. This gives some colour to the hypothesis that Shakespeare had already read the anonymous *Timon* when he wrote *King Lear*.

The chief objection to supposing that Shakespeare knew the anonymous play is that it is clearly an academic work and was not available in print. Adams tentatively suggested that it is 'not impossible that the play—reworked perhaps—was presented to a London audience'.[4] The other hypothesis about the relationship, that of a common source, has recently been pre-

[1] *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, IX (1910), 511–12.

[2] 1821 Variorum, II, 455.

[3] IX, 482–5.

[4] *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, IX (1910), 522.

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sented, with some new arguments, by G. A. Bonnard,[1] who even goes so far as to suggest that this source was also accessible to Shadwell, the love-intrigue in whose adaptation Bonnard regards as the 'exact replica' of that in the anonymous play. Apart from the fact that Shadwell's Melissa fawns on Timon in his prosperity, abandons him at his fall, and returns to him when she hears he has found gold—all inevitable results of introducing a false and mercenary mistress in the first instance—I can see no resemblance. The claim that the anonymous author echoes other Shakespeare plays is less far-fetched, but not irresistible. His is the only version of the story in which Timon's ruin is immediately precipitated by the loss of ships at sea (3. 5), although his steward has, as in Shakespeare, prophesied disaster from sheer prodigality (3. 2). But this is scarcely sufficient ground for attributing the wreck to the influence of *The Merchant of Venice*. Nor is the scene (5. 3) where Timon offers to accompany Gelasimus to a cliff on the sea-shore and help him 'at a push' necessarily indebted to *King Lear*. It is very much a matter of personal impression, but the pedantic author of the anonymous *Timon*, his Lucian open before him and tags of Plautus in his head, does not strike me as very likely to conflate these sources with reminiscences of the popular drama. With some reluctance, I am inclined to suppose, then, that Shakespeare somehow came across the anonymous play. If it was a London school play, as Adams thinks, he could have been dragged to see it by some fond father of his acquaintance.

Plutarch, Lucian and the anonymous *Timon* seem, then, to be the only sources of any moment. The figure of Apemantus (roughly corresponding to Lucian's Thrasicles as well as to the more shadowy Apemantus

[1] *Études Anglaises*, VII (1954), 63–9.

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of Plutarch) owes something to the traditional accounts of Diogenes the cynic, many of which were accessible to Shakespeare,[1] notably Lyly's *Campaspe*.[2] Two suggestions made by Kittredge in his edition (1936) seem to me to have little substance: that the behaviour of Apemantus in 1. 1 and 1. 2 owes something to the cynic Alcidamas as described in Lucian's *Symposium*, § 12, and that the crime of the unknown soldier in 3. 5 recalls the murder of Phrynichus, which is mentioned briefly in Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*, chapter 25.

The Play[3]

Timon has not been a popular play on the stage, though, as the Stage History shows, adaptations by Shadwell and others, not more drastic than those to which some of the major plays were subjected, were performed oftener than might have been expected. The play certainly lacks many of the qualities which make for theatrical success, and it is natural that it should have had more interest for readers than for theatregoers.

Some of the judgments it has evoked are remarkably enthusiastic. Even apart from the opinion of G. Wilson Knight that it 'includes and transcends' *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and *King Lear*,[4] we have Hazlitt's statement that it 'always appeared to us to be written with as intense a feeling of his subject as any one play

[1] P. Reyher, *Essai sur les Idées dans l'Oeuvre de Shakespeare* (1947), pp. 566–7, cites two typical references from Nashe, *Works*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, II, 109, 237.

[2] G. Gervinus, *Shakespeare* (3rd German ed. 1862), II, 388, mentioned this, and also Lucian's *Vitarum Auctio*.

[3] Part of this section was first published in *Scrutiny*, XV (1947–8), 195–208.

[4] *The Wheel of Fire*, 4th ed. (1949), p. 236.

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of Shakespear. It is one of the few in which he seems to be in earnest throughout, never to trifle nor go out of his way',[1] and George Saintsbury's characterization of it as 'that in some ways most Shakespearian of all the plays *not* greatest'.[2] But none, except Wilson Knight (and possibly A. S. Collins), have been entirely satisfied by it. His challenging account cannot be ignored, but I find it difficult to bring into relation with the play itself. He has had the advantage, since his essay was first published, of producing *Timon* and acting in the title-role, and he writes that these and other experiences have increased his respect for it.[3] The essay, however, is an example of the difficulties of 'interpretation', conceived by Wilson Knight as a process distinct from, and in various ways opposed to, 'criticism'.[4] Much of it strikes me as an account rather of a play that Shakespeare might have written on this theme than of *Timon* as we have it, and the particular qualities of the play tend to disappear behind vast cosmic rhythms depicted as running through Shakespeare's work as a whole. This unwillingness to grant artistic autonomy to the individual work comes out perhaps most clearly in the claim that 'in *Timon of Athens* we have a logical exposition of the significance of earlier plays'.[5] Those who do not see the working of Shakespeare's imagination in such terms are likely to remain unconvinced. Again, the relative absence of the concrete and specific is too readily treated as evidence of 'universal tragic

[1] *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, in *Works*, ed. P. P. Howe (1930–34), IV, 210.

[2] 'Shakespeare and the Grand Style', *Essays and Studies*, I (1910), 129. Saintsbury is less enthusiastic in *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V (1910), 196.

[3] *The Wheel of Fire*, 4th ed. p. 239.

[4] *Ibid.* ch. 1.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 223.

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significance',[1] or 'universal philosophical meaning',[2] while in a later discussion, *Timon* 'is found to express the central essence of tragic drama'.[3] Wilson Knight certainly records with powerful eloquence an intense imaginative response to the play, and I have begun by referring to his essay because I regret not having been able to incorporate as much from him into my own reading of it as I have into my reading of, for example, *Lear* and *Othello*.

The most obvious structural peculiarity of the play is its division into two sharply contrasting halves. It could not exist at all except in terms of these two pictures of Timon before and after his fall, and it is a superficial criticism—or else a deliberate rejection of all that Shakespeare is trying to do—to talk of it as 'two plays, casually joined at the middle'.[4] But to recognize what Shakespeare has aimed at is not necessarily to find the result satisfactory, and the working-out of the main theme must be examined. The rather simple, schematic nature of the outline means that we are more than usually dependent on achieving the appropriate response to the central figure. Because he is in most ways so much less individualized than Hamlet or Lear or Othello, such a response is, more than in the other plays, a matter of grasping the moral category to which he belongs, and seeing him as an example of that category. This does not involve turning the play into a moral treatise, but it does involve an attention to the abstract and general of a kind that Shakespearian tragedy does not usually demand from us, or that is, at least, usually no more than a subordinate element in our response to something richly unique.

[1] *Ibid.* p. 207. [2] *Ibid.* p. 220.

[3] *Principles of Shakespearian Production*, Pelican ed. (1949), p. 177.

[4] Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (1939), p. 288.

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Whatever other judgments may be made on Timon, he is certainly the prodigal. Even his true friends and admirers confess it; he himself glories in it after his fall (4. 3. 278–80). Much of the disagreement about the play and the hero has been on the question of just what prodigality involves. It is clear that no simple moral or prudential condemnation is conveyed. Though Shakespeare has not gone as far as he sometimes does in presenting us with firmly placed subordinate characters from whom we can take our bearings with regard to the hero,[1] he makes up for this by at least one undiluted piece of choric comment, the dialogue between the 'three strangers' at the end of 3. 2. Timon's 'right noble mind, illustrious virtue and honourable carriage' elicit disinterested admiration, and the ingratitude with which he is treated appears as monstrous. This in itself is enough to refute the view, developed in its most extreme form by O. J. Campbell,[2] that Timon is set before us merely for derision, and that the play is Shakespeare's attempt at a 'tragical satire' in the manner of Jonson's *Sejanus*. It is true that the sycophants and false friends also call Timon noble; but that is perhaps one reason why Shakespeare goes out of his way to give us also the impartial judgment of the strangers. We are surely meant to assent when Timon exclaims, 'Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given' (2. 2. 180). Campbell's interpretation of the play depends on strictly selective reading. It is perhaps only natural that, approaching it with such prepossessions, he should assume without argument that Timon commits suicide,

[1] Cf. U. M. Ellis-Fermor: 'Unlike *Hamlet*, unlike *Lear*, the play of *Timon* does not endow its minor characters with the function of focusing, by their nature and actions, our thought and attention on its central figure' (*Review of English Studies*, XVIII (1942), 282).

[2] *Shakespeare's Satire* (1943).

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a view for which there is no good warrant in the text.[1] But even so, it argues a curiously blinkered response to poetry to write, 'even his choice of a grave is food for scorn',[2] and immediately go on to quote the reference to

> his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beachéd verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embosséd froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover. (5. 1. 214–17)

One may distrust such biographical conjectures as that 'in Timon's tomb Shakespeare buried his own bitterness',[3] but it is clear that something that never happens to Sejanus has happened to the Timon who speaks these words, and who a few lines earlier has said

> My long sickness
> Of health and living now begins to mend,
> And nothing brings me all things. (5. 1. 185–7)

What this makes us think of is nothing in Jonson, but rather the Cleopatra whose

> desolation does begin to make
> A better life.

Such passages are perhaps fragmentary, and Shakespeare may not have developed them organically out of his theme—perhaps the recognition that he had failed to

[1] A number of critics, the earliest I have come across being Gervinus, have thought that Timon committed suicide, while some have thought that Shakespeare leaves the question open. But no earlier version makes him die in this way, and the onus of proof is on those who think that Shakespeare made the innovation. It must be admitted that the text as we have it leaves some details uncertain—notably, who buried Timon.

[2] *Shakespeare's Satire*, p. 192.

[3] Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (1939), p. 292 (tentatively).

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do so led him to leave the play unfinished—but they are there, and they disrupt Campbell's neat scheme.

Shakespeare's treatment of the 'prodigal', then, is not that of the pure Jonsonian satirist. Yet Timon, if he has not given 'ignobly', certainly has given 'unwisely', and it has often been thought that this unwisdom robs him of more of the audience's sympathy than a tragic hero can afford to lose. For Ellis-Fermor, one of the unsolved questions that make the play unsatisfactory is, 'if he is of mature age, why is he such a fool?',[1] and Farnham comments that 'he is so completely lacking in wisdom that one wonders how he could ever have been useful to Athens in a responsible position'.[2] Such comments may point to weaknesses in the play, but Shakespeare does not encourage us to identify ourselves with the cold prudential verdict. The comment by the 'three strangers' has already been cited, and cold calculation in the world of the play is represented by the 'usuring senate'. As Alexander writes, 'the criticism that finds in his untimely death a judgment on his "kindly self-indulgence" or "easy generosity" is exactly in the senatorial vein'.[3] Yet just as it is true that Lear 'hath ever but slenderly known himself', however repellent it is to hear such a piece of cold analysis from the daughter who has just been

[1] *Review of English Studies*, XVIII (1942), 281.

[2] *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (1950), pp. 46–7. An interesting recent discussion of the differences between Shakespeare's sympathetic heroes and the unsympathetic ones (including Timon) is Huntington Brown's 'Enter the Shakespearean Tragic Hero', *Essays in Criticism*, III (1953), 285–302. In *Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy* (1956), Brents Stirling briefly refers to *Timon* as one of the plays which present 'the problem...of a deliberately minimized hero' (p. 188).

[3] *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939), p. 184.

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loading him with adulation, so Shakespeare has provided some (if not all) of the material for a balanced and complex response to Timon. To achieve this, we must do justice to the form of the play. So I revert to some questions raised in passing at an earlier stage.

The abstract and schematic nature of the play has evoked comment of two contrasting kinds. Neither is entirely satisfactory by itself, but taken together they help to define its special quality. On the one side it has been suggested by A. S. Collins that *Timon* is Shakespeare's 'true morality play in the straight sense';[1] the minor characters scarcely even pretend to be individuals; 'Apemantus is a fairly simple "humour" of Railing Envy, Timon is Ideal Bounty and Friendship, Alcibiades alone is a man, a soldier, practical, sensual, yet a true friend, but still barely individualized'.[2] There is truth in this, but it scarcely answers all the questions the play raises for us. When, for instance, Mark Van Doren in a similar vein writes, 'Timon is not so much a man as a figure representing Munificence, an abstraction in whom madness may not matter',[3] we are entitled to ask why it should not matter. If the Morality convention were as one-sided as this, it would be incapable of presenting real moral situations. Even a relatively crude work like Skelton's *Magnificence* does not absolve its central figure from criticism simply by giving him a name that is predominantly laudatory. There is, in fact, no need for such subterfuges in order to make sense of *Timon*. Timon is, if you like, a simplified, schematized figure; but Shakespeare makes it quite clear that his madness does 'matter', that his

[1] *Review of English Studies*, XXII (1946), 98. This essay, though I think it has some faults of emphasis, is a fine piece of criticism.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 99.

[3] *Shakespeare* (1939), pp. 289–90.

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prodigality is to be judged by ordinary moral standards. Equally unacceptable is Collins's account in which 'the abstract Virtue' of Bounty is transformed 'to a similarly abstract Vice'.[1] Collins does not really, as the better parts of his valuable essay show, read the play as any such unearthly ballet of bloodless categories, but he is betrayed into talking like this by taking as the moral of the early acts that 'such Ideal Bounty should have infinity of riches to draw on, for it is Noble Bounty'.[2] That, complete to the capital letters, is no doubt how Timon sees himself in the distorting mirror provided by his flatterers, but it is not how the audience sees him, and it does not make sense of the play. The two halves of it are contrasting studies in excess, and both excesses quite intelligibly belong to the same character. This element of the play is summed up in Timon's reply to Apemantus's statement that he is proud 'that I was no prodigal'—'I, that I am one now' (4. 3. 279–80). It is the same nature that, according to circumstances and the twist they have given it, can turn to love or hate, but to each with prodigality, and the gold that embodies the corrupted and corrupting spirit of Athens affords an equally fit instrument for the expression of each.

It is this corrupting spirit that is stressed in the rival accounts, which insist on the contemporary social relevance of the play. J. W. Draper, discussing 'The Theme of "Timon of Athens"', claims that theme to be usury: we are shown in the hero 'a sort of liberal young Bassanio, who, without the moneyed backing of Antonio and Portia, experienced to his sorrow the hard economic facts of the Jacobean age'.[3] In this form, the claim cannot be accepted. Timon is too much of a special case, and the relation of usury to the society that

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 104. [2] *Ibid.* p. 99.
[3] *Modern Language Review*, XXIX (1934), 31.

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