

***Timon of Athens*: Shakespeare's Sophoclean Tragedy**

Earl Showerman



T*imon of Athens* is an austere, static, and troublesome play. It suffers from what one critic called a 'languid, wearisome want of action' (Butler 26) and has been criticized for its textual inconsistencies and dramatic deficiencies as a work not entirely befitting Shakespeare's genius.

Critical opinion on *Timon* actually varies widely. While one scholar called the play 'sublimely unrealistic' and another considered it Shakespeare's 'strangest tragedy', G. Wilson Knight praised *Timon* as being tremendous and 'of universal tragic significance' (207).

Hugh Grady, author of *The Modernist Shakespeare* (1991) discusses another inconsistency, *Timon's* 'genre confusion'. The play has been variously referred to as parable, allegory, dramatic fable, morality play, tragic satire, Renaissance satire, tragical pageant, Idiotes comedy, and late tragedy. (200-1) John Ruskiewicz, in his annotated bibliography, concludes that the truth may reside with the critics who see *Timon* as generically mixed, 'a play conceived as tragedy, but incorporating elements of morality, comedy, farce, satire, masque and pageant:' (xviii).

Oxford editor John Jowett, in explaining how *Timon* was originally printed in the First Folio in the place of *Troilus and Cressida* while copyright issues were being resolved, notes clearly that 'it is strongly suspected that there was no origi-

nal intention to publish it' (127). There are no designations of acts or scenes, nor any locality identified in the Folio text. Regarding this, Arden editor H.J. Oliver wrote, '*Timon*, in fact, provides some of the best evidence we have for believing that Shakespeare would not compose in acts and scenes and that he would have been surprised at the awe with which his alleged five-act structure is regarded in some circles today' (xxx).¹

Then there is the problem of dating *Timon*. Scholars generally agree that the date of composition of the play cannot be determined by contemporary records of any known performance or specific allusions to a dramatic production. Based on a direct allusion in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, Oxfordian scholar Robert Detobel states *Timon* must have been written by 1601, while H.J. Oliver suggests 1604, because of the play's freedom of versification.

The scholarly consensus dates *Timon* even later, around 1608. There were a number of English literary allusions to *Timon* during the latter part of the 16th century, including the works of William Painter (*Palace of Pleasure*, 1566), Thomas North (*Plutarch's Lives*, 1579), John Lyly (*Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit*, 1578), Robert Greene (*Gwyndonius*, 1584), Thomas Nashe (*Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*, 1593) and Thomas Lodge (*Wit's Misery*, 1596). None of these writers however specifically references a 'Timon' drama.

John Jowett is alone among contemporary editors of *Timon* to mention a very early date for a drama depicting the famous Greek misanthrope. Poet William Warner's *Syrinx or A Sevenfold History* (1584) includes this passage from the introduction, 'To the Reader':

And yet, let his coy prophetess presage hard events in her cell, let the Athenian misanthropos [printed in Greek] or man-hater bite on the stage, or the Sinopian cynic bark with the stationer; yet, in Pan his Syrinx, will I pipe at the least to myself.

Kurt Kreiler has recently suggested that Warner's 'coy prophetess' is an allusion to Cassandra, the seer who rejected Apollo, and became a slave to Agamemnon, and that this might be an allusion to the lost *History of Agamemnon and Ulisses*, performed at court in December, 1584 by the Earl of Oxford's Boys.² We may note in addition that the 'Athenian misanthropos' biting on the stage is almost certainly an allusion to a contemporary dramatic representation of *Timon*. The 'Sinopian cynic' refers to the 5th-century Greek philosopher, Diogenes, a character in John Lyly's *Campaspe*, which was also staged by Oxford's Boys during the court revels of 1584. *Campaspe* was published later that same year, thus the allusion to the 'stationer'. The importance of Warner's *Syrinx* to a perception of a political allegory in Shakespeare's *Timon* cannot be overstated.

For nearly 200 years, scholars have been perplexed by the dramaturgic weaknesses and the poetic and nomenclature inconsistencies in *Timon*. These are explained in one of two ways: Shakespeare had a collaborator or the play is a draft.

Charles Knight first suggested co-authorship in 1839, and by 1900 critics were almost unanimous in their agreement that *Timon* was not written wholly by Shakespeare. Scholars have suggested George Chapman as a possible co-author, but more recently Brian Vickers, John Jowett and Stanley Wells, based on stylometric comparisons, have contended that Thomas Middleton is likelier.

In 1966, Francelia Butler catalogued those 20th-century scholars who nonetheless maintained that *Timon* had a single author. The dramatic weaknesses and the inconsistencies in the text, according to this group, suggested that *Timon* was either an unpolished, rough draft, or an experimental drama. E.K. Chambers, H.J. Oliver, George Kittredge, A.S. Collins, E.A.J. Honigmann and A.D. Nuttall were among the many critics taking the view that the Folio text was simply incomplete, possibly having been abandoned as a suitable dramatic subject.

There is also a significant dispute over the acknowledged sources of *Timon*. While most scholars readily admit that Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* and Lucian's dialogue, *Timon The Misanthrope*, are the primary sources, controversy continues over the part played by an unpublished, anonymous manuscript of a *Timon* satire, *MS Timon* (also referred to as the 'academic' or 'old Timon' comedy). No one knows for sure if this drama was ever performed, although scholars generally agree that it was written for the Inns of Court or a university audience. Willard Farnham summarizes the relevant parallels:

Probably before 1600 and perhaps between 1581 and 1590 an academic author wrote an English play on Timon ...intended for the amusement of a university audience. There can be no question that the author knew Lucian, for in certain passages he follows him closely. But the academic has much that is not found in any other version of the Timon story, and it has some features that are found elsewhere only in Shakespeare's *Timon*. Like Shakespeare's play and unlike any other version of the Timon story it has a servant who is faithful to Timon, a mock banquet given by Timon to his friends who have failed him in his time of need, and the invocations made by Timon to the sun after misfortune has come to him. (Farnham 62)

The *MS Timon* was edited by Alexander Dyce and published in 1842, and is clearly derivative of Lucian's *Timon* dialogue. The *MS Timon* depicts Timon during his prosperity with a Steward, and has the mirroring effect of two different banquets. Unfortunately, an exact dating of the *MS Timon* may never be known. Commenting on the impossibility of the *MS Timon* being a source for Shakespeare, H. J. Oliver posits:

It is difficult enough to understand how Shakespeare could have known this play

(which judging from its erudite and pedantic references, was intended for an academic audience) even when, on the evidence of an allusion to Ben Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humor*, it was vaguely dated 1600. Now Bonnard, pointing to possible borrowings from *King Lear*, suggests that the old Timon play is more likely to have followed Shakespeare's *Timon* than to have preceded it—and yet cannot be based on it, since Shakespeare's play was not published until 1623 and was apparently never acted. (xxxlx)

Muriel Bradbrook and, more recently, Sonja Fielitz, have also argued that the *Timon Comedy* is a more likely to be a derivative parody of Shakespeare's tragedy. Fielitz states the *Comedy* actually incorporates 'many borrowings from other Shakespearean plays, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and, most tellingly, *Coriolanus*...., as well as from Jacobean dramatists such as Marston' (183).

John Jowett notes that neither Plutarch nor Lucian embodies the bleak cynicism found in Shakespeare's tragedy. 'None of these sources establishes the intense pessimism of Timon's view of life after he leaves Athens.... Ultimately the play belongs to a far larger and more complex textual field' (22). In a recent presentation, Charles Beauclerk stated, 'Shakespeare alone has created the emphasis on Timon's matchless mind, his art, his artistic patronage, his quasi-royal status.'³ Taking the drama a step further into the realm of Elizabethan politics, J.W. Draper called Shakespeare's tragedy 'a fierce and sweeping indictment of the ideals and social ethics of the age.... Timon depicts the economic ruin of the nobility.' (Oliver xlv)

Overview

This study will first examine Shakespeare's sources, his deft employment of Plutarchan characterization and nomenclature and Lucianic plot motifs. Then a solution to *Timon*'s 'genre confusion' will be proposed by exploring the influence of classical drama on Shakespeare, concluding that it is a Renaissance adaptation of Greek tragedy. Finally, an Oxfordian context for *Timon* will be suggested, based on the 1584 dating of Warner's allusions to the Athenian misanthrope 'biting on the stage.' Edward de Vere's misfortunes, emotional state and literary connections during this period may even suggest that *Timon* is allegorical autobiography.

Scholars universally agree that Shakespeare relied heavily on Plutarch's *Lives* in composing *Timon*. H. J. Oliver observes that 18 of the 19 named characters in the play come from Plutarch: Timon, Apemantus, Alcibiades, Ventidius, Flavius, and Philotus from the 'Life of Antony'; Lucilius, Servilius, Hortensius from the 'Life of Brutus'; Varro from the 'Life of Caesar'; Lucullus, Sempronius, and Caphis from elsewhere in *Lives*. This recruitment of characters was no small undertaking. As T.J.B. Spencer notes in *Shakespeare's Plutarch*,

In Shakespeare's time, the *Lives* were confined to large and cumbrous folios. There were no convenient selections comparable to the present volume; Shakespeare, when he read Plutarch, had to have a very heavy folio in his hands. One reads 1010 pages before coming to the death of Cleopatra...The reading of North was rather a serious thing for a busy man of the theatre, probably his most serious experience of the bookish kind. (13-14)

The passages in Plutarch that refer to directly to the Athenian misanthrope are actually quite brief, comprising a few paragraphs plus the strange double epitaph also found in the Shakespeare's play.⁴ There is little more than this single paragraph on Timon in the 'Life of Antony':

This Timon was a citizen of Athens, and lived much about the Peloponnesian war, as may be seen in the comedies of Aristophanes and Plato, in which he is ridiculed as hater and enemy of mankind. He avoided and repelled the approaches of everyone, but embraced with kisses and the greatest show of affection Alcibiades, then in his hot youth. And when Apemantus was astonished, and demanded the reason, he replied that he knew this young man would one day do infinite mischief to the Athenians. He never admitted anyone into his company except this Apemantus, who was of the same sort of temper, and was an imitator of Timon's way of life....One day he got up in a full assembly on the speaker's place, and when there was a dead silence and great wonder at so unusual a sight, he said, 'Ye men of Athens, I have a little plot of ground, and in it grows a fig tree, on which many citizens have been pleased to hang themselves; and now, having resolved to build in that place, I wish to announce it publicly, that any of you who may be desirous may go and hang yourselves before I cut it down.' (1144)

Although E. A. Honigmann argues persuasively that the character of Shakespeare's Timon is based on Plutarch's Mark Antony, Oliver suggests that Plutarch's 'Life of Lucullus' provided the background for Shakespeare's Timon as a rich, benevolent host. Lucullus was a commander in the Mithridatic War, amassed a vast fortune, and retired early to provide extravagant amusements at his villas. Plutarch reports that all of Asia regarded him as their savior from the miseries, which they had suffered from the Roman moneylenders, the 'revenue farmers'. Lucullus' epicurean life was ridiculed by Crassus and Pompey. He was called 'Xerxes in a gown' by the Stoics. Although Lucullus was a 'good and humane man', Plutarch offers this caveat:

...Lucullus's life, like the Old Comedy, presents us at the commencement with acts of policy and of war, at the end offering nothing but good eating and drinking, feastings, and revellings, and mere play. For I give no higher name to his sumptuous buildings, porticos and baths, still less to his paintings and sculptures, and all his industry about these curiosities, which he collected with vast expense, lavishly bestowing all the

wealth and treasure which he got in the war upon them, insomuch that even now...the Lucullean gardens are counted the noblest the emperor has. (621)

Shakespeare's interest in Lucullus may also derive from Plutarch's report that Lucullus was fluent in both Greek and Latin and incurred great expense in collecting books and entertaining famous scholars.

Shakespeare subtly enhances the nobility of Timon's servants by naming them after bold Roman leaders who sacrificed themselves in extremity. Flavius, Timon's loyal steward, is named for the tribune who became famous for pulling the diadems off the statue of Caesar in Rome and arresting citizens who proclaimed Caesar 'king'. This Flavius was honored by the people, who referred to him as Brutus, after Brutus the Fool, the legendary liberator of Rome who defeated the Tarquins. Caesar opposed Flavius and had him stripped of his position. Timon's other servant, Lucilius, is named for the Roman described by Plutarch as the 'excellent man' who saved Marcus Brutus from a band of barbarians by allowing

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himself to be captured. Claiming that he was Brutus, Lucilius demanded that the barbarians bring him to Mark

Antony. When Lucilius assured the amazed Antony that Brutus would never be taken alive, Antony embraced Lucilius, saying that it was better to have 'such men as Lucilius our friends than our enemies.' (1217)

Shakespeare thus drew extensively on Plutarch for *Timon's* cast of characters and the double epitaph. Willard Farnham, however, points out that 'There is no sign that Plutarch's Timon was ever wealthy or that he stood high in public esteem in Athens. For all we are told, his suffering from ingratitude may have been a petty affair. As a man-hater he seems to be merely an eccentric character of a sort not unknown in other towns than Athens...' (51).

Honigmann echoes modern criticism in acknowledging Lucian's *Timon, or The Misanthrope* as the other primary source. From Lucian, Shakespeare 'sketched in Timon's prodigality, his flatterers, his long railing speeches when reduced to poverty, his discovery of gold while digging, his subsequent stoning of the parasites who return to batten on him, etc.' (Honigmann 3). The fawning supplicants in Lucian's satire include a hypocritical philosopher, a songwriter whose dowry Timon has paid, and a lawyer whom Timon redeemed from prison, character qualities that Shakespeare clearly adopted. Shakespeare also employs Lucian's animistic imagery, including allusions to dogs and wolves, a major motif in the tragedy. Timon's precipitous fall and his ironic pretense of offering help to the Athenians are also clearly borrowed from Lucian.

Honigmann acknowledges Deighton for identifying numerous verbal parallels between the Greek satire and *Timon* (10). Sir John Sandys writes Lucian (ca. 125-180 C.E.):

His verbal familiarity with Greek literature is attested by his constant quotations from Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar, and his frequent reminiscence of Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato and Demosthenes...his genius has much in common with that of Aristophanes, to whom he repeatedly refers...he owes something also to the comedies of Cratinus, and the satire of Mennipus. His interest in the great writers of Attic is clearly marked ...' (317)

Robert Flaceliere argued that Lucian looked back to the Attic dramatists and was clearly influenced by Mennipus and possibly Aristophanes for his fantastic inventions. 'It is true that, like many of his contemporaries during this second wave of sophism, he accepted as the basis of his literary work the principle of mimesis, that is to say, the imitation of earlier writers' (366-7).

Lucian's *Timon, or the Misanthrope* had been translated from the original Greek into Latin, Italian, and French editions by the 17th century, but there were no English translations during Shakespeare's lifetime. Matteo Boiardo's *Il Timone* (1487), an Italian comedy, and Pierre Boaistuau's French adaptation, *Le Théâtre du Monde*, translated into English by John Alday in 1566, both follow Lucian closely. Honigmann suggests that Filbert Bretin's *Les Oeuvres de Lucian* (Paris, 1582/3) was Shakespeare's likeliest source, although others have argued that the playwright knew his Lucian by way of the Latin translation of the satires by Erasmus apparently included in the curriculum of several grammar schools, Westminster and Eton (Kennedy 200).

A few scholars have suggested that Shakespeare's Apemantus may be based on a character from another Lucian dialogue, *The Carousal or The Lapiths*, which satirized Plato's *Symposium*. In *The Carousal*, the guests are all philosophers (Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans and Peripatetics) who abuse each other. An uninvited guest, Alcidas the Cynic, terrorizes the others and offers a perverse toast similar to Apemantus' anti-grace (I.ii.62-71).

Shakespeare's Timon, as a patron of the arts turned profoundly cynical pessimist, is discovered neither in Plutarch's moral history nor in Lucian's satire about an angry miser. While Shakespeare adopted character and plot from these acknowledged sources, he recast Timon in the mold of a classical tragic hero. Examined from this perspective, *Timon of Athens* reflects the structure, poetics, and dramaturgy of Greek tragedy.

Over a century ago, J. Churton Collins proposed Shakespeare's familiarity with Greek drama. His *Studies in Shakespeare* serve as an invitation to this approach:

...if Shakespeare was acquainted with the Greek dramas he would have left un-

equivocal indications...by reproducing their form, by drawing with unmistakable directness on their dramatic personae for archetypes, by borrowing incidents, situations and scenes from them, or, at least, by directly habitually referring to them. (69)

Collins says elsewhere:

Nor must we forget the many curious parallels between his plays on words; his studied use of paronomasia, of asyndeton, of onomatopoeia, of elaborate antithesis, of compound epithets, of subtle periphrasis; and, above all, his metaphors, with those so peculiarly characteristic of the Attic dramas. It is indeed in the extraordinary analogies...that we find the most convincing testimony of his familiarity with their writings. (62)

And:

... Shakespeare's dramatic art recalls characteristics equally striking and predominating in the dramatic art of Sophocles and of no other preceding master; one is the elaborately antithetical disposition of the dramatis personae, the other is the not less elaborately studied employment of irony. (92)

Collins was not the only early scholar to recognize Greek influences on Shakespeare. Swinburne notes that, 'in the great and terrible 4th act of *Timon* we find such tragedy as Juvenal might have written when half-deified with the spirit of Aeschylus' (Soellner 79), while A.D. Nuttall observes that in *Timon*, Shakespeare 'dramatizes inhumanity itself and in doing so explores...a distinctly Renaissance alienation effect (having links with the stiff archaic formalism of Greek Tragedy....' (xix), adding that the tragedy employs expressions that 'are a classic expression of irony, running at full Sophoclean strength' (42).

Timon's triptych structure may even be a reflection on the Greek tradition of tragic trilogy. Many editors have commented on the diptych opposition of *Timon's* indiscriminate philanthropy contrasted with his cynical invective against all things human. However, Rolf Soellner has suggested the structure of *Timon* 'follows the tripartite design offered by Renaissance humanists: protasis, epitasis, catastrophe' (Ruszkiewicz 103). Although the Folio text of *Timon* does not include any act or scene divisions, the play explores three distinct dramatic moods, all of approximate equal length:

Part 1 - 'Prodigal *Timon*' (Act I plus the Masque of the Amazons): The Poet, Painter, Jeweler and Merchant all praise *Timon*, who ransoms Ventidius from prison, provides Lucilius' a marriage dowry, and provides a great feast and entertainment. Part 1 has 632 lines plus the Masque.

Part 2 - 'Timon's Misfortune' (Acts II, III, & IV Scenes 1&2): Creditors approach Timon, and Flavius informs his master that all his lands have been forfeited. Timon dispatches his servants requesting 50 talents from his friends, Lucullus, Lucius and Sempronius, but all three deny him. Alcibiades is banished by the Athenian Senate. Timon serves his surprised banquet guests lukewarm water, raging against their 'reeking villainy'. Part 2 has 906 lines.

Part 3 - 'Timon's Fury' (Act IV Scene 3, Act V): Timon curses the walls of Athens, then flees to the woods where he calls for the destruction of all humanity and immediately finds a buried treasure of gold while digging for roots. Timon is sequentially approached by Alcibiades and his mistresses, Timandra and Phrynia, then Apemantus, three bandits, Timon's steward, the Poet and Painter, and, finally, the Athenian Senators. The victorious Alcibiades promises mercy on Athens and a messenger arrives with news of Timon's passing. Alcibiades recites Timon's epitaph. Part 3 has 879 lines.

'Astonishingly Greek'

John Jowett has noted that *Timon* 'resorts to the remarkable and apparently un-theatrical device of having almost a third of its action made up of the single sequence in which Timon, statically dwelling in the woods, is visited by a succession of Athenians' (3). While calling this minimalism, this rejection of plot, a 'daring and radical manoeuvre,' Jowett misses the possibility that its radical pattern is actually based on an ancient dramatic tradition. In discussing Act IV of *Timon*, however, A.D. Nuttall observes that 'the structure and character of the scene is astonishingly Greek.' He adds:

We have the pattern of the humiliated hero, apart from society, in a wild place. To him come, in succession, various figures to upbraid him or (more important) to solicit his aid. It is a pattern of great power in Sophocles, strong in Aeschylus, less strong in Euripides. In *Oedipus at Colonus* the protagonist, blind, filthy, and ragged is visited in turn by Theseus, Creon and Polynices, who wishes to raze Thebes to the earth in vengeance for the wrong he has suffered. Oedipus, for all his strange aura of sanctity, is more like Timon than one expects. He embraces his own wretchedness and curses those who have wronged him. (107)

Nuttall identifies three plays with structures similar to the final part of *Timon of Athens*: Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Philoctetes*, and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, the tragedy of a rebellious Titan who outraged Zeus and suffered terribly for befriending the pitiful, experimental race of men. In these three Greek tragedies, a betrayed and wounded hero survives in a desolate wilderness, but is pursued by needy visitors. Of Timon's succession of supplicants, Nuttall writes:

The single departing figure of the steward is replaced as we move to Act 4:3 by the

solitary figure of Timon 'in the woods'. We seem to have traveled back to the earliest period of Greek drama, in which the 'second actor' has not yet been invented and where...the same speaker came forward to address the audience in a succession of different masks.' (89)

Many critics, including Nuttall, James Bulman, James Rice, Maurice Charney, G. Wilson Knight and H.J. Oliver, have also noted the drama's use of Greek-like choruses. In ancient Greece these were primarily employed to show the audience how to interpret the drama, to make transitions smooth, and to advise the protagonist. A typical example of this element in *Timon* is embodied in the comments of the three strangers after the appeals of Timon's servants have been rejected for the third time by his former friends:

Stranger: Why, this is the world's soul,
And just of the same piece
Is every flatterer's sport. Who can call him his friend
That dips in the same dish? For in my knowing
Timon has been this lord's father,
And kept his credit with his purse;
Supported his estate; nay, Timon's money
Has paid his men their wages...
And yet—O see the monstrousness of man
When he looks out in an ungrateful shape! (III.ii.65-75)

James Bulman argues that in *Timon*, 'Shakespeare directs our appreciation further by using an unprecedented amount of choric commentary...The choric scene in which three Strangers comment on the action dictates clearly that Shakespeare wants his audience to admire Timon's bounteous nature as a heroic virtue.' (133) John Jowett similarly remarks that the 'group of three strangers seems to be at hand simply to express their disgust at Lucius' behavior. Because they are strangers...their condemnation is unequivocal, clear and simple' (44). The 1997 Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of *Timon* even adopted this device, as dramaturg Scott Kaiser noted: 'We expanded the role of the strangers from a relatively minor appearance in a single scene to a chorus-like presence throughout the play' (Kaiser 3).

Other scenes which could be considered choric include the Four Nobles at Timon's mock banquet (III.iv.1-115), Timon's Servants (IV.ii.1-51), the Three Banditti (IV.iii.401-60), and the Athenian Senators (V.iv.13-64). James Rice argues that the Senators' plea for mercy from Alcibiades at the end of the tragedy also has a typical choric quality:

These arguments...seem to me to constitute a choral commentary on the theme of the play. The senators plead for the concreteness of individual moral responsibility as

opposed to the abstraction of mass guilt. They ask for rational discrimination between those who deserve punishment and those who do not...for precisely the virtues that Timon lacked. (90)

Timon's steward, Flavius, and especially the cynical Apemantus, also provide cautionary speeches that may be described as choric. In Act I Apemantus gives a running commentary on Timon's ostentatious feast and sycophantic friends: 'He that loves to be flattered is worthy o' th' flatterer.' (I.i.225-6), 'O you gods! What a number of men eats Timon and he sees 'em not!' (I.ii.39-40), 'What a sweep of vanity comes this way.' (I.ii.128), 'What needs these feasts, pomps, and vain-glories?' (I.ii.242-44), and 'O that men's ears should be to counsel deaf, but not to flattery.' (I.ii.250-1). In Act IV he returns to chide Timon for his inappropriate response to the misfortune that has befallen him: 'Thou hast cast thyself, being like thyself a madman...' (IV.iii.222-3), 'The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends.' (IV.iii.301-2), and finally 'Thou art the cap of all fools alive' (IV.iii.360).

The term 'gods' appears more often in this play than any other by Shakespeare, the pagan influence evident in its repeated appeals to deities, characteristic of Greek drama. In his century-old *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare*, Robert K. Root writes, 'Eleven mythological allusions are, with two exceptions, to Divinities and personify either the powers of nature or the moral influences in the life of man' (129). These allusions include Neptune, Plutus, Hyperion, Jove, Moon, Amazons, Mars, Diana, Cupid, Hymen, and Phoenix. Charles Beauclerk has also noted how the allegorical figure of Fortune seems to reign over Timon (the word occurs 30 times in the play).

Shakespeare's tragedy even begins, in the Greek fashion, with an oracle. This device is as prominent in *Timon* as in *The Winter's Tale*. Timon's oracle is delivered as the *Fortuna Poem* at the conclusion of the extended Paragone dialogue between the Poet and Painter. Fortuna was of course the Roman goddess of fortune or chance, whose symbol is the spinning wheel.

Poet: When Fortune in her shift and change of mood
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependents
Which labour'd after him to the mountain's top
Even on their knees and hands, let his sit down,
Not one accompanying his declining foot.

Painter: 'Tis common.

A thousand moral paintings I can show
That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's
More pregnantly than words. Yet you do well
To show Lord Timon that mean eyes have seen
The foot above the head. (I.ii.86-96)

By the time Timon is shown this image of Fortune by the Poet, he is already bankrupt and out of Fortune's favor. In *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example*, Adrian Poole writes that this passage, which represents an 'apprehension of temporal convergence at once fearful and hopeful, is characteristically Sophoclean. The time the oracle predicted coincides with now' (55). Ironically, Timon appears to be at the height of his prosperity, providing Senators, artists, merchants and generals with grandiose patronage and hosting a lavish symposium in the ancient Greek tradition, completely unaware that soon creditors will be clamoring at his door, that his coffers are now empty and that all his lands have been sold.

Fortune was one of the *Parcae* or Fates, powerful goddesses who presided over the birth, life and death of humankind. According to Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary Writ Large*, Pausanias gives the names of the *Parcae* as Venus Urania, Fortune, and Ilythia. 'In Boeotia, Fortune had a statue that represented her holding Plutus the god of Riches in her arms. The worship of the *Parcae* was well established in some cities of Greece,...they received the same worship as the Furies' (Lempriere 445). Thus, Timon's Poet acts as the oracle of the goddess Fortune, much as the Delphic priestess acted for Apollo.

Curiously, there is another oracle referenced in Timon's enraged demand that Alcibiades be merciless in his revenge on Athens:

...Spare not the babe
Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy:
Think it a bastard, whom the oracle
Hath doubtfully pronounc'd the throat shall cut,
And mince it sans remorse. (IV.iii.122-6)

Many scholars consider this passage refers to the prophecy of Laius given by the Delphic oracle that the king would be murdered by his own son, Oedipus. In his last speech, refusing to help Athens defend itself from Alcibiades army, Timon refers to himself as an oracle:

...but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover. Thither come,
And let my grave-stone be your oracle. (V.i.213-18)

Timon's dies off-stage, his death is reported by a messenger. Rolf Soellner suggests that this 'fits the slightly classical aura of the tragedy.' (48) Timon's grave-stone outside Athens thus remains as an oracle and a curse, a plague upon the city. This seems to be a traditional Greek idea. In his introduction to *Oedipus at Colon-*

us, Bernard Knox discusses the cult of dead heroes as a widespread religious phenomenon in 5th-century B.C. Greece:

...sometimes the dead hero was believed to possess healing or prophetic powers, like Asclepius, or to send prophetic dreams, like Amphiaraus. More often, he was thought of simply as an angry spirit whose wrath had to be appeased by sacrifice. The heroes followed in death the fierce code they had lived by: to help their friends and harm their enemies. (257)

Not only does *Timon* start and conclude in the style of Greek tragedy, but the drama includes an address to the sun, another classical marker:

O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
Rotten humidity; below thy sister's orb
Infect the air! Twinn'd brothers of one womb,
Whose procreation, residence and birth
Scarce is dividant – touch them with several fortunes,
The greater scorns the lesser. Not nature,
To whom all sores lay siege, can bear great fortune,
But by contempt of nature.
Raise me this beggar, and deny't that lord,
The senators shall bear contempt hereditary,
The beggar native honor. (IV.iii.1-11)

Rush Rehm notes in *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World* (that 'it is remarkable how frequently tragic characters and choruses address the sun, 'the god foremost of all the gods' (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* 660-1). Tragedies and satyr-plays often made reference to sunlight or the dawn, especially near their outset, effectively merging the mythical world with that of the audience' (23).

Timon's excess of emotion to the point of madness is also characteristic of Attic drama. His indiscriminate generosity reflects the same naïve hubris so commonly found in Greek tragic heroes: 'Why, I have often wish'd myself poorer that I might come nearer to you. We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends?' (I.ii.98-101) and 'Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends, and ne'er be weary' (I.ii.219-20). In this regard, many editors have argued that Shakespeare's *Timon* closely reflects an ethic that is transparently Greek. James Bulman commented, 'Of all of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Timon* most closely adheres to an Aristotelian moral scheme' (131). Frank Kermode similarly notes, 'Timon knows no mean, only extremes; and this has rightly been called the most Aristotelian of Shakespeare's plots' (1443). Rolf Soellner's paraphrase of Aristotle's *Nicomachaen Ethics* refers specifically to the problem associated with Timon's prodigality:

Liberality was the mean between the excess, prodigality, and defect, stinginess. A liberal man is one who gives to the right people at the right time and fulfills the conditions of right giving. He will purchase and hold property as a necessary condition of having the means to give...He will not deplete his substance unless to save his friends from ruin...' (124)

Beyond the triptych structure, choruses, prophecy, solar invocation, and ethics, *Timon* specifically employs Greek versification, tropes and imagery. Stichomythic dialogue (alternating one-line speeches between characters during scenes of high emotion or intense argument), is characteristically Greek. Examples in *Timon* include the central figure's dialogue with Apemantus and the Poet (I.i.180-238), Apemantus and the Lords (I.i.255-271), Apemantus and the Servants (II.ii.51-75), Timon and the Lords (III.iv.35-63), and Timon and Apemantus (IV.iii.279-327). In *Shakespeare Co-Author* (245), Vickers quotes the 19th-century scholar, Charles Knight on this feature of *Timon*'s verse: 'the Folio presents to us in particular scenes a very considerable number of short lines, occurring in the most rapid succession. We have no parallel in Shakespeare of the frequency of their use...'

A.D. Nuttall also discusses Shakespeare's use of a Greek trope in Timon's invocation for a reversal or inversion of natural phenomena:

Plagues, sciatica, itches, blains and general leprosy are to be visited on Athens, but that is not all. The ancient trope known in Greek as the *adynata* and in Latin as the *impossibilia*...is invoked as a figure of malediction. In ancient literature, the trope of the world turned upside down was variously used to describe the Golden Age, to express ultimate absurdity or...to convey a condemnation. (86)

This sentiment is captured perfectly by Shakespeare at the beginning of IV.i as Timon curses on the walls and initiates his relentless invective against the people of Athens:

Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night-rest and neighborhood,
Instruction, manners, mysteries and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries;
And yet confusion live! Plagues incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens ripe for stroke! (IV.i.15-23).

Nuttall suggests that Shakespeare may have used another Greek device in Act II where, accompanied by Alcibiades, Timon is accosted by his creditors' servants. Alcibiades has no lines during this brief confrontation:

Throughout this episode of gentlemanly, arrogant evasion, Alcibiades stands at the elbow of Timon like a *kophon prosopon*, or dumb-mask, in a Greek tragedy. He seems to be there as an extreme anti-type, now, to the creditor's servant. (50)

Rush Rehm also notes that a Greek theatre audience would confront an extraordinary array of frightening incidents: 'incest and cannibalism; matricide, patricide, filicide, suicide, even genocide; disease, plague and insanity; rape, torture, cruelty, betrayal; homelessness and exile...and the terrors of imminent death' (40). Timon's moral collapse, insane ranting, and suicide are certainly Greek-like, as is Shakespeare's use of cannibalistic imagery. Cannibalism was deeply ingrained in the Greek mythopoetic imagination: Cronus swallowed his children, Tantalus butchered and served his son Pelops to the Olympian Gods, and Atreus banqueted his brother on Thyestes' own sons. In Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Agave calls for a feast upon the head of her son, Pentheus. In *Timon*, Shakespeare uses an extraordinary number of cannibalistic images:

Apemantus: No; I eat not Lords. (I.i.204)

Alcibiades: ...I feed most hungrily upon your sight. (I.i.251)

Apemantus: O you gods! What a number of men eats Timon, and he sees 'em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood. (I.ii.39-41)

Timon: You had rather be at a breakfast of enemies than a dinner of friends. (I.ii.75)

Alcibiades: So they were bleeding new my lord, there's no meat like 'em. (I.ii.76)

First Stranger: For my own part, I never tasted Timon in my life. (III.ii.779)

Timon: ... cleave me to the girdle...Cut my heart in sums...Tell out my blood...
Five thousand drops pays that...Tear me, take me...(III.iv.89-97)

Timon: You must eat men. (IV.iii.428)

Timon's discourse with the three thieves is also noteworthy. 'The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction / Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun. / The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves / The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief / That feeds and breathes by a composture stol'n / From gen'ral excrement; each thing's a thief.' (IV.iii.439-45) John Jowett suggests that this passage was based on the 19th ode of the renowned Greek lyric poet, Anacreon (560-488 BCE): 'fruitful earth drinks up the rain, / Trees from earth drink that again, / The sea drinks the air, the sun / Drinks the sea, and him the moon' (297).

Classical Auras

Timon of Athens thus presents a matrix of Greek dramatic elements that imbue the tragedy's plot, characterization, poetics, ethics, imagery and dramaturgy with a classical aura. Nuttall's brilliant deductions about the many similarities between Shakespeare's *Timon* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* are particularly important. A decade earlier, G. Wilson Knight was perhaps the first 20th century Shakespeare specialist to note that *Timon* 'is like Prometheus or Oedipus. Oedipus fits well, as in Sophocles' second play he is sought after by Thebes...for his magic would be powerful in death...but he will not return.' (*Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge* 137).

Late 20th-century scholarship has generally rejected the notion of a direct Greek influence on Shakespeare. Nuttall, for example, cannot accept that Shakespeare could have used an untranslated Greek dramatic source like *Oedipus at Colonus*. 'It must be understood,' he writes, 'that I here press an analogy and make no claim for direct influence' (106).

Yet *Timon* and *Oedipus at Colonus* share the structural element of serial supplication, and there are a remarkable number of other parallels that link these two tragedies. Both playwrights portray protagonists suffering exile in the woods out-

Timon and Oedipus both die mysteriously and their gravesites remain secret, the single instance in Shakespeare where the protagonist dies off stage.

side of Athens, bitterly cursing the friends and family who betrayed them. Both insist that they are victims of Fate and have sinned unknowingly. While *Timon*

curses Athens and *Oedipus* rails against Thebes, both are approached by Athenian heroes (Alcibiades to *Timon* and Theseus to *Oedipus*) who offer sympathy and aid. Alcibiades is accompanied by two women and Theseus guides *Oedipus'* daughters, Antigone and Ismene, to their father at the end of Sophocles' drama.

Timon and *Oedipus* both die mysteriously and their gravesites remain secret, the single instance in Shakespeare where the protagonist dies off stage. Finally, Poseidon and Neptune are invoked near the conclusion of both dramas. Poseidon is the protector of *Colonus* and the Chorus calls to Theseus to come from the grove of 'Ocean Lord Poseidon' to rescue *Oedipus*. In the last lines of *Timon*, Alcibiades laments how 'rich conceit / Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye / On thy low grave, on faults forgiven' (V.iv.77-9).

Timon also presents a number of direct inversions of the *Coloneus*. *Timon* curses Athens repeatedly, but *Oedipus* praises the city offering him protection and that will, in time, receive his blessing, 'Hear me, city named for mighty Athena—Athens, honored above all cities on the earth!' (131-2) As in Plutarch, Shakespeare's *Timon* invites the Athenians to hang themselves on his fig tree, while *Oedipus'* chorus sings of the greatness of *Colonus'* sacred olive tree:

There is a natural marvel here, ...
 a creation self-creating, never conquered,
 a terror to our enemies and their spears,
 it flourishes in greatness in our soil,
 the gray-leafed olive, mother, nurse of children,
 perennial generations growing in her arms –
 neither young nor old can tear her from her roots,
 the eternal eyes of guardian Zeus
 look down upon her always. (790-801)

The German scholar Robert Detobel has identified another potentially shared but inverted metaphor in reference to gender transformation.⁵ Moved by Flavius' tears of pity, Timon says, 'What, dost thou weep? Come nearer; then I love thee, / Because thou art a woman and disclaim'st / Flinty mankind, whose eyes do never give / But through lust and laughter' (IV.iii.486-9). Oedipus, in denouncing his merciless son, Polynices, proclaims the reverse in praising his loyal daughters, '...if these two girls had not been born to nurse me, / I'd be good as dead—for all you cared! But now, / look, they save my life, they feed me, tend me, / why, they're men, not women, look, when it comes / to shouldering my burdens.' (1545-9)

While both Timon and Oedipus suffer terrible reversals of fortune at the height of their prosperity, they both are newly empowered as they approach death. Timon discovers a fortune in gold, which finances the defeat of Athens, while Oedipus receives a new oracle, one beneficent to Athens. Bernard Knox, in his introduction to Fagels' translation, notes that as Oedipus 'foresees the day of his vengeance on the Thebans who have wronged him, his words reverberate with an unearthly tone, the daemonic wrath which, in Greek belief, was the characteristic quality of so many of the beings they honored with heroic sacrifice' (267).

Shakespeare's Timon uses apocalyptic invective that sounds similarly inspired. He is highly Sophoclean, both in the hubris of his benevolent prodigality and in his malevolent, cynical misanthropy. Like a typical Sophoclean tragic hero, Timon remains stubbornly himself without the benefit of self-reflection, and dies, cursing madly and fury-driven in the wilderness.

Rush Rehm writes, 'As a genre, Greek tragedy confronts the horror behind appearances, exposing the blindness of intellect and the destructiveness of passion, showing human beings as vulnerable, cruel, violent, brave, foolish, and compassionate.' (18) *Timon of Athens* is such a work. It has so many unmistakable markers of Greek tragedy that it should be seen as an experiment imitating classical drama. Certainly, it's an unpolished play with a want of action, histrionic emotions, and a protagonist who suddenly descends into self-destructive madness. The action's classical design and allusions certainly support the belief of many critics,

including Harbage and Honigmann, that it was intended for the cultivated audience of the Inns of Court.

Greek Renaissance Classics

There was a longstanding university and court tradition of classical drama productions, in Greek as well as Latin and English translation, during the 16th century in England. Sir Thomas Smith is known to have mounted Greek productions of Aristophanes' *The Plutus* at St. John's College Cambridge in 1536 and *The Peace* at Trinity



College, Cambridge in 1546 (Lever 170). A Latin translation of Sophocles' *Ajax* was produced at King's College, Cambridge in 1564, and *Jocasta*, George Gascoigne's English translation of Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, was performed at Gray's Inn during the Christmas Revels of 1566-7. Finally, Thomas Watson's Latin translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* premiered at St. John's College, Cambridge in 1583.

The dramas of Seneca, Plautus and Terence mostly replaced Aristophanes and the Greek tragedians during the Elizabethan era. Cambridge's Trinity College had a tradition of Latin productions at Christmas, including Seneca's *Oedipus*, *Hecuba*, *Medea* and *Troas*. The boys from Westminster school 'were under royal orders to prepare one Latin play each Christmas' (Smith 71). In addition, classical interludes based on the dramas and legends of the ancient Greeks and Romans were quite the rage. *Horestes* was performed at Gray's Inn and again at court during the Christmas Revels during the same season as Gascoigne's *Jocasta*. Besides these dramatic productions, there was a virtual industry of Greek and Latin drama translations underway, mostly centered at the Inns of Court. By the end of the 16th century, six of Euripides' dramas had been translated, including half a dozen versions of *Hecuba* and four of *Iphigenia of Aulis*. Of Sophocles, there were numerous translations, though only of three different tragedies, *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Electra*. *The Coloneus* remained untranslated for another century.

In *Ancient Scripts & Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500-1700* Bruce Smith argues cogently that Shakespeare imitated classical theatre:

Many superficial features mark *Titus Andronicus* as a ‘classical’ play: its Roman subject matter (this, despite Shakespeare’s unhistorical, thoroughly romantic sources), its borrowing of plot motifs like Thyestes banquet, its several Latin *sententiae* (including one quotation from Seneca’s *Hippolytus*), its numerous parallels between the protagonists and mythological characters, its characterization of Titus as a hero who suffers with the stoic patience of Seneca’s Oedipus—until he turns into an implacable avenger like Seneca’s Tantalus. (240)

Oxford and Timon

Timon of Athens is a mimetic work incorporating characters from Plutarch’s *Lives*, a plot from Lucian’s satire, and sense of irony and tragic depth from the mythopoetics of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*. As a Renaissance adaptation of Greek drama it is a self-consciously literary creation, which adapts a mosaic of sources that would only have been appreciated by a well-educated audience. William Warner’s 1584 allusion to the Athenian misanthrope biting ‘on the stage’ was written in the context of references to two dramas presented at court by the Earl of Oxford’s Boys during the Christmas revels: John Lyly’s *Campaspe* and the lost drama, *The History of Agamemnon and Ulisses*. In *The Scandal of Images: Iconoclasm, Eroticism, and Painting in Early Modern English Drama*, Marguerite Tassi notes that the Earl of Oxford was intimately involved in the court dramas during the revels of that year:

Oxford commissioned dramas for the 1583-4 Christmas season from Lyly, most likely as bids for the Queen’s favor, for he had been notoriously out of her favor from his amorous pursuit of Anne Vavasour, a gentlewoman of Elizabeth’s bed-chamber. Lyly’s *Campaspe* was performed first at Blackfriars for a select audience and then at Elizabeth’s court. (70)

Oxfordian biographers in recent years have strongly suggested that *Timon* is a political allegory, one specifically reflecting Edward de Vere’s financial and social crises in the early 1580’s. In *Discovering Shakespeare*, Edward Holmes goes so far as to claim that *Timon* is the Shakespeare drama ‘which is closest to autobiography’ (237). The argument that de Vere was ‘the archetypal patrician bankrupt of his age’ who ‘threw away a fortune and a career to end up as a Queen’s pensioner’ (238) underlines Draper’s claim that *Timon* is ultimately about the economic ruin of the nobility. Holmes also argues that Timon’s dramatic flaws reflect the unstable, emotional condition at this point in Oxford’s life, echoing E.K. Chambers’s belief that Shakespeare wrote *Timon* ‘under conditions of mental and perhaps physical stress, which led to a breakdown.’ He adds:

Timon is too raw, too real for comfort. It was begun too close to the catastrophe which prompted it. That must be why it was left artistically undigested, incomplete.

But the material of mature tragedy is there, unmissable and moving in its humanity. It is in some ways more potent as it is, not yet formulated into conventional literary form. Timon remains a tremendous fragment. ((Jowett 133, 238)

Eva Turner Clark, Alan Nelson, Charles Beauclerk and Mark Anderson have all provided evidence to show how closely Timon fits the mold of the Earl of Oxford during this period. Like Timon's patronage of the Poet and Painter, Oxford supported many writers, having received a dozen literary dedications by 1580, and sat for two paintings, the Welbeck and Ashbourne portraits. Like Oxford, Timon supported performance art, as shown in the Masque of the Amazons, a device that may mirror the Masque of Amazons performed before Queen Elizabeth and the French ambassador in 1578. (Jowett 13) Timon's direct connection to the theatre is confirmed as he claims the troupe 'Entertain'd me with my own device' (I.ii.146). At this time, Oxford supported two theatre groups, Oxford's Men and Oxford's Boys, who were directed by John Lyly. De Vere was also known to have written interludes and performed before the queen himself.

As for providing lavish gifts on nobility like Timon, Clark has shown that Oxford made notable gifts of beautiful jewels to Queen Elizabeth on New Year's Day in 1575, 1578, 1579 and 1580. On New Year's Day in 1575,

Lord Oxford gave to the Queen 'a very fair jewel of gold, containing a woman holding a ship of sparks of diamonds upon her knee...with three pearls pendant, and three small chains of gold set off with sparks of diamonds.' (Clark 34)

Edward Holmes has noted that in return for his remarkably generous gift to the Queen in 1579, weighing 192 ounces in silver, de Vere received 'a bason and ewer from our store', weighing only 72 ounces of silver. Holmes continues:

This was a dubious riposte in that not only did it represent less than half the value but was plainly a snub; her gift had no personal significance, reminding Oxford of his function as Lord Great Chamberlain. For the ewer and basin was part of the ritual attendance on the monarch on certain occasions. They were practical reminders of a purely ceremonial role. (246)

Oxford's basin and ewer are particularly relevant here in that Timon's inconstant, flattering friend, Lucullus, ironically greets Timon's servant Flaminius with these words, 'A gift, I warrant. Why, this hits right: I dreamt of a silver basin and ewer to-night' (III.i.4-6).

De Vere's patronage of the arts and provision of fabulous gifts qualify him as a model for the prodigal Timon. Similarly, his disastrous financial and social affairs during this period confirm him the best exemplar for Shakespeare's Timon that could be found at court during Elizabeth's era. Charles Beauclerk summarizes

Oxford's crisis thus: 'Although once "superlative in [Elizabeth's] favour", Oxford had taken a fall in 1580/1 from which he never fully recovered. Burghley in a letter to Hatton in March 1583 refers to him as 'subject to the disgrace of her Majesty' and mentions 'his fall in her Court, which is now twice yeared, and he punished as far or farther than any like crime hath been...' Particularly symbolic in this regard is the fact that Oxford, like Timon, was forced to sell his lands to pay the debt. Confronted with his dire financial mismanagement, Timon exclaims, 'Let all my land be sold' and his Steward ironically replies, "'Tis all engag'd, some forfeited, and gone, and what remains will hardly stop the mouth of present dues' (II.ii.149-52).

Financial Woes

The extent of Oxford's financial woes can be discerned from his correspondence of that period. In an October, 1584 letter to Lord Burghley, Oxford admitted to being very indebted to the Queen and to having entered into a 'great number of bonds' for the sale of lands with encumbrances, and earnestly requested Burghley's assistance so he would be 'unburdened of a great care' that threatened his honor. Like Timon,

Oxford complained of being pursued by many creditors, 'suit-

Particularly symbolic in this regard is the fact that Oxford, like Timon, was forced to sell his lands to pay the debt.

ors unto me to procure the discharge of her Majesty's said debt.' In his postscript, he objected bitterly to Burghley's interference in his affairs with John Lyly, stating, 'I mean not to be your ward nor your child, I serve her majesty and I am that I am, and by alliance near to your lordship, but free and scorn to be offered that injury, to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants, or not able to govern myself,' In conclusion, Oxford also urged Burghley to 'leave that course hurtful to us both.' (Nelson 294)

In his lifetime, Oxford was also ill-served by flattering friends and servants as attested in Henry Lok's letter to Burghley in 1591, which complained about 'the number of overmany greedy horse-leeches which have sucked too ravenously on his [de Vere's] sweet liberality.' (Anderson 250)

In *The Authorship of Timon of Athens*, Ernest Hunter Wright remarks that 'Cicero seems to rank [Timon] as a cynic philosopher, so does Seneca, while the elder Pliny definitely classes him with Heraclitus, Pyrrho, and Diogenes. In another reference, Cicero tells us something more interesting about him; even a recluse like Timon, he says, must have some companion. No one else is meant, apparently, than Apemantus;' (Wright 9). Later Wright intriguingly suggests that Shakespeare may be indebted to John Lyly for the characterization of his cynic:

In the general conception of his character, and particularly in the manner of his ad-

dress, Apemantus closely resembles the Diogenes of Lyly's *Campaspe*—much more closely, in fact, than he resembles the Diogenes of Lucian's *Sale of Philosophers*. (16)

A century later, Jonathan Bate echoed Wright's belief: 'The character of Apemantus may also be indebted to the misanthropic philosopher Diogenes in John Lyly's comedy *Campaspe*' (Bate and Rasmussen 1748). Plutarch's Apemantus, is spelled 'Apermantus' at several places in the Folio, e.g., in the opening scenes and the banquet blessing, 'Apermantus Grace'. Robert Detoble suggests that this variable spelling was not due to compositor error, but was actually intentional, 'Aper' referring to Edward de Vere. 'Aper' is the Latin word for wild boar, the heraldic animal of the Earls of Oxford.⁶

Lyly's *Euphues and His England* (1580) was dedicated to the Earl of Oxford and his Greek-themed comedies, *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao*, were both performed at court by Oxford's Boys in 1584. Not unlike Timon's loyal steward, Flavius, John Lyly appears to have been responsible for the Earl of Oxford's books during the early 1580's. Alan Nelson writes that Lyly's declared willingness to have his accounts reviewed 'suggests that he both kept financial accounts for Oxford, and served as his private secretary' (289). In *Shakespeare By Another Name*, Mark Anderson, points out the perfect parallel between Oxford's relationship with Lyly and Timon's with Flavius. In particular, Anderson notes Timon's questioning his Steward's honesty when presented with the harsh reality of his bankruptcy:

Flavius, fearing Timon's retribution, defends his actions as those of a true and steadfast retainer. 'If you suspect my husbandry or falsehood,' the steward tells Timon, 'Call me before the exactest auditors / And set me on the proof.' This is what John Lyly encountered in the summer of 1582. As de Vere faced financial difficulties, he first sought to fix the blame on someone else, his trusted secretary. (Anderson 184-5)

That Lyly was loyal to Oxford appears to have been the case. His disturbed letter to Lord Burghley in 1582 expresses his grief over having displeased Oxford: 'This conscience of mine maketh me presume to stand all trials, either of accounts or counsel, in the one I never used falsehood, nor in the other dissembling.' (185) Anderson echoes Marguerite Tassi's opinion that court observers would have seen *Campaspe* as an exiled nobleman's 'dramatic plea for royal forgiveness... Lyly's production gave de Vere the opportunity to argue that his scandalous affair with the temptress Anne Vavasour was now ancient history' (188-9).

Lyly would suffer his own misfortune later in 1584, landing in prison for failure to pay his debts. This too seems to fit the mold of Shakespeare's Flavius, who beggars himself by sharing his personal savings with the other servants following the collapse of their master's estate. Both Lyly and Oxford were eventually res-

cued by royal favor. 'The Queen herself released Lyly, perhaps due to the favorable impression he had made with his witty dramas.' (Tassi 71) In *Timon*, Flavius reports he had appealed to the Athenian Senate for 1,000 talents to rescue Timon. Oxford's rescue came in 1586 when Queen Elizabeth awarded him a lifelong annuity of 1,000 pounds, which he continued to receive for the next 18 years.

The Oxfordian view that *Timon of Athens* is an allegory bearing witness to the playwright's disastrous personal and political estate, is powerfully supported by the many significant details in this tragedy linking both Timon to Oxford and Flavius to Lyly. Are there other characters in Shakespeare's work that represent members of Elizabeth's

court? Charles Beauclerk has argued that the many allusions to Fortune in *Timon* are allegorical references to Queen Eliza-

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beth herself, whose 'capriciousness was the despair of those who sued for her favor.' Further, Beauclerk notes that it is hardly surprising that 'Timon should lose both his sanity and his identity when Fortune withdraws her favor.'⁷

The queen's first Minister, William Cecil, may also be represented by the likes of the Athenian Senators and Lucullus who betrayed Timon. Burghley was certainly 'Lucullean,' in that he built fabulous homes and gardens, had a renowned library, and was surrounded by scholars. He also helped bankrupt Oxford through his control of the Court of Wards and the nonpayment of his daughter Anne's £15,000 dowry. (Anderson 67) In this specific instance, Timon's immediate offer to pay the Old Athenian a dowry for his romantic servant Lucilius is richly ironic.

Although Burghley did lend support for Oxford on many important occasions, it was another powerful courtier who successfully intervened to help restore the earl to royal favor, effectively ending his exile. Anderson reports that on May 11, 1583, 'at the end of the haunted week that began with the burial of de Vere's son, a third party argued the earl of Oxford's case before the queen. Walter Raleigh, put in a good word with Elizabeth about de Vere's reinstatement' (192). Oxford and Elizabeth were reconciled on June 1. One eyewitness reported that 'after some bitter words and speeches, in the end all sins are forgiven, and he may repair to the court at his pleasure. Master Raleigh was a great man, whereat Pundus (Lord Burghley) is angry for that he could not do so much' (193).

If Walter Raleigh is parodied in *Timon of Athens*, as Oxford, Lyly and Burghley appear to be, then the character of Alcibiades fits Raleigh's critical role in helping restore Oxford's honor and prospects. H.J. Oliver has noted that the scene leading up to Alcibiades' banishment from Athens for the offence of pleading too-passionately for the life of a friend (one who is neither named nor mentioned elsewhere in the play) was puzzling and obscure. Oliver further notes that the Alci-

biades in *Timon* is not that far from Plutarch's historic character: 'He is the Fortinbras who restores order only after the tragic hero is dead; still more, he is the Octavius, the Aufidius—the man who survives because he has a clearer view of things... Timon, like Hamlet, Coriolanus and Antony has a greater soul than the man of action with whom he is contrasted' (xlix).

Alcibiades' speeches to the Senate may thus serve as thinly veiled pleas by Oxford for royal forgiveness, mercy, and the honor of a military commission.

It pleases time and fortune to lie heavy
 Upon a friend of mine, who in hot blood
 Hath stepp'd into the law, which is past depth
 To those that, without heed, do plunge into 't
 He is a man, setting his fate aside,
 Of comely virtues;
 Nor did he soil the fact with cowardice
 (An honor in him which buys out his fault)
 But with a noble fury and fair spirit,
 Seeing his reputation touch'd to death,
 He did oppose his foe;
 And with such sober and unnoted passion
 He did behave his anger ere 'twas spent,
 As if he had but prov'd an argument. (III.v.10-23)

This speech could well represent the defense of a homicide committed by the Earl of Oxford in 1567, when Thomas Bricknell, an under-cook at Cecil House, was judged to have died *felo-de-se* of injuries from 'running upon' the Earl of Oxford's fencing sword. Cecil, Oxford's guardian at the time, did his best to have the jury rule that Oxford was acting *se defendendo*. This passage by Alcibiades could be interpreted as a justification for the recent year-long lethal quarrel between de Vere and Thomas Knyvet in which a number of their servants were killed in street skirmishes. Alcibiades argues that to act in anger is certainly 'impiety' and he condemns 'rashness in cold blood', but he proclaims that to kill in defense is 'most just'. Finally, Alcibiades offers to pawn his victories, all his honor, upon his friend's goodness:

If by this crime he owes the law his life,
 Why, let the war receive 't in valiant gore,
 For law is strict, and war is nothing more. (III.v.84-86)

If this passage represents plea for a military assignment from Queen Elizabeth, then *Timon* succeeded because de Vere was dispatched to the war the Netherlands in August, 1585.

Genre Questions

Although the controversy of co-authorship seems to have dominated 20th-century criticism of *Timon of Athens*, scholarly confusion over its very genre has been equally problematic. F.W. Brownlow came close when he asserted that *Timon* represents the development of an 'English classical drama of ideas' (Ruszkiewicz 89). Because of the consistency of the play's classical design, poetics, and images, viewing it as a classical Greek drama that combines Plutarchan, Lucianic, and Sophoclean elements supports the argument for single authorship.

Oedipus at Colonus, needs to be examined as a direct source for *Timon*, despite the unavailability of translated editions of Sophocles' dramas in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. This stricture does not discomfit Oxfordians because Edward de Vere was tutored by England's foremost Greek scholar, Sir Thomas Smith, and was surrounded by a coterie of Greek translators at Gray's Inn. Cecil House, where Oxford lived for nearly a decade, had a great library with Greek editions of Sophocles and Euripides (Jolly 12). As for Oxford's personal interest in Greek literature, Thomas Underdowne dedicated his 1569 translation of Heliodorus' Greek romance, *An Aethiopian History*, to de Vere, the same year Oxford purchased Bishop Amyot's French translation of *Plutarch's Lives*.

William Warner's 1584 allusion to a Timon drama linked to Greek-derived dramas performed at court by the Earl of Oxford's Boys is not the only contemporaneous connection between Timon and de Vere. Robert Greene's *Gwyndonius* (1584) was dedicated to the earl and, unlike Plutarch or Lucian, Greene specifically refers to Timon's misogyny to 'condemn those heavenly creatures' (Wright 12). Oxfordian biography thus provides intriguing possibilities for interpreting Shakespeare's tragedy as the playwright's personal appeal, an apology and an attempt to regain royal favor. Oxford's exile from court, his financial and political woes, the street violence over Anne Vavasour, and the death of his newborn son may have provided the emotional grist for an archetypal tragedy of excess, suffering, and ruin.

The performative style of Shakespeare's *Life of Timon* is rooted in Attican tragedy, but the hero's bitter cynicism and desperate emotions suggest a deeply troubled author. The extreme negativism, combined with the unsatisfactory condition of the folio text, have caused many critics to speculate about Shakespeare's mental condition when he wrote the play. A century ago, Frank Harris called *Timon* a 'scream of suffering' (Ruszkiewicz 11) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mark Van Doren, George Brandes, Anthony Burgess and E. K. Chambers have all suggested that Shakespeare was in crisis when he wrote it.

G. Wilson Knight astutely noted that *Timon* 'shifts between the personal and the universal without overmuch regard to particulars of characterization' (125). These thoughts in mind, the Earl of Oxford fits their authorial icon rather well.

Notes

¹ Despite Oliver's disclaimer, the Arden edition includes the traditional five-act and scene designations. Quotes from *Timon* are taken from this edition.

² Kreiler's comments were included in postings by Robert Detobel on elizaforum. The dating of *The History of Agamemnon and Ulisses* is confirmed by Nelson (247).

³ 'Timon: Son of Fortune', unpublished presentation delivered at the Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference, Concordia University, Portland, OR 2007.

⁴ From Dryden's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Antony*:

Tomb Inscription: Here am I laid, my life of misery done.

Ask not my name, I curse you everyone.

Epitaph: Timon, the misanthrope, am I below.

Go, and revile me traveler, only go. (1144)

Shakespeare's equally paradoxical epitaph, recited by Alcibiades:

'Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft:

Seek not my name. A plague consume you, wicked caitiffs left!

Here lie I, Timon, who, alive, all living men did hate.'

Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait. (V.iv.70-73)

⁵ Personal communication, December 2008.

⁶ In postings on elizaforum, Detoble noted that Thomas Lodge also used this anomalous spelling in *Wits Misery* (1596) when referring to 'Timon and Apermantus' serving 'the fury of their unbridled minds' (Lodge 100).

⁷ 'Timon: Son of Fortune', 2007

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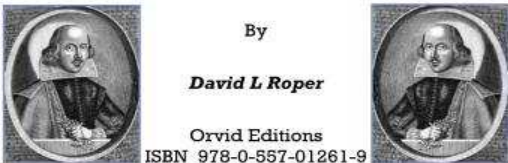
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