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# Some Versions Of Timon's Epitaph: Performance, Text, And Gift In Shakespeare And Middleton's Timon Of Athens

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SOME VERSIONS OF TIMON'S EPITAPH: PERFORMANCE, TEXT, AND GIFT IN  
SHAKEPEARE AND MIDDLETON'S *TIMON OF ATHENS*

by

Silas F. Pera  
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2014

A Thesis

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

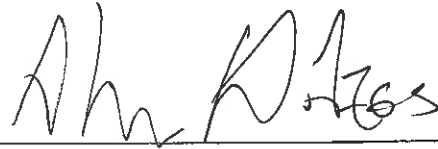
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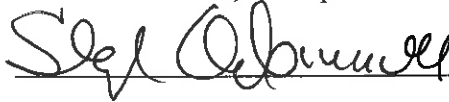
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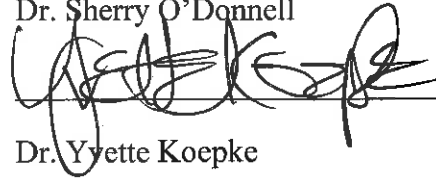
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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how notions of textuality influence the production of William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton's *Timon of Athens* in both scholarly, print editions and in theatrical performances of the play. It focuses specifically on the scenes involving Timon's epitaph, which have proven difficult to handle both editorially and theatrically, and seeks to show how changing views of the nature of textuality has significantly altered the way that different readers and audiences encounter this play. These issues regarding the idea of textuality begin with the play itself, which enacts its own ideas about the power of texts to intervene in human affairs. This is accomplished by framing the play's harsh critique of socio-economic relations—centering on ideas of the gift and the counterfeit—within a contestation of different modes of artistic representation. Timon's epitaph emerges at the end of this contest as a specifically textual emblem. How different editions and productions of *Timon of Athens* treat this textual moment in the play then offers insights into their own notions of textuality, and it demonstrates how these views influence their specific editorial and theatrical decisions about how to present this play to their respective audiences. Therefore, a review of the editorial and performance history that focuses on editions and productions which offer unique treatments of the epitaph scenes highlights the significant role that ideas of textuality play in shaping these versions of the play. It also suggests how work in the field of textual studies can ultimately influence theater practice.

## CHAPTER I

### A TEXTUAL TURN IN *TIMON OF ATHENS*

In a short article from the 1950s, W.M. Merchant identifies a specific discourse at work in *Timon of Athens*. It first appears at the outset of the play action in what he recognizes as a “technical” and “manifestly disproportionate” discussion between the characters of the Poet and the Painter over the nature of each other’s art (249). Merchant’s primary contribution consists of identifying this discussion as an “echo of the *Paragone* controversy,” referring specifically to Leonardo da Vinci’s attempt to raise the status of painters and painting in the fixed hierarchy of the arts in place at that time (251). In doing so, Da Vinci is working against the ingrained Platonic distrust of the world of sensual appearance. Merchant describes the argument in the following terms: “it claims for the visual arts, which constantly lay under judgment as panders to the lust of the eyes, an insight into reality which had until the high renaissance been reserved for the operation of ‘the word,’ philosophy and poetry” (252). Specifically, Da Vinci is claiming that painting’s value is higher than the value of poetry. From this initial identification, Merchant makes several interesting comments on the situation of this discourse in the play. The first is that the inclusion of this particular type of discussion, an intellectual commonplace by Shakespeare’s time, in the play amounts to a kind of wider consideration by the playwrights on the appropriate use and function of these different modes of representation. Secondly, Merchant notes that in the critical literature of his time this consideration of representation is almost always subordinated to the social and economic dimension of the play, and he insists on reading a more “organic relation” between the discourse on representation and what he takes as the central socio-economic message: “the dual theme of the false appearance of friendship and the uncertainty of

fortune” (250). With few exceptions, Merchant’s general assessment of the critical attention paid to this discourse in the play has held true up to the present. An increasing awareness of the (to a greater or lesser degree) incomplete nature of the text of *Timon* has led many critics to assume that these elements of the play (if they were ever intended to) were never satisfactorily developed by the original writers. In short, I believe that Merchant is correct to insist on a more integrated relationship between the discourse on the visual versus the verbal modes of representation and the discourse on society and economy in *Timon of Athens*. I would only add that Merchant seems to be missing a third term in this consideration, that of theatrical representation. Several critics (Bradbrook, Wilson, Jowett) have pointed to places in the play that seem to reflexively examine the use and the function of theatrical performance and representation in the play, and this examination of theater culminates precisely in a final scene with the Poet and the Painter, suggesting an interplay between the three terms. I will further suggest that a play which includes just such a consideration of different forms of appearance and modes of representation might interestingly engage with current debates about how we conceptualize Shakespeare as an artistic figure and about theater’s relationship to the texts used to create theatrical performances.

In a more recent article, W.B. Worthen reaffirms the importance of the performance-text nexus in the field of Shakespeare studies. He goes on to examine what is at stake in the different conceptions of Shakespeare as either a literary or a theatrical figure. In doing so, Worthen contends with a current trend in Shakespeare studies that he refers to (borrowing a term from Patrick Cheney) as “return of the author” (Worthen 309). While Worthen identifies this trend primarily with Lukas Erne’s well-known argument for a literary Shakespeare, he also links it to the work of Cheney, David Kastan, Jeffrey Knapp, Charlotte Scott, and others. What ties these critics together then is a general view that Shakespeare, for whatever reasons, viewed himself as



an ‘author’ or that the play-texts that we attribute to him were in some way shaped by ‘literary’ intentions, concerns or pressures. This creates a relationship wherein performance studies nominally defines itself in opposition to this view of Shakespeare as a literary dramatist, presenting a Shakespeare whose life and work is primarily shaped by the intentions, concerns or pressures of the theater. Yet in forwarding this theatrical view of Shakespeare, performance studies has often enough advocated a view of performance that reinforces the centrality of the text rather than challenges it.

At the heart of this issue, according to Worthen, is a common way of imagining the relationship between text and performance, literature and theater. We can sum up this relationship between the text and performance as one of ‘interpretation’. This is the idea that what occurs during a theatrical performance is the unfolding of a single interpretation of the text of the play. Here, according to Worthen, “‘interpretation’ seems to be a principle that both qualifies and guarantees the appropriate transfer of the text’s signifieds to performance” (331). In this view, the values and meanings of the play are ultimately fixed and determined by the text. The role of a performance then is to accurately and vividly transmit those values and meanings that reside in the text to the audience.

The influence of this conception of the performance-text relationship on current debates over literary or theatrical Shakespeares is traced back to Harry Berger’s distinction between the “imaginary audition” involved in the slower, more recursive act of reading and the more limited, linear “realized audition” of the spectator. This distinction itself evokes an even older critical hierarchy that privileges literary activity over other forms of creative or artistic interaction on the basis that these other artistic forms operate on the level of the senses while reading a literary text engages the intellect. We can read this here as another version of the bias that Da Vinci encountered in the *Paragone* controversy: the literary word is of the mind, and the other arts are

of the senses. This suggests then that the debate that is staged in opening scenes of *Timon of Athens* is still relevant to our own conceptualization of the performance/text relationship today.

Following David Saltz, Benjamin Bennett, and others, Worthen questions this conception of the performance-text relationship. Saltz in particular has dubbed this view ‘the interpretation fallacy’ (299). Instead, Worthen favors a more integrated conception of performance and text, one that instrumentalizes the role of the text in the process of creating a performance. In this view, the text (and its interpretations) is only one of the many elements (i.e. sets, sound, costumes, props, lighting, stage direction, blocking, etc.) that are used to create an altogether different thing, the event of the performance. Or, as Worthen puts it, “Stage performance uses writing not to communicate with words to an audience, but to create those problematic performatives of the stage, the entwining of the fictive and the actual, the drama in the performers’ doing, that animates (our appetite for) acting” (333). This conception is founded on the apprehension that “performance always does more with the text, makes more of it than what its mere words say (to us, here, now), more than we can detail in words” (Worthen 333).

What is at stake, then, in these conceptions of the performance-text relationship is precisely the assertion of a critical hierarchy. Understanding performance as interpretation reinforces the centrality of the text, which often enough allows critics to dismiss the critical difficulties of performance in favor of the more familiar difficulties of the text. Worthen picks up Hans-Thies Lehmann’s terminology, referring to the tradition of performance-as-interpretation as ‘dramatic theater’ and the more instrumental view of the text in performance as ‘postdramatic theater.’ The postdramatic theater, according to Lehmann in his survey of experimental performances in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, is precisely a theater in which performance is no longer fixed, determined, and subordinated to a text. And these shifting relations of text and performance between dramatic (text-based) theater and postdramatic (non-

text based) theater can help us understand something about the shifting relations caught up in a play like *Timon of Athens*. In this case, the most relevant aspect is one element of postdramatic theater's approach to theatrical representation.

This aspect of theatrical representation is what Lehmann calls the undecidability of the theatrical sign. Theatrical signification differs from written signs in its relation to the material and material processes of everyday life. He explains further,

theatre is *at the same time* material process—walking, standing, sitting, speaking, coughing, stumbling, singing—and ‘sign for’ walking, standing, sitting, etc.

Theatre takes place as practice that is at once signifying and entirely real. All theatrical signs are at the same time physically real things: a tree is a cardboard tree, sometimes also a real tree on stage; a chair in Ibsen's *Alving house* is a real chair on stage that the spectator locates not only in the fictive cosmos of the drama but also in its real spatio-temporal situation onstage. (102)

Postdramatic theater takes this basic simultaneous functioning on the level of signification and on the level of the real and parlays it into “a strategy and an *aesthetics of undecidability*” (100).

This strategy involves “an irruption of the real” into the fictive world of the play, creating a situation in which the audience can no longer confidently parse out reality from fiction (101).

On a more recognizable level, Lehmann cites moments such as embarrassing mistakes (forgetting lines, etc.), audience heckling, and open scene changes as examples of this irruption of the real into performance. But, the more pronounced cases occur when such moments are self-consciously deployed in the action of the play. One such example cited by Lehmann is the outrage stirred by Peter Brook's staging of the Vietnam revue *US*, in which “an apparently live butterfly was burnt” (103). More pertinently, we could add here Brook's 1974 production of *Timon of Athens* in Paris at the Theatre des Bouffes-du-Nord. This production was notable

(among other things) for the role that the theater building played in the performance. Gary Williams describes the old nineteenth century structure—partly ruin, only partly renovated—as “the cavernous shell of a once red-and-gilt Victorian theater, pocked and fire-scorched, with a gaping, curtainless proscenium that exposed a deep cavity where the stage had been” (183). Brooks clearly uses this setting to create this kind of postdramatic undecidability. The irruption of the real occurs at moments such as that in Act Five when the first Senator begs Alcibiades to forgo the destruction of the city: “These walls of ours/ were not erected by their hands whom/ You have received your griefs; nor are they such/ That these great towers, trophies and schools should fall/ For private faults in them” (5.5.23). The spectator is able to register the desperation of the Senator’s words not only as they relate to the Senators situation in the action of the play but also on the level of the real, in the destruction and ruin of the theater building itself. Something close to this apprehension might be heard in the comments of one reviewer, who claimed, “Every spectator at once knows that he is sitting inside a symbol of the decline of the West” (Williams 183). This makes it especially clear how this undecidability involves a kind of double action. Not only are theatrical signs infused with elements of the “real” world, but also the real world is infused with the signifying potential of the theater. In other words, we begin to view elements of the real world as theatrical signs.

This unsettling of fiction and reality that in part characterizes the postdramatic theater becomes more relevant if we recognize it as a kind of counterfeiting. And it is precisely the idea or the problem of the counterfeit which lies at the heart of the action of *Timon of Athens*. By investigating this problem further, we can (following Merchant’s original suggestion) also tie more closely together the social and economic dimension of the play with the discourse on fiction and modes of representation. At a basic level, Timon’s problem is a problem of recognition. He does not distinguish true friends from flatterers, true gifts from loans at interest.

The reasons for this, though, go beyond simple naiveté on his part. Ken Jackson has skillfully provided an account of Timon's gift-giving practices that touches on this concept of the counterfeit. In an essay which employs Derrida's work on the subject of the gift in *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* and *The Gift of Death*, he seeks to explain the drastic change in Timon's character from the first to the second half of the play. While picking up on the basic terms of this argument, I will use a reading of the discourse on the competing visual/verbal modes of representation to challenge some of the final conclusions that he makes about Timon's character and the action at the end of the play.

In exploring Timon's gift-giving, Jackson reacts mainly to the influential work of Coppelion Kahn and others who view Timon's reckless giving at the beginning of the play as a form of potlatch. By applying Marcel Mauss's anthropological description of the gift practices involved in the potlatch, where the excessive displays of giving are essentially aggressive and agonistic and finally establish the social ordering of primitive societies, these critics take a decidedly negative view of Timon's giving. By giving so recklessly so as to ensure that the gifts cannot be reciprocated, he is caught up in a high stakes competition for social power and is ultimately interested only in maintaining his social position at the top of Athenian society. Jackson rightly identifies this view with a long critical tradition, extending back to Samuel Johnson, which understands Timon's giving in an equally negative, self-interested light (Jackson 39). On the other hand, we can identify Jackson's view with an equally long tradition, extending back to at least George Steevens, which detects a more positive and disinterested motivation behind Timon's giving (Butler 78). Most of these critics, though, read in the lines from Act 2, "Unwisely, not ignobly have I given," the sentiments of a basically naïve character and his subsequent rage as the after-effects of a vast disillusionment. While reading Timon's motivation

in a similarly positive way, Jackson's argument presents a little more sophisticated view Timon's character.

Following G. Wilson Knight, Jackson takes a more directly ethical and philosophical stance towards the play, reading Timon's character as one motivated by a "passionate religious search for the gift" (Jackson 34). Unlike the self-interested, narcissistic giving described by Kahn, Timon, here, is on a kind of religious quest for the pure gift, or the gift without an obligation (Maussian or otherwise) to return. And this is where Derrida's formulation of the gift in *Given Time* comes into play. As Jackson reminds us, Timon's quest is a quest for the impossible "Because for Derrida there is no gift in gift exchange; there is only exchange" (39). In place of Mauss's reading of the gift in which the potlatch and the obligation to return are at the core of the gift relationship, Derrida presents the aporia of pure giving: a situation in which "the simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it" (Derrida 14). The idea is that in order for a true gift to occur there must be no reciprocation, but once a gift is perceived, identified or recognized (consciously or unconsciously) by the donor or the donee as a gift it carries with it a debt or obligation to return. It therefore enters into a circle of exchange, an economy, and negates or annuls its own character as free gift. The gift then, in a well-known declamation, is: "Not impossible but the impossible. The very figure of the impossible. It announces itself, gives itself to thought as the impossible" (Derrida 7). This understanding of the gift as the figure of the impossible is the connection to Derrida's work in *The Gift of Death*, and it is what places Timon's giving in a specifically religious context. Jackson explains, "The gift—the impossible—is linked to Derrida's religious explorations in that the *tout autre*, the wholly other, the God which cannot be known, must occupy the same aneconomic—impossible space as the gift" (40). Jackson makes the most use out of Derrida's reading of *Fear and Trembling*, specifically the ethical rendering of the story of Abraham. The ethical relationships described by

Kierkegaard in the story of Abraham and Isaac are of interest precisely because of their relationship to the gift or, in other words, “because Abraham must *sacrifice Isaac without any reciprocity*; that is, he must murder his son without any expectation that God will reward him, that God will enter into an exchange relationship with him” (Jackson 41). The instant when Abraham moves to kill Isaac is an instance of pure giving in which the circle of exchange is interrupted. It is a profoundly religious moment because in order to truly fulfill his relationship with God, the wholly other, he cannot (secretly, unconsciously, or otherwise) anticipate anything in return. Most importantly for Jackson is what occurs ethically in this moment. According to Kierkegaard’s well-known pronouncement that “the ethical is the universal,” Abraham, in breaking the economic circle of exchange, also breaks from all ethical relationships and has become the enemy of mankind. Fulfilling this relationship to God then includes what Derrida terms “a duty of hate”, and this duty in turn supplies Jackson with a specific cause for Timon’s misanthropy in the play (Derrida 64). Jackson sums this up:

In creating the sudden split between the two Timons, Shakespeare actually reveals their proximity. Timon’s misanthropy is implied in his giving. Not in the sense that he gives—or we should say now, exchanges—aggressively but in that his attempts at ‘truly’ giving or moving outside the circular economy of exchange in the first part of the play are passionately, profoundly religious. Impossibly so. And so, too, is his misanthropy religious, a necessary renunciation of the circular economy of exchange that pervades all worldly activity and disallows the impossible gift. His efforts at giving are efforts, not unlike Abraham’s, to respond to the call of the *tout autre*; they are efforts that take him—almost—outside general ethics. (47)

So, in this sense, Timon's philanthropy and misanthropy are really two sides of the same coin. His generosity is a search for the divine other—an attempt to escape the logic of exchange that governs all human relationships. After this attempt fails, Timon removes himself from human society. This move out of society is then another attempt to break from the cycle of exchange. In order to seek the divine, he must reject and revile human society.

While Jackson here insists on Timon's religious passion as the source for his misanthropy, a claim for which there is little direct evidence in the play, I will suggest another reason for Timon's wish to break from the cycle of exchange, namely, an anxiety over the absolute undecidability of all economic and social relationships, an anxiety of the counterfeit. And it is precisely the discourse on the competing modes of representation that most clearly registers this anxiety. So, it is now important to look more closely at the situation of this discourse in the action of the play.

In an attempt to address some of textual difficulties and stylistic unevenness of *Timon of Athens*, M.C. Bradbrook has offered a rather unique (if not altogether satisfactory) depiction of the play as “an experimental reshaping of the Elizabethan ‘show,’ a different *kind* of performance” (84). She goes on to describe this kind of performance further, “It [the play] depended not on plot or character but on a number of contrasted scenes written on a central theme,” and “the development is shown largely in spectacular terms and through iconographical interpretation of the dramatic spectacle” (84). While the view that *Timon* was written as a sort of Elizabethan pageant has not generally been accepted, critics have periodically noted the kind of spectacular and iconographical presentation that Bradbrook points out here. The play, I argue, presents its discourse on representation through a series of figures that emblemize these different modes of representation. Each of these figures, consequently, represents a shift in the way that the stage action can communicate and relate to the audience.



We encounter two of these figures in the opening scene, the first of which is the Painter's portrait of Timon and the second being the Poet's allegory of Fortune. Both of these figures give us a representation of Timon in the moments before he makes his first appearance on the stage. In the order of action, then, Timon appears first in the medium of painting, then in a poetic recitation, and finally in his own character on stage. As we already began to see in Merchant's reference to the *Paragone* controversy, these different modes of representation were distinguished in part by how they operated on and through the senses to communicate their subjects to their audiences. If painting operates primarily as a visual medium ("panders to the lust of the eyes") and poetry functions as a primarily aural medium (the audience listening to the words), then the opening scene stages a kind of contest of the senses. This contest is most clearly on display in the Painter's response to the Poet's work. He rather dismissively replies that there are thousands of paintings that he knows of which illustrate the Poet's conceit "more pregnantly than words" (1.1.94). Since both of these senses, the visual and the aural, are the primary senses at work in theatrical performance, this contest becomes a debate over the modes of representation through which performance communicates. While the theater primarily signifies its material through a combination of the visual and the aural, a certain tension can be created when one of these senses begins to dominate the signifying process.

This tension is certainly at play in the third emblematic figuration of Timon, the masque performed at the banquet in the second scene. The banquet scene presents Timon at the height of his excess. The masque is an interesting interlude in the play, not least because of the appearance of female characters in a play with such few women. In the middle of this scene, a "forerunner" dressed as Cupid enters and announces that a performance in honor of Timon has been prepared for the banquet. A pleased Timon invites the performers into the banquet hall. As the stage direction tells us, a troupe of ladies enters dressed as Amazons. The ladies are playing

lutes and dancing, and the lords at the banquet join the ladies in a dance, usually with some lascivious implication. As the performance ends, Timon praises the masquers for their entertainment and offers them a small banquet of their own to show his gratitude. The masque is immediately followed by and even seems to incite Timon's most profligate bout of gift-giving in the play. The masque then is clearly linked to this reckless giving and to the character of Timon. In his own discussion of some of these issues, John Jowett sees a similar relation between the masque and Timon in the rather allusive line following the end of the performance when Timon claims that the performers have "entertained me with my own device" (1.2.149). Whatever the exact meaning of this line, for Jowett, it points to the fact that "the masque is emblematically appropriate to him [Timon]" (Jowett 83). The masque then figures Timon in a distinctively theatrical mode of representation.

The masque presents several difficulties both textually and critically. One of the difficulties considered by Jowett is how to determine what kind of performance the masque is. When Cupid announces the entertainment, he locates the performance in relation to the other senses that are being satisfied at the banquet. He proclaims, "Hail to thee, worthy Timon, and to all that of his/ bounties taste! The five best senses acknowledge thee/ their patron and come freely to gratulate thy plenteous bosom./ There taste, touch, all, pleased from thy table rise,/ They only now come but to feast thine eyes" (1.2.121-126). Here Timon, as the patron of the five senses, is linked to sensuality in general, and the masque, as a spectacle, is linked specifically with the visual, a feast for the eyes. Jowett, who describes the action of the play precisely in terms of certain "shifts to and fro between the iconographic and the verbal" mode, sees this as "an eruption of the visual as the primary signifying medium that transports the play into another mode of action" (84). In the contest of the senses, the visual comes to dominate during the performance of the masque. Because Cupid frames the masque in such sensual terms, Frederick

Keifer has even suggested that these lines signal a specific stage action and that at this point the five senses might appear as personified characters on stage in a dumbshow hailing Timon (Jowett 84). In the text, the lady masquers enter after Cupid has announced the performance. But at this point, the stage direction frames the performance differently, not as a masque of the five senses but now as a masque of Amazons. This, in turn, leads us to consider whether the performance is a masque of the five senses, a masque of Amazons, or some combination of both. This last choice is the approach that Jonathan Miller takes for his 1981 production of *Timon* for the BBC. In this performance, a young Cupid enters with five other child performers each of which is holding an ornament representing one of the five senses, such as a gold mirror representing sight and a gold apple representing taste. In a line, they approach Timon and literally present each of the senses to him. After this presentation, the young Cupid signals for the Amazons to enter and begin their entertainment (BBC). While the visual may dominate during the masque, Jowett also points out that the verbal is still at work in the form of Apemantus's commentary on the proceedings. And it is this commentary that draws out a more explicit relationship between the spectacle, the Amazons and Timon. As the masquers enter, Apemantus rails, "Hoy-day,/ What a sweep of vanity comes this way./ They dance? They are madwomen;/ Like madness is the glory of this life,/ As this pomp shows to a little oil and root" (1.2.130-134). The Amazons code the performance as dangerously feminine. The masque, which seems to "come freely to gratulate thy bosom," is ultimately aggressive. The eruption of the visual into the scene of action that occurs during the masque is also a feminine invasion of the mad, disordered, deceptive, sensuous, excessive, lustful, and vain. The madness of the spectacle is compared to the madness of "this life," which could obviously refer to life or the world in general, but could also refer to a specific life, *The Life of Timon of Athens*. Timon's world, in which the masque appears, is as equally mad and disordered as the Amazonian world

of the masque. A little plain living, “oil and root,” Apemantus assures us, will reveal this all to be a world of false appearance. And Apemantus ends by wondering why Timon does not recognize the danger in the reciprocal relationships involved here: “Who lives that’s not depraved or depraves?/ Who dies that bears not one spurn to their graves/ Of their friend’s gift?/ I should fear those that dance before me now/ Would one day stamp upon me” (1.2.139-143). In an interesting way, these lines then confuse the danger of giving gifts with the dangers of theatrical performance.

So while Jowett ultimately rejects a performance that combines characters representing both the five senses and Amazons, the association between the two seems to set up a situation in which “The female, the visual, the sensual, and the irrational are here opposed by the male, the aural, the critical, and the rational” (85). But Jowett is also right to point out how the masculine commentary of Apemantus is continually at risk of being subsumed or conquered by the spectacle it comments upon, or how it is “orchestrated within the masque episode” (85). It is certainly true that Timon’s guests and Timon himself regard Apemantus as his own type of spectacle or entertainment at the banquet. They seem to view him as a kind of sideshow curiosity at the festivities. In this sense, Apemantus himself supplies the answer to the question of why Timon does not recognize the danger in the performance of the masque and the performance of friendship and harmony that it is supposed to represent. Insofar as Apemantus becomes a part of the masque spectacle, it is no longer clear that his role is essentially different than any of the other participants. The undecidability of the theatrical sign is at work here. His “oil and root” rather than exposing a world of appearance become just another element of that (theatrical) world. This relationship is demonstrated again in the exchange (or rather lack of exchange) which ends scene 2 and in which Timon attempts to give Apemantus a gift:

Timon: Now Apemantus, if thou wert not sullen

I would be good to thee.

Apemantus: No, I'll nothing—for if I should be bribed

too, there would be none left to rail upon thee and then  
thou wouldst sin the faster. Thou giv'st so long, Timon,  
I fear me thou wilt give away thyself in paper shortly.

What needs these feasts, pomps, and vainglories?

Timon: Nay, an you begin to rail on society once, I am

sworn not to give regard to you.

Farewell, and come with better music.

Apemantus: So, thou wilt not hear me now, thou shalt not then.

I'll lock thy heaven from thee.

O, that men's ears should be

To counsel deaf, but not to flattery. (1.2.244-257)

Apemantus here refuses Timon's gift. He attempts to disrupt the cycle of exchange precisely in order to supply Timon with a critique of exchange. But Timon does not view his refusal antagonistically, as Mauss's theory suggests he should. What gets in the way of Apemantus's critique is again the idea of a performance. If Timon believes he is giving pure gifts but is only exchanging for a certain performance or show of friendship (which he takes to be genuine), he does not regard Apemantus's refusal as a refusal at all. He views it more like a bad deal. From Timon's point of view, Apemantus *is* trying to exchange something, his critique (viewed as its own kind of performance or amusement), that Timon is simply not interested in. Therefore, he does not "give regard" to him. Apemantus, in other words, *gives* the wrong performance, prompting Timon to call for the right one, "come with better music." This leaves Apemantus wondering again why Timon cannot distinguish between the real and the counterfeit. He can't

distinguish this precisely because Apemantus himself has been subsumed in the theatrical mode of representation that characterizes Timon's social world.

The element of theatricality or performance that renders all exchanges and relationships undecidable appears again in the second half of the play. It appears as a rejection of the theatrical mode of representation as the idea of performance itself becomes a direct object of the dialogue. For Timon, performance can no longer be counted on to deliver what it purports to deliver. Gifts and displays of friendship do not assure the existence of true friendship. Toward the end of *Timon of Athens*, the Poet and the Painter, the two fawning characters who have opened the action of the play and the discourse on representation, have heard rumors that Timon is wealthy again and are on their way to regain his favor. As they discuss Timon's situation and consequently their own, the Painter reflects,

Good as the best. Promising is the very air o'th'  
time; it opens the eyes of expectation. Performance is  
ever the duller for his act and, but in the plainer and  
simpler kind of people, the deed of saying is quite out  
of use. To promise is most courtly and fashionable;  
performance is a kind of will or testament which argues  
a great sickness in his judgement that makes it. (5.2.22-28)

Luke Wilson has very profitably examined these lines by tracing the way the meaning of the term "performance" evolved historically from a primarily legal word describing contracts to an almost exclusively theatrical word describing what takes place on the stage. The term "performance," then, was most often used as an antecedent of the word "promise," with "promise" referring to the act of entering into a contract and "performance" referring to the fulfillment of the terms of the contract. If money is lent at interest, then the "promise" takes

place when the money is lent out, and the “performance” occurs when the debt is repaid with the accrued interest. Wilson then goes on to show how the lines above might play on the different legal and theatrical meanings of the term “performance.” If we take the legal sense of performance, what the Painter says here is pretty clear: fulfilling the terms of an agreement or contract (performance) is not the norm among the Athenian elite, doing so demonstrates your low social status and diseased thinking, while, on the other hand, anticipating the fulfillment of the contract is the more preferable and exciting experience. While the legal meanings here are pretty straight-forward, it is more difficult to determine what the lines might say about theatrical performance. They might, to name a few examples, point to a general feeling that theatrical performances never quite live up to the hype or that theater is a crude and unsophisticated form of entertainment. They could also simply signal dissatisfaction with changing theatrical styles or theater practices (i.e. performances are “duller” now), or they could suggest an inability of performances to fully “realize” a text (i.e. performances don’t accurately deliver what they promise).

Wilson explores this last meaning, drawing out a relationship between a “will or testament” and a theatrical script with performance as a shared term between the two. So, we can view performance then, like death, as a terminus where all outstanding accounts are settled or where all theatrical actions are completed. But, we can also view the will or testament as “a written *deed*” (performance), like a theatrical script, that itself becomes a promise. The fulfillment (performance) is accomplished at a later date by a person’s heirs and executors, in the case of a will or testament, or by a theatrical company in the case of a script (Wilson 77-78). Wilson concludes from this:

That Shakespeare’s imagination sends us back to promise, back to text, means both that in some sense performance fails and reverts to promise and that

Shakespeare is manipulating the pair of terms so as to cause them to be reversible: performance is approached to be turned back into promise in a new guise. And it's precisely this reversal of direction that is possible in the rehearsal and composition of a dramatic script; indeed, in this passage in *Timon* the things to be promised are precisely works of art—poems and paintings. Plays go unmentioned, but the theater, where production and performance maintain so tense a temporal relationship, is clearly the most suited generic paradigm. (Wilson 78)

For Wilson, Shakespeare is pointing out a problematic feature in the very notion of performance. Namely, it has trouble completing itself. Performance or fulfillment can always be deferred, can always be turned back into a promise. If a performance fails, it can be re-worked, rehearsed, and performed again. We can think of Puck's speech, which closes each performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but which is posed precisely in the form of a promise:

If you pardon, we will mend.  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearned luck  
Now to scape the serpent's tongue,  
We will make amends ere long;  
Else the Puck a liar call. (*Riverside* 5.430-435)

So just at the moment when the performance is about to reach its conclusion, Puck encourages the audience to think of the current, (perhaps) unsatisfactory performance as a promise of a future, improved performance. Wilson's point is that this process is a continuous one in the theater and that this recursiveness is always a feature of performance in general.



The play, though, may not be addressing the issue of performance in quite this way. That the Painter's lines contain some kind of meta-theatrical comment seems unavoidable. In just what way this comment denotes a kind of failure or deep problematic of theatrical performance is another question. Although Shakespeare seems aware of them elsewhere, it's not so clear that he has in mind the kind of temporal relationships that Wilson describes. Wilson goes on in his analysis to draw an analogy between these ideas and the historical situation of the play in Shakespeare's time: "yet surely it is remarkable that the play was thus an unperformed promise of performance" (Wilson 78). The fact that there is no record of a performance of *Timon* during Shakespeare's lifetime makes the play a representative case for Wilson. With *Timon of Athens*, we are almost forced to read the text as a promise. We can't read it as a representation of a Shakespearean performance because such a performance never existed. Of course, this is rather speculative. As far as we know, *Timon* may have been performed any number of times without any historical record of these performances being discovered. It may be more relevant to associate any kind of critique or failure of performance in the Painter's lines with the fact that actual performances of *Timon of Athens* have so often been critical and financial failures. A typical example, according to Gary Williams, is Frederick Warde's early American production of the play, which had to shut down after a handful of performances "at a great financial loss" (Williams 173). And even in fairly successful productions, such as Tyrone Guthrie's in 1952, critics seem to lose interest in Timon's ranting, as one critic notes, "The latter part of the play may be said to lapse into one tremendous grouse" (Williams 176). *Timon's* uneven history on stage does then seem to point to a larger, more troubled relationship with performance in the play.

It is also significant that Wilson sees a return to text at this point in the play. For Wilson, a performance's reversion into promise is a reversion back into the script or text of the play. As I

hope to show, the play does make a textual turn in the final scenes, but not quite in the same way that Wilson suggests here. Since the theatrical mode of representation is so tied up with the problems of the gift in the play, Timon finally has to seek out a different mode of representation, the textual, in order to accomplish the moment of the gift. But first, I will note a few things about the Painter's comments that somewhat complicate the view of performance in the scene above. The first is that as the Painter says these lines he and the Poet are in the midst of rehearsing their own act which they will perform before Timon. The Painter calculates, "Therefore 'tis not/ amiss we tender our loves to him in this supposed/ distress of his: it will show honestly in us" (5.2.12-14). The Poet even goes as far as thinking up the exact lines he will deliver (5.1.31). This view fits in nicely with Wilson's analysis. The Poet and Painter hope that their show of loyalty and support to Timon in his misfortune will ultimately pay off in the end, that is, "likely to load our purposes with what they travail for" (5.1.15). Here, performance reverts back to a promise to be fulfilled later when they will deliver their new poems and paintings and Timon will supposedly again shower them with gold. Yet, they base this whole performance on a misinterpretation or misrecognition of Timon's character. They believe that Timon's misfortune itself has only been a performance. As they discuss the rumors of Timon's new-found wealth, the Poet questions, "Then this breaking of his has been but a try for his friends?" (5.1.9-10). And the Painter replies confidently, "Nothing else. You shall see him a palm in Athens again and flourish with the highest (5.1.11-12). They believe that Timon's financial crisis and resulting misanthropy are simply an act, a counterfeit, a way for Timon to sniff out his true friends from the mere flatterers. Earlier, Apemantus confronts Timon with this same skeptical accusation of performance, "This is in thee a nature but affected,/ A poor unmanly melancholy sprung/ From change of fortune./ Why this spade, this place,/ This slave-like habit and these looks of care?" (4.3.201-204). Apemantus sees Timon here elaborately

choosing a setting, selecting props and costumes, and developing a suitable acting style. From this point of view, then, the Poet and Painter are taking appropriate parts in Timon's production, a performance for which, like other actors, they should be paid for. The representation folds back on itself in such a way here that it's not clear whether the actual person speaking these lines believes he should be paid for providing Timon with a painting, or playing the correct part in Timon's supposed drama, or acting the part of the Painter in a production of *Timon of Athens*.

Another aspect of performance in this scene that Wilson doesn't mention is the presence of a spectator. As their conversation continues, Timon enters and overhears the Poet and Painter plotting out their roles. He instantly recognizes their false intentions and in an aside exclaims, "Excellent workman, thou canst not paint a/ man so bad as is thyself" (5.1.29-30). Timon here has become a kind of privileged spectator who is able to see what goes on behind the scenes. It is interesting that in the confrontation with the Poet and the Painter, with representation, that Timon is able to overcome the problem of representation. He is able to do what he was unable to do at the beginning of the play, which is to distinguish friendship from flattery. In this way, the scene is a cognate of the previous scene, in which Timon is able to recognize Flavius's authentic friendship. (This is potentially a strong reason against separating these scenes with an act break as they traditionally are in most editions.) It is not surprising, then, that it is in this scene that Timon most directly confronts the notion of the counterfeit. As Timon meets the Poet and Painter, he gives his own performance, playing along with their show of friendship. He listens to their entreaties and flatters the unwitting pair by repeating over and over his ironic suggestion that they are "honest men" (5.1.54). He continues this game by complimenting first the Painter: "Thou draw'st a counterfeit/ Best in all Athens; thou'rt indeed the best,/ Thou counterfeit'st most lively" (5.1.78-80). And likewise to the Poet, "And for thy fiction,/ Why, thy verse swells with stuff so fine and smooth/ That thou art even natural in thine art" (5.1.81-83). Timon employs the

double meaning of counterfeit in these lines as both likeness/ semblance and as fraud/ deceit. Timon then reveals that he is on to their charade. He has recognized their false flattery, and he drives them off, berating them and pelting them with gold (or possibly stones or roots). In this scene, then, the modes of representation (the visual and aural) that are embodied by the Poet and the Painter and that are the primary means of theatrical communication are rejected as uncertain or unstable grounds for the performance of true friendship. The world of the theater and performance is the world of the counterfeit. As we will see, the theater becomes a representational regime within which the true gift cannot be thought or make an appearance.

With this, we can return to Ken Jackson's argument and more specifically the importance that he places on the final exchange that Timon has with his faithful steward. In this scene, Flavius seeks out his old lord in the woods outside of Athens. He hopes to convince Timon of his loyalty by offering to give Timon all the money he has personally saved and to become his servant again. Most editors, following Nicholas Rowe, have positioned this interview with Flavius as the final scene of the Act Four. Making these act divisions is not a straightforward task given the structure of the second half of the play. At this point, the text of the First Folio consists of a long unbroken string of action without act or scene division that continues to the end of the play. The positioning of the final act break, as editors readily admit, is a somewhat arbitrary decision of convenience. The pride of place that the Flavius scene receives from this position may partly influence the significance that Jackson gives this moment in the play action. The long sequence of action in Act Four presents a series of characters who visit or come across Timon in the wilderness outside of Athens. Interspersed with scathing apostrophes, these exchanges seem primarily to demonstrate the force and depth of Timon's misanthropy. In this case, Timon's interaction with Flavius does present something different, a moment when Timon relents in his vast misanthropic project. And this is precisely what holds Jackson's interest in

this interaction. For him, it carefully stages an instant in which “the impossible of the religious is possible” (64). For a moment, then, Timon is able to escape the circular economy of exchange and, in doing so, open up a situation in which he is simultaneously and absolutely responsible to both God as the wholly other and to humanity in general as other. Jackson does not reach this conclusion easily, so it’s important to review some of the steps he takes to get to this point.

As we have seen, Jackson depicts a Timon, motivated by extreme religious passion, who seeks God (the wholly other) by pursuing the pure gift (the impossible). This quest gives rise to an inevitable contradiction. Jackson explains, “We have a responsibility to others (ethics) and another, absolute responsibility to the *tout autre* (in this case, gods). And the two can be contradictory. This in part explains Timon’s sometimes confusing generosity, the way he simultaneously seems to love others but, in that love, to distance himself (51). This is the relationship that Kierkegaard addresses in his reading of the Abraham story, where responding to the call of the Other (a call to give without any calculation or expectation of a return) takes a person beyond general or universal ethics. And this begins to account for the failure of Timon’s giving in the first half of the play. Jackson goes on to explain that Derrida, in exploring the contradictions of the gift, wants to trace a potential connection between the absolute responsibility to the Other and a general responsibility to others, which would be the same connection between the pure gift and economy; or, “To put this another way, in this impossible contradictory instant Derrida seeks to find a relationship between religious obligation and everyday ethical obligation” (Jackson 46). So, thinking the impossible moment of the gift in these terms involves a “double bind” which simultaneously and absolutely obligates the individual to both God and humanity. Timon’s interaction with Flavius then contains such an Abrahamic moment, “a striking reversal in the logic of the gift” (64). This comes about as

Timon questions Flavius's intentions: "Is not thy kindness subtle, covetous,/ A usuring kindness and, as rich men deal gifts,/ Expecting in return twenty for one? (4.3.503-505). He replies,

My most honored lord,  
For any benefit that points to me,  
Either in hope or present, I'd exchange  
For this one wish: that you had power and wealth  
To requite me by making rich yourself. (4.3.513-517)

Exchange is negated here, Jackson tells us, precisely because Timon is already wealthy. The one thing that Flavius would exchange for (the restoration of Timon's wealth and power) is impossible for him to give, but impossibly this gift is given not by Flavius but by the gods. In Jackson's terms, "The gift of the gods makes the gift of Flavius—in the form of a gesture toward another—the possible," so that "Timon, who has been seeking the wholly other all along, finds it here in the figure of Flavius's 'impossible' gesture" (64, 65). This moment, then, constitutes the double bind in which Timon is absolutely responsible to both God and humanity simultaneously. Yet, it is not clear that this accurately describes what takes place in this scene. In their notes on these lines, Anthony Dawson and Gretchen Minton do not read such a singular event: "Flavius is still speaking in terms of an economy of exchange—he wants to be rewarded for his service by seeing his master rich again" (*Arden* 309, footnote). From this perspective, Flavius's kindness is still consciously or unconsciously a "subtle, covetous," "usuring" kindness, and, therefore, the circular economy of exchange is never interrupted. Jackson also noticeably fails to mention that Timon apparently gives Flavius a large amount of gold as the direct result of this exchange. I do think this is a significant moment if not an impossible one. The question is why Timon accepts Flavius's gesture as an authentic one. We will look at another aspect of Jackson's argument to help read this scene again from another perspective.

From Jackson's point of view, Timon's giving in the first half of the play is an initial attempt to encounter the pure gift. And, as Jackson tells us, he pursues the pure gift through exchange, which operates as a simulacrum of the gift. Yet seeking the pure gift within the limits of exchange is necessarily a flawed project:

We note that Timon *imagines* a divinely inspired exchange network where the gods provide the help from others. The divine gift, the impossible, thus makes possible this economy of exchange, but, at the same time, it renders Timon's imagined economy inert; that is, the circle of the economy of exchange does not turn here, because Timon ultimately exchanges with no one. And the exchange network exists in no place except Timon's imagination, revealing something, perhaps, of what might be called a utopic impulse. (Jackson 52)

Timon, as noted earlier, believes that he's giving pure gifts, and any return or restitution from others must appear as a gift from the gods, not as a mere vulgar exchange. This explains why Timon refuses any attempt at repayment for the gifts he has given. But rather than binding himself to others (as he clearly believes, "For tis a bond in men") Timon is in fact severing his ties to humanity, sacrificing his responsibility to others in a way that is analogous to Abraham when he decides to sacrifice Isaac (1.1.148). This relationship is imaginary also because "Timon is the only character in the play who regards generosity as such a *bond*" (*Arden* 172, footnote). The simulacrum of giving that Timon has constructed is therefore a kind of utopian fantasy. But this is precisely where we need to interject another critical context, because if Timon indulges in a kind of utopian fantasy of the gift, it is a specific fantasy. It is the utopic vision laid out by Seneca in his treatise on the gift, *De Beneficiis*.

The case for Seneca as a crucial context for understanding early modern notions and practices of giving and consequently the action of *Timon of Athens* is made by John Wallace.

After reviewing some of the different sources for the play, he concludes, “but Seneca remains by far the most important author for the dissemination of ideas concerning the obligations derived from gifts, and neither Shakespeare nor any of his contemporaries could have thought seriously about the subject without coming to terms with him” (350). Wallace goes even further in his claim, arguing that the play was written as a direct response to Seneca’s book. While I don’t think it is very likely that Shakespeare and Middleton created a play to engage directly with Seneca’s work, I do agree with Wallace’s suggestion (a suggestion which he then does not follow) that “Shakespeare [and Middleton] were testing the prevalent Senecan ethos rather than the book itself” (350). Insisting on a Senecan context, also provides a more plausible account for the relevance of Derrida’s work to the kinds of giving that take place in the play, which is something, in my view, that Jackson never satisfactorily accounts for in his essay. This will become clearer if we refer to a short essay by Jean-Joseph Goux, in which he reads Seneca’s account of the gift in *De Beneficiis* against Derrida’s work on the same subject in *Given Time*. In fact, we might even go so far as to say that the extent to which we can find Derrida lurking in this play is exactly the extent to which Seneca is also lurking in this particular play as well as in early modern culture in general.

Goux offers a good albeit brief account of some of the most important distinctions that Seneca makes in his description of what takes place and what should take place when a person gives a gift (usually referred to more broadly by Seneca as *beneficiis* or “kind deed”). Seneca, first of all, distinguishes the *beneficium* from two other forms of giving. The kind deed is specifically not a *generatio*, a category which encompasses not only loans at interest but any giving that calculates in advance a material return on the thing given. Timon does not seem to engage in this type of giving, although his flatterers clearly do. As one of these lords observes, “no meed but he [Timon] repays/ Sevenfold above itself, no gift to him/ But breeds the giver a



return exceeding/ All use of quittance” (1.1.284-287). So in their gifts to Timon, they expect beforehand a disproportionate return. The kind deed is also separate from the *munus*, which covers any giving motivated by the donor’s wish for more glory, honor, prestige, pleasure, or fame. This is the excessive, destructive, competitive form of giving examined by Mauss. It is also the picture of giving that the Poet depicts in his poem dedicated to Timon. The Poet represents human society as a ruthless competition for status; people clamoring over each other to reach the top of Fortune’s hill. He specifically notes how Timon’s wealth and giving fit into this picture: “His [Timon’s] large fortune,/ Upon his good and gracious nature hanging,/ Subdues and properties to his love and tendance/ All sorts of hearts” (1.1.57-60). In contrast to these two forms of giving, Seneca defines the *beneficium*, which constitutes a completely other, higher form of giving, by the absence of a return or of any expectation of a return. It is formulated as a pure gift in Derridean terms. In this respect, it is important to remember that Timon does not just bestow material objects or money on his friends, but he performs kind deeds, such as releasing Ventidius from debtors’ prison or setting up his servant Lucilius in marriage (1.1.97-113; 1.1.114-155). It is also clear that, on the subject of giving, Timon speaks in a distinctly Senecan idiom: “and there’s none/ Can truly say he gives if he receives,” or “We are born to do benefits” (1.2.10-11; 1.2.99-100). The beginning of the play, then, seems designed to present a picture of each of these Senecan categories of giving. Timon has particular trouble (a problem he most likely shares with almost all wealthy and powerful people) distinguishing or disentangling the *munus* from the *beneficium*. As Wallace points out, this problem is embedded in Senecan thought: “One of the inherent difficulties in the system, which Seneca never overcomes, is the borderline between true generosity and thoughtless extravagance. More generosity is always claimed to be a virtue, but at some point, never defined, it transforms itself into a vice” (352). It is precisely this distinction that comprises one of Apemantus’s pointed questions to Timon:

“What needs these feasts, pomps, and vainglories?” (1.2.236). Apemantus tries to show Timon how his own vanity or pride of place is caught up in his liberality in spite of his Senecan rhetoric. Apemantus most clearly enunciates this idea with his comparison between “Willing misery” and “uncertain pomp” during his second meeting with Timon in the wilderness (4.3.241-242). He explains,

The one [uncertain pomp] is filling still, never complete,  
The other [willing misery], at high wish. Best state, contentless,  
Hath a distracted and most wretched being,  
Worse than the worst, content. (4.3.243-246)

Apemantus is pointing out again the calculation in Timon’s giving, that even when he was at his highest, wealthiest, most powerful position (“Best state”) in Athens, Timon was always after something more (“contentless”). Apemantus tries to convince Timon that this discontented best state is actually a worse position than the person who is perfectly content with their miserable, low condition. He wants to show him how this striving for social position is incompatible with true gifts and true friendship.

Goux gives us a better idea of how Seneca actually attempts to distinguish these categories of giving. He, first of all, tries to show a radical separation or “autonomy of principle” between the three operations that constitute the gift event: the giving, the receiving, and the returning of the gift (Goux 152). He goes on to emphasize the difficulty of such a distinction:

The problem, for him [Seneca], is to prescribe to the donor a giving without the hope of a return; and, on the other hand, concerning the beneficiary, a receiving and a returning that should not be confused with the reward of the giving or with a calculation to receive much more. Between the duty of giving and the duty of

returning, there is not the symmetry of the trade, but the heterogeneity of two orders of reality. (Goux 152)

In order to explain this autonomy of the different actions in gift-giving and to extricate the pure gift from the circle of exchange, Seneca relies on the concept of gratitude. Rather than an obligation to return, the gift entails on the part of the donee a moral obligation of gratitude “that must be asymmetrical, not a simple logic of exchange of equivalents” to the act of giving (Goux 152). This obligation of gratitude does not have to bring itself to completion in the act of returning, and if a person does decide to give something in return, s/he does so *out of gratitude* not compulsion. Whether or not we can accept this separation ultimately depends upon a further distinction in the definition of the gift, and this distinction itself amounts to a semiotics of the gift. Here, Seneca detaches the object or material that is given from the true act of giving. In this formulation, the *beneficium* in its essence can only occur in the soul. It is therefore defined as a good will or intention (*voluntas*) on the part of the donor to act solely for the benefit or advantage of the donee without regard for him/herself; and conversely, it only exists as gratitude in soul of the donee. We’re very close here to the common sense notion that when it comes to gifts it’s the thought that counts. If the true gift is entirely a matter of the soul, the material object, then, becomes the visible sign of this authentic, incorporeal action of the soul, which is of the order of the signified. So this structure of the gift then mirrors the structure of the act of signification in general (Goux 155). For Goux, this is important. He declares it a “foundational moment” or “an ethical turning point” in human history (159, 157). The foundation of this semiotic of the gift is what allows the pure gift to become thinkable or distinct from the other categories of giving, the market model of the *generatio* and the anthropological model of the *munus*. This also brings us back to Derrida and *Given Time* because it is exactly this semiotic of the gift that they want to challenge. Here, the uncertainty or undecidability in the relationship

between the signifier, the signified and the referent is what makes the gift the impossible: “It is the voluntas that we will never see in itself, as such, in its true presence, but always through signs” (Goux 158). What Seneca offers in *De Beneficiis* then is an idealized, utopian model of human social interaction beyond the market and the war for status. Wallace comments on this utopian character of the Senecan regime, calling it a system that was “unworkable in practice” and that “made impossible demands on human nature” (354). Similarly, Goux points out, “The one who is closer to divine donation, even if human weakness takes this ideal as a guide, can never hope to achieve it” (157). A similar apprehension of the undecidability of the gift at a semiotic level (an apprehension that would be more available to those working in the theater) seems to drive Shakespeare and Middleton’s exploration of gift relationships in *Timon of Athens*, and this is the specific “utopic impulse” that drives Timon in the first half of the play.

Now, we can return to the final interview between Timon and Flavius. In the complementary scene with the Poet and the Painter, we have already seen how Timon in breaking with human society finds himself in the role or position of a privileged spectator that allows him to overcome the uncertainty of the counterfeit. A similar action takes place between Timon and his steward. For Ken Jackson, the moment of the gift occurs because Flavius’s giving cannot accomplish its goal and only the gods can complete the action of the gift. But, we can also read this moment of the gift in a Senecan rather than a Derridean framework. Jackson’s analysis presupposes that the gift that Flavius offers is the restoration of Timon’s wealth and power. From a Senecan point of view, though, this confuses the outward, material sign of the gift with the true gift, which only exists as the *voluntas*, true intention or good will of the donor. And if we look at the beginning of this scene, it is precisely this true intention that Flavius offers up to Timon: “I will present/ My honest grief unto him and as my lord/ Still serve him with my life” (4.3.464-466). Timon, though, does not immediately accept as authentic Flavius’s claims

that he is “An honest poor servant” and that “Ne’er did poor steward wear a truer grief” (4.3.470, 475). What finally convinces Timon of his true intention is another sign, Flavius’s tears; but his tears are a different kind of sign here. Timon responds to his friends weeping,

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 thorough lust and laughter. Pity’s sleeping.

Strange times that weep with laughing, not with weeping. (4.3.477-481)

For Timon, the tears are an authentic sign because they don’t belong to the common sign system operating in Athens. In the utterly masculine world of Athens, weeping can only be a sign of “lust and laughter.” But Flavius’s tears signify in a wholly different way, characterized by their femininity. In an interesting way, Timon makes the patriarchal, phallogocentric discourse—which identifies humanity in general with the masculine (“flinty mankind”) and therefore excludes the feminine from this same identification—work against itself. Since Timon in his misanthropy has rejected this masculine, Athenian world as counterfeit, Flavius’s femininity (“thou art a woman”) offers him the possibility of authenticity outside of this masculine world. He seems to take Flavius’s tears as authentic precisely because they are not the kind of counterfeit, masculine signs employed by the Athenians. And it is only after this, when Flavius begs Timon “T’accept my grief,” that he declares his steward’s intention (*voluntas*) to be authentic: “I do proclaim/ One honest man” (4.3.491-492). Flavius is in a very hermaphroditic position here, simultaneously coded as masculine and feminine. This also interestingly reinforces the impulse in several productions of *Timon* to turn the Flavius role into a female role. This decision began with the very first known performances of *Timon* and can be found again in some of the most recent productions of the play, including Nicholas Hytner’s 2012 production for the National Theatre.

But, we can see that it is precisely Flavius's interjection of these feminine signs (tears) into the masculine world of Athens that allows Timon to accept Flavius's act of giving as an authentic, pure (in the Senecan sense) gift.

What I've been arguing, then, is that the action of *Timon of Athens* deploys a recognizable discourse or debate over different modes of representation, and through the notion of the counterfeit demonstrates the basic uncertainty or undecidability at work in the semiotics of the theater. The play uses this more familiar discourse to investigate a similar uncertainty in the semiotic that, in Senecan terms, serves as the foundation of the gift. In this way, the play performs a deconstruction of the gift that in some ways parallels Derrida's own deconstruction of the gift event. But as we see in the final interaction with Flavius, Timon does not seem to be after an impossible moment of the gift in the Derridean sense that Ken Jackson describes. Rather, he seems to be after a foundational moment, something that will make certain (or assure one of the *voluntas*) the relationships involved in the act of giving. This cannot take place in Derridean terms because the gift is defined by its very impossibility. It can only appear as the impossible. In Timon's case, though, the pure gift appears or becomes certain through a sign, Flavius's tears, which do not participate in the system of signs that governs the social world of the play. This sets up a textual turn in the final moments of *Timon of Athens*, and it involves one last emblematic figuration of Timon. The emblem is the epitaph found on the monument that marks Timon's grave, and it completes the series of emblems that represent Timon, which began with the Painter's portrait in the first scene.

Timon first mentions his epitaph during his encounter with Apemantus in the woods. He addresses himself,

Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave:

Lie where the light foam of the sea may beat

Thy gravestone daily; make thine epitaph,  
That death in me at others' lives may laugh. (4.3.371)

The epitaph is first of all different from the other emblems that precede it because it is Timon who creates this representation of himself. The epitaph at this point, though, seems to be a simple continuation of Timon's intense hatred and rage; these lines come directly after Timon's dialogue with Apemantus has regressed into a childish shouting match. He conceives of it as a way to continue cursing and ridiculing humanity even after his death (4.3.356-370). But this already brings out what I take as the essential characteristic of the epitaph as a means of communication; it allows Timon to simultaneously participate in the general social discourse of humanity, which he has absolutely rejected, while remaining outside of humanity itself. Alcibiades' final pronouncement suggests as much: "Dead/ Is noble Timon, of whose memory/ Hereafter more" (5.5.77-79). The Athenians will continue to remember and discuss Timon's life and death by reflecting on this epitaph.

Timon refers to his epitaph one more time before his death. This reference occurs in the final scene in which Timon's character appears on stage. In this scene, two senators from Athens come to reconcile with Timon and beg for his help in defending the city from Alcibiades. It is in this final exchange that the characters begin to refer more directly to the act of writing itself. The senators, as a sign of their remorse, pledge to restore Timon to his former position of wealth and power in Athens. The first thing to notice is how the senators use the written word itself as a figure to frame this offer rhetorically:

Ay, even such heaps and sums of love and wealth,  
As shall to thee blot out what wrongs were theirs,  
And write in thee the figures of their love,  
Ever to read them thine. (5.2.37-40)

The senators' rhetoric here carefully mimics the Senecan rhetoric of the gift used by Timon earlier in the play before his change of fortune. The gifts that the senators are offering here, they claim, will operate as true signs of their love (intention, *voluntas*) for Timon. It is also important, then, to note that these signs are represented as written signs which are unmediated. They are not false, counterfeiting theatrical signs but rather can be written directly ("in thee") onto Timon's heart. Despite this rhetoric of authenticity, the figure of writing here still participates in a system or logic of exchange. The writing they refer to is that of an accountant's balance sheet, on which good "figures" on one side of the ledger can balance, cancel or "blot out" a negative number on the other side. In short, they are still calculating in their giving, and Timon's response to the senators' offer shows as much. He pretends to be moved by their gesture:

You witch me in it,  
Surprise me to the very brink of tears.  
Lend me a fool's heart and a woman's eyes  
And I'll bewep these comforts, worthy senators. (5.2.40-43)

In exchange, Timon offers the senators his own sign of authenticity (one which we have already seen before) his tears. But, Timon is of course dissembling in these lines. He parodies their rhetorical gesture, throwing it immediately back in their faces to show them how empty it is. He ends by rejecting their offer and countering with his own bleak offer for every Athenian to come and hang him/herself on this spot. The important point, though, in all of this is how writing and authenticity seem to stand in contradistinction to the theatrical and the counterfeit. For his part, Timon begins to refer directly to his own writing at the end of this scene, "Why I was writing of my epitaph;/ It will be seen tomorrow" (5.2.70-71). He ends this interview with the senators



with a description of his epitaph. This description includes an invitation to all the Athenians to come and view this gravesite and read the epitaph:

thither come,

And let my gravestone be your oracle.

Lips, let sour words go by, and language end:

What is amiss, plague and infection mend. (5.2.103-106)

In doing this, Timon, as we saw happening in Alcibiades' announcement to remember Timon at the end of the play, signals his wish to continue to participate in the discursive community of Athens even as he is making his final plans to remove himself permanently from that world. He wants the Athenians to come and read his epitaph, which clearly implies that even after he is gone, he still has something say. Timon also chooses a specific metaphor in these lines to characterize this kind of writing. The purpose of the epitaph now is to function as an oracle for the population of Athens. This is, I think, a complex metaphor. Dawson and Minton don't put a lot of stock in the epitaph's oracular character, "Since, 'oracles' are traditionally cryptic and difficult to interpret, the promise of meaningfulness that Timon holds out here seems ironic and elusive" (*Arden* 328, footnote). This simplifies the matter a little too much. In Dawson and Minton's view, the oracular character of the epitaph makes its functioning as a sign more slippery and less certain, but I think that Timon conceives of the epitaph as an oracle for exactly the opposite reason. As a divine sign, Timon presents the epitaph to the Athenians as a true, authentic sign. Similar, then, to the senators earlier, he appeals to the written sign as a carrier of authenticity. And while Dawson and Minton are clearly right to point out the cryptic nature of the oracle, this difficulty stems from the oracle's liminal position; it participates simultaneously in both divine and human systems of signification. For whatever confusion this creates, it does not make the oracle less true. Timon constructs the epitaph, then, as an oracle and as a written

sign, and it is exactly the liminal position of the oracular and the written in this play that acts as an assurance of the epitaph's authenticity. In the same way that femininity becomes a ground for certainty with Flavius's tears, divinity and textuality serve as the ground for reading the epitaph as an authentic sign. The epitaph reproduces this dilemma on a meta-theatrical level as well. The epitaph, if it appears at all (in many stage productions it does not) it must appear on stage as a theatrical sign. It, therefore, must appear as a part of the world of the theater which is the world of the counterfeit. So in order to guarantee its authenticity, it must communicate through a different, non-theatrical mode of representation, specifically a textual mode. The epitaph, then, simultaneously participates in the systems of theatrical and textual signification. The authority and authenticity of the epitaph's meaning is therefore grounded in this textuality.

In a final note that I hope will direct the rest of this study of Timon's epitaph, I want to return to Hans-Thies Lehmann, W.B. Worthen and the notion of a postdramatic theater. I want to suggest that the textual turn in *Timon of Athens* is a move that begins to register a shift in consciousness in early modern culture that ultimately leads toward the historical development of a dramatic, text-based theater. As we have seen, Timon's epitaph functions simultaneously in a theatrical and a textual mode; a theatrical emblem whose authority and authenticity is determined by its textuality. As a sign, therefore, its presence on stage is rendered decidable through its textual mode of representation. The way the theatrical sign here derives authority from text starts to sound somewhat similar to Lehmann's description of dramatic theater, in which the literary authority of the text ultimately determines the meanings and values to be found in theatrical performance. The historical situation of Shakespeare's plays during his lifetime, though, was rather different in regards to these issues. As Worthen explains, "Shakespeare's writing emerges in a decisive moment of autopoietic interplay with performance" (326). Shakespeare's texts were created in and informed by what was still in some ways very much an

oral-based early modern culture along with a nascent print culture. In this environment, a text's relationship to performance was more open and uncertain. It is a situation that Lehmann labels as "predramatic" or "impure." Situated as they were, then, the theaters at this time were reorienting themselves in relation to the texts they used and to notions of literary value. This is a moment, then, when notions of literary value are just beginning to exert more influence over performance. Since the movement, according to Lehmann, was clearly toward a more thoroughly dramatic, text-based theater, we could expect to find gestures in this direction in the plays themselves. The textual turn in *Timon of Athens*, I'm arguing, is just such a gesture.

The problem for Worthen, though, is the persistence of this literary bias in performance criticism itself even as it develops a sharper sense of the performance/text relationship. So, even as critics attempt "to keep the moment of text/ performance, literary/ oral interplay open," he comments, "our ways of imagining Shakespeare performance seem to demand that we discover a critical practice—however refined—that enables us to inscribe the presentational [performance] in the text's representational work" (Worthen 327). Even in some of the most careful studies of Shakespeare performance, such as Weimann and Bruster's *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, Worthen sees evidence of this familiar conceptualization in which performance is inscribed in the literary. In an everyday sense, we encounter this often enough. If you watch a film adaptation of a literary work, it can be difficult not to judge the film by how well you feel it 'delivers' the essential characteristics of the original through the new medium. This is exactly what is at stake in arguments over Shakespeare as a literary or theatrical figure. As Worthen claims, "The 'return of the author' witnesses perhaps the largest obstacle to imagining Shakespeare performance studies;" and this is because "Shakespeare's writing provides the instrument for asserting a decidable interplay between presentation [performance] and representation [text], the live and the virtual, theatrical playing and the 'play' it delivers"

(Worthen 326-327). The question, therefore, is how to get the play-text to stop functioning as the literary original on which the performance is based. Worthen justifiably scrutinizes this underlying presupposition of dramatic theater, how it insists on the textual document endowed with literary value to ultimately justify and determine the value of performance. In this case, the written, literary text, much like Timon's epitaph, is used to render more certain and decidable the complex (possibly counterfeit) relationships involved in theatrical performance. Therefore, Timon's epitaph is uniquely situated both in the play and in history between text and performance. It is in this context that a history of the epitaph's life in print and on stage becomes the most useful. What I propose to do then is to look back at this moment when the play itself turns toward the textual and examine how some of the people most intimately involved with this specific play have imagined this relationship between text and performance. I will do this from two different perspectives. First of all, on textual side, I will examine how certain editors in preparing the text of *Timon* for publication conceptualize the play as a performance. And from the performance side, I will look at how specific productions of the play (especially those in which the epitaph plays a prominent role) imagine the play as a text. By making these conceptualizations of performance and text an object of study, it will hopefully contribute to the effort to keep the moment of interplay between text and performance more open.

## CHAPTER II

### SOME EDITORIAL APPROACHES TO TIMON'S EPITAPHS

If we open any two of the more recent scholarly editions of *Timon of Athens* and read the epitaph scenes at the end of the play, we will find that the text looks somewhat different in each edition. Some editions will have only one epitaph, while others will have two. Some will have a messenger read out the first epitaph, and others will not. There will be different sets of stage directions. In some editions, even the words contained in the epitaphs will be different. The reason for this variety, of course, is that the editors of these distinct versions of the play have made different decisions about these scenes. More specifically, they have made decisions about how to present the material from the earliest existing versions of the play to their present-day readers. In the case of *Timon of Athens*, the earliest existing version is the one found in the first volume of Shakespeare's collected works, the *First Folio* (1623). Without any other early versions of the play to examine, the editor's task is simplified somewhat, but it also leaves her/him with less data which s/he can use to make decisions about the text. While a historical understanding of how and why these early play-texts were printed improves continuously, the record of any given play text is usually far from clear. This leaves an editor with many decisions and interpretations that s/he can make about the nature of an early play-text. To give a short example, one of the most crucial assessments an editor must make is about what kind of text the printer worked from in order to make an early printed version of a play. Based on the historical data that is available, the editor could decide that the printer's copy-text came from an author's 'foul papers' (an earlier rough draft); from a 'fair copy' (a later version of the draft cleaned up by the author and distributed to other members of the playing company to read and comment on); a

scribal copy (made by the playing company's scribe in order to disseminate copies of the play to members of the company); a memorial reconstruction (made by a hired actor or spectator producing the text from his/her memory); a prompt-copy (marked and used by a company's prompter to direct members of the company during a performance); or from an earlier printed version of the play. There are even more possibilities here, but we can start to get a sense of the difficulty of the editor's task from the available interpretations regarding just this one aspect of an early text. The various interpretations an editor makes ultimately determine how the text is presented in a given edition of the play, and this begins to explain why Timon's epitaph can look so different depending on where we look for it.

From this example of a printer's copy-text, we can also start to see how an editor's interpretations about a text relate to ideas about performance. First of all, judgments about the printer's text clearly involve ideas about how playing companies used texts in the process of creating performances. An editor bases his interpretation of the kind of text s/he is working with on her/his understanding of this process that scripts went through in the course of theatrical production. As this understanding of how plays made their way from the page to the stage evolves, it duly influences an editor's view of a text. For example, critics are much less likely to accept claims about memorial reconstruction than they were in the past. People have become more suspicious of its likely role in the process of production. Secondly, an interpretation about the printer's copy-text can influence what the text might reasonably be able to tell us about early performances. At different stages in a play's production, the script bears a slightly different relation to performance. A play printed from a company's prompt-book might furnish us with different types of evidence about aspects of performance than a play printed from a playwright's foul papers. They might, for instance, provide different evidence about the length of performances, the staging, directing, acting, etc. We can see, therefore, how the activity of

editing necessarily involves ideas about performance. It is for similar reasons that one of Shakespeare's modern editors declares that the performance/text relationship "is in fact directly relevant to editing" and is "an inescapable part of the [editing] process" (*Editors* 168-169). With this, we can explore more closely the different decisions that editors have made concerning Timon's epitaph and how notions of performance might be implicated in these decisions.

One editorial question regarding the epitaph scenes is simply how many epitaphs should actually exist in the text. Depending on how they read the text, editors have seen anywhere from one to three epitaphs in these two scenes. The difficulties of the *Folio* (1623) have spawned the various answers to this question, so we can review the *Folio* text to see where these problems begin. In a late scene (5.3 *Arden* edition), we hear from a Messenger reporting back to the Athenian Senators on the size and position of Alcibiades' army. In the middle of his report, the Messenger recounts a chance meeting between himself and another Messenger. This other Messenger, he tells us, has been sent by Alcibiades to seek out Timon in the woods outside of Athens. Presumably, his mission is similar to the unsuccessful one the Senators have just attempted themselves in the previous scene; the goal of which is to convince Timon of their loyalty to him and gain his support in the coming battle. Most readers assume that this is the Messenger who we then see in the following scene.

In this next scene, Alcibiades' Messenger (listed as "Soldier") enters onto the site of Timon's cave. He does not find Timon but presumably finds something as he exclaims, "What is this?" (5.4.2). Most readers reasonably assume that the Messenger has found Timon's grave. For most recent editors, the following two lines comprise the first epitaph. They read, "Timon is dead, who hath outstretched his span,/ Some beast read this, there does not live a man" (5.4.3-4). These lines are problematic for a few reasons. In the *Folio*, they are not distinguished from the rest of the Soldier's lines in any way. In fact, most early editions treated the lines as part of the

Soldier's direct address rather than something he reads. Given the misanthropic tone of the lines and other conclusions about the state of the copy-text for the *Folio* printing, the lines now seem more likely to belong to an epitaphic message left by Timon. The *Riverside Shakespeare* signals this shift most efficiently by simply giving the stage direction "[Reads.]" before these lines and adding quotation marks to the lines themselves in order to further signal that these are not his words (*Riverside* 5.3.2.5).

This interpretation, though, very quickly raises another problem. If the Soldier in fact reads the epitaph above, it is not clear why in the next two lines he states, "what's on this tomb/ I cannot read" (5.4.5-6). The Soldier proceeds to make a copy of the unreadable epitaph in wax in order to take it back to Alcibiades, who, we are assured, as "An aged interpreter though young in days," will be able to read it (5.4.8). The question is then how the Soldier is simultaneously able and unable to read Timon's epitaph, and this is where modern editorial decisions about the epitaph begin to diverge.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Howard Staunton first proposed what has come to be the most common solution to this problem. Putting a set of quotation marks around the lines to distinguish Timon's words from the Soldier's, he goes on to argue that there are actually two epitaphs written on the grave. The first epitaph, the one that the Soldier can read, has been written in the Soldier's native language. The second epitaph is presumed to be written in another language, and the clearly uneducated Soldier cannot read this epitaph. The soldier then makes his copy of the second epitaph, and it is this second epitaph that Alcibiades reads out in the last scene (*Arden* 101-102). Not only does Staunton's solution make good sense out of a passage which initially seems muddled, but it also accomplishes this without further emending any of the language from the *Folio* text, which accounts for its wide acceptance.



We can now turn to the last scene and the text of the second epitaph, which presents its own set of difficulties. In the last scene, we find Alcibiades with his army outside the walls of Athens poised to destroy the city. He is in a tense negotiation with two of the Senators over the fate of the city. They're eventually able to work out an agreement in which Alcibiades is allowed to enter the city and execute an indeterminate number of Athenian citizens. In exchange, Alcibiades will spare the city from the wider damage (collateral or otherwise) of an all-out attack. During this negotiation, Alcibiades continues to invoke his common cause with Timon even as he steers away from Timon's desired resolution of this conflict, which is the destruction of the city. Just as they are reaching the final terms of this agreement, the Soldier from the previous scene (now titled Messenger) enters and announces Timon's death. He gives the wax copy of the epitaph to Alcibiades for him to read.

Again, the epitaph creates textual problems. The *Folio* text contains two couplets that closely follow one of the source texts, North's translation of Plutarch's 'Life of Antony.' The epitaph therefore reads,

*Heere lies a wretched Coarse, of wretched Soule bereft,*

*Seek not my name: A Plague consume you, wicked*

*Caitifs left:*

*Heere lye I Timon, who alive, all living men did hate,*

*Passe by, and curse thy fill, but passé and stay not here*

*thy gate (Folio 714).*

The setting of these lines in the *Folio* seems to present the couplets as one complete epitaph. In Plutarch, though, the two couplets are clearly presented as two separate compositions. The first epitaph ("Heere lies. . . left") was supposedly written by Timon himself, and the second epitaph ("Heere lye. . .gate") was a more well-known version invented by the poet Callimachus

(Bullough 252). Editors can then either read these lines as one epitaph or two. As others have pointed out, the difficulty is compounded when we take into account the seemingly contradictory sentiments in each couplet; the first containing a command to “Seek not my name,” while the second openly announces “Heere lye I Timon.” Taken together, then, with the epitaph from the previous scene, we can start to see the different choices a given editor might make regarding the epitaph scenes.

The first thing to notice about how different editions have dealt with the epitaphs in these scenes is that most have chosen to present two epitaphs. In doing this, the 1974 *Riverside Shakespeare* and the 2007 *Oxford Complete Middleton* give us texts which are fairly similar to each other despite the fact that they are so widely separated by both time and editorial principles. Both editions use stage directions to clarify that the Soldier reads the first epitaph. The stage direction in the *Oxford* version is even more explicit as it announces, “[He discovers a grave, with two inscriptions]” (18.2.5). Both editions also choose to present both couplets of the second epitaph together as one complete epitaph in the final scene. In fact, this choice is nearly universal as only two editions have ever made the decision to cut one of the couplets. These texts then bring us pretty close to the text of the *Folio* with some intervention to clarify the sense if not the meaning of these lines.

But this is certainly not the only possible approach to these lines. The 1986 *Oxford Complete Shakespeare* and the subsequent *Norton Shakespeare*, based on the *Oxford* text, both make a significant deviation from the previous approach. Both of these editions present only one epitaph, choosing to eliminate the two lines (“Timon is dead, who hath outstretched his span . . .”) of the first epitaph completely. Instead of reproducing the lines from the *Folio*, they simply replace the lines with a stage direction, “[He discovers a Gravestone]” indicating that the Soldier has in fact found Timon’s grave (*Oxf Shakespeare* 18.2.5). These editions go on to reproduce

both couplets of the final epitaph, now the only epitaph found on the gravestone. This approach, then, significantly alters the *Folio* text. It also greatly clarifies the text by eliminating the awkward question of why the Soldier can simultaneously read and not read the epitaph. The editors of the *Oxford Complete Shakespeare* and the *Norton Shakespeare* base their decision to cut the first epitaph on their understanding of the state of the copy-text and the theatrical process of creating and revising that text. Many critics and editors, following Una-Ellis Fermor's analysis, accept that the *Folio* text was most likely set from an unfinished manuscript of the play. Given this assessment of the unfinished state of the copy-text, one explanation for the proliferation of epitaphs is that they represent different possibilities, but not a final decision, about which epitaph would be used in an actual performance. Assuming that one of the epitaphs would have eventually been cut somewhere in the writing process, it makes sense to eliminate one, especially when it clarifies the sense of the passage.

These editions move further away from the text of the *Folio* and closer to something that, in editor's judgement, is more like a performance text, which represents, in their view, a more complete version of the text. This follows the *Oxford* editors' stated approach of choosing "when possible, to print the more theatrical version of each play," even when doing so "requires the omission from the body of the text of lines that Shakespeare certainly wrote" (xxxv). Yet if the editors favor a one-epitaph text, this leaves a question about the second epitaph. If they decided to cut the first epitaph, why did they not cut one of the couplets from the second epitaph? We have seen how the second epitaph presents a similar difficulty as the first; two separate epitaphs from the source text, one of which may have been cancelled out before the play made it to the stage.

This approach is similar in some respects to the one taken by the editors of the most recent edition of the play, the 2008 *Arden* edition. This edition accepts Staunton's solution and

presents two epitaphs. They place the first epitaph in italics to make it understood that the Soldier reads the epitaph, giving a lengthy explanation of this decision in the footnotes. I would also note that the decision to italicize the text retains some of the original ambiguity as opposed to the stage directions that explicitly call for the Soldier to “read.” But one of the most distinctive features of this edition is their treatment of the second epitaph. In this case, the editors have eliminated the first couplet of the second epitaph (“Heere lye I Timon . . .”). C.J. Sisson’s 1954 *Complete Works* is the only other edition to make this choice. The basis for this decision is roughly similar to that in the *Oxford* and *Norton* Shakespeares. The editors read the couplets as two distinct possibilities for Timon’s final epitaph, one of which would have inevitably been canceled as the text progressed toward performance.

Yet, the reasoning behind the *Arden* editors’ (Anthony Dawson and Gretchen Minton) decision also differs significantly from the *Oxford/Norton*. In order to get a better view of different critical attitudes and positions toward Shakespeare and his texts, we might contrast this view with that of John Jowett, who had at least a hand (if not direct control) in four out of the six versions of the play discussed here. Jowett, we have seen, retains all of the epitaph lines from the *Folio* in both the *Oxford Complete Middleton*, and he does the same for his 2004 single-edition of *Timon* for the *Oxford Shakespeare* series. In this decision and others (most notably his rejection of a five-act structure for the play) he shows more of a reluctance to stray from the *Folio* text. In doing so, Jowett, to a certain degree, follows an approach that privileges the historical value of the material text.

For their part, Dawson and Minton present their edition of *Timon* as an alternative to what they view as this materialist turn in modern editing practices. Dawson gives a fuller account of this in his essay “The Imaginary Text, or the Curse of the Folio,” in which he argues for a different editorial approach, “one that grants more ‘authority’ to an imagined, but

nonetheless powerfully present, entity—the idea of the play” (148). This approach seeks then to reconstruct a certain kind of ideal text. While this text may never have existed fully in any of its material instantiations, it nevertheless certainly existed as the goal/object of the writing that has come down to us materially. In practice, this approach allows the editor of a given text or set of texts more room to consider different aspects of a text, such as “aesthetic intentionality,” and to work toward “a certain kind of aesthetic consistency” (*Arden* 106). Their decision, then, to cut one of the couplets in the second epitaph is not based entirely on technical considerations of how the historical play text may have come to exist in the state that we have it. Aesthetic concerns become decisive for Dawson and Minton in deciding which couplet to actually cut from the text. In reading the final scenes of the play, they find “a slight softening of the sharply abrasive tone of Timon’s isolation and misanthropy” (*Arden* 108). Since the first couplet seems to continue the harsh tone from earlier parts of the play, they choose to include the second, “softer” couplet.

Attempting to reconstruct and idealized text based on this kind of aesthetic determination, could certainly leave the *Arden* editors open to charges that their text of the play is unhistorical. But, both this approach and a more materialist approach show a concern for the ways that print and typography can powerfully determine a reader’s historical understanding of the text. In other words, it would be a mistake to privilege one of these editorial versions that we have been discussing without recognizing the inevitable limitations of any approach. Returning to Dawson’s essay, he argues that the editor’s job is to make decisions about the relationship between different material versions of a text rather than seeing the different versions as distinct entities. Dawson refers directly to the controversy from the early 1980s over the conclusion to regard (and to print) the Q1 and *Folio* copies of *King Lear* as two distinct versions. And, he goes on, it is precisely some kind of “imaginative perception” that allows the play to hang together in our consciousness (“Curse” 142). It is what helps us recognize the different material versions of

the play as different manifestations of the same work. By conflating different versions of the play, the editor is presenting her/his idea of what kind of relationships exist between and behind these different versions. In his view, this gives the reader an account of the way imaginative processes interact with and shape a given text.

However, there are limitations to this approach. Dawson, of course, recognizes that “. . . definitive arguments about the precise relation of each text to the imaginary original are impossible” (148). And he acknowledges that such an approach “. . . can be subjective and even wrong-headed” (*Arden* 106). In the case of Timon’s epitaphs, there is no definitive evidence that can reliably tell us whether Shakespeare, Middleton, or the playing company ever intended to cut any of the epitaphs from the text of the play or which epitaphs they might have ultimately chosen to cut. If the play was abandoned somewhere in the process of production, it could certainly be the case that these questions over the epitaphs were never seriously considered by anyone at that time. Under these conditions, a close reading of the aesthetic movement of the play, the shifts in mood and tone, might be the best guide on how to handle the epitaphs editorially. It should be noted that Dawson and Minton attempt to enter into and bring to completion Middleton and Shakespeare’s aesthetic project. The danger or “wrong-headedness” in assuming their literary sensibilities is the possibility or inevitability of substituting the editor’s aesthetic tastes for those of the original authors. This is especially difficult with a text that shows signs of being an experimental script, with a text that mixes the tastes of two different writers, and with Timon himself, who is certainly one of the strangest tragic characters in the Shakespeare canon.

While these are some of the limitations, there are clear advantages to this approach as well. The case of the epitaphs gets to the heart of this matter, as Dawson and Minton emphasize, “Retaining both epitaphs highlights the muddle; printing or performing only the second facilitates meditations that, while not directly ‘theatrical’, have an aesthetic dimension, an aura

that is certainly amenable to performance” (*Arden* 109). In attempting to reconstruct the Shakespeare/Middleton literary/aesthetic project, the editors want to focus the reader’s attention in a specific way. While a printed text can obviously never be a dramatic performance, editing toward an idealized text can give the reader a better sense of an aura of performance. It attempts to evoke in the reader’s experience something of an audience’s experience of the play. I should note that Dawson and Minton here are defining readers as not only those reading for purely literary purposes but those reading in order to create their own performances as well. Dawson presents this same point a little more dramatically in his earlier essay, identifying readers of the play with the character of Troilus just before his first direct encounter with Cressida onstage as he contemplates just what this meeting will entail. Troilus famously luxuriates in the anticipatory pleasure of this moment. He reflects on this state, saying “I am giddy; expectation whirls me round./ Th’imaginary relish is so sweet/ That it enchants my sense” (*TC* 3.2.16-18). As Dawson concludes, this situation “pinpoints a stand-off between the imaginary and the material, drawing comfort from the joys of the former while fearing the muddle of the latter” (Dawson 142). Readers then might follow Troilus’ example in contemplating and enjoying the text of the play as an active and attentive editor has imagined it.

Of course, readers and editors could also follow Pandarus’ urging later in this scene to wade into the muddle, to grab a hold of Cressida’s physical body, and to “rub on, and kiss the mistress” (3.2.48). This is the proverbial wisdom that “Words pay no debts” and that Troilus must “give her deeds” (3.2.54). Taking account of the material text and “materialist” editorial practices at this point can help us understand how different choices and assumptions regarding the epitaph scene construe their readers differently just at a point where the scenes within the play themselves present and construe their own types of readers.

From this perspective, I will consider more closely the texts of *Timon of Athens* prepared by John Jowett for both the 2007 *Complete Middleton* and the 2004 single edition *Oxford Shakespeare*. It would not be accurate, though, to group Jowett in with other critics and editors who have advocated a stricter materialist approach (such as Randall McLeod, Margreta de Grazia, or Leah Marcus) and who are more directly the targets of Dawson's critique. In fact, Jowett's own editorial perspective is probably much closer to Dawson and Minton's than any of these other textual critics. First of all, Jowett does not dismiss the category of aesthetics as a basis for editorial intervention. He explains, "for an emendation founded entirely on bibliographical and palaeographical reasoning without reference to the effect of the emendation on the literary quality of the text might produce a reading that is not only displeasing but also, in the case of a major writer, less likely to be correct" (*Text* 125). Using aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of the literary qualities of the time period, the author(s), and the particular text in questions is clearly not out of bounds in editorial practice. Therefore, a decision like Dawson and Minton's to cut one of the second epitaphs based on their reading of both the textual situation and a softening tone at the end of the play could be a perfectly acceptable emendation from this perspective.

Their views tend to converge again on the question of an idealized text and its relation to the editorial process. In Jowett's view, any alteration of a control text must have reference to some kind of pre-theatrical or post-theatrical alternative source. Often enough this alternative source may never have actually existed materially. Editing with reference to an ideal or imaginary text, then, is also acceptable. Jowett, though, qualifies this view somewhat, "To the charge that the pursuit of a prior text of this [imaginary] kind falls into an unjustifiable idealism, it can be replied that the more pernicious idealism would be to correct the errors in a document to no other criterion than an ideal version of itself" (*Text* 116). Editing based on an ideal text



becomes unacceptable when it is the sole factor in editorial decisions. Again Dawson and Minton's treatment of the epitaphs seems to fulfill this criterion. Their imaginary text, though not directly specified, is clearly based on what a more completed copy of the play may have looked like. And their decision, as we have seen, is not only based on their view of what that ideal version should look like but also on an analysis of the state of the *Folio* text, its underlying copy, and the likelihood of further change to the text in the process of production. Jowett also recognizes the danger of moving away from the material text leading into "realms of unverifiable conjecture" (*Text* 117). The difference between the two approaches might be characterized best not as a difference in principle but in degree, a willingness to move away from the material text based on more speculative considerations.

Given the similarities, though, the question arises as to why their editions of *Timon of Athens* look rather different. One of the most noticeable differences is the act and scene divisions in the play. As noted earlier, the texts of both *Oxford Middleton* and the *Oxford Shakespeare* series are not divided into the more familiar five act structure. This follows more closely the *Folio* text, which is similarly not divided into separate acts. However, the *Oxford* editions do not recreate the scene structure of the *Folio* exactly, creating scenes where the text seems to demand it. The *Arden* edition, on the other hand, does break the play into five acts, accepting Edward Capell's refinement of Nicholas Rowe's early alteration of the play's act/scene structure. Nearly all editions of *Timon* have used Capell's act/scene divisions with a few minor variations. Here again uncertainty about the play's textual situation forces the editor to make an interpretation about the nature of the text. The *Oxford* and the *Arden* editors recognize both the arbitrariness of the Rowe/Capell structure as well as certain hints of a five act structure in the *Folio* text. While Middleton more typically wrote with act divisions at this time, Shakespeare did not. So, the authors' habits are also ambiguous on this topic. In this case, the *Oxford* texts

give more weight to the series of encounters that Timon has in the woods outside of Athens in the second half of the play. The *Folio* presents these encounters in an undivided block of text of more than seven hundred lines. Jowett reads this block of text as an intentional and experimental theatrical form. He therefore concludes, “Act divisions impose a structure of action that is alien to the play and disrupt its startlingly inventive form” (*Oxford* 11). The *Arden* edition focuses more on the first half of the play, which shows a more clearly divided structure. The breaks between Acts Two, Three, and Four clearly designate significant shifts in the setting, focus, and tone in the play. The possibility of further revision of the original play text also figures into their decision: “Since the text as we have it appears unrevised, it is possible that plans for further elaboration of the Alcibiades plot, which might have yielded a longer final act, were set aside” (*Arden* 17, footnote). Dawson and Minton’s decision to insert the more common act divisions relies in part on the speculation that a more coherent act structure might have emerged from the writing process. So here again, we encounter the Arden editor’s willingness to alter the text more significantly from the control text.

As we have seen, this pattern is repeated in their treatment of the epitaph scenes with the *Oxford* editions following the *Folio* text more closely, and the *Arden* edition giving itself more leeway to alter the control text based on their understanding of the imaginative processes that underlie the work of the play. It seems, then, that the *Oxford* texts take an approach that seeks to avoid editorial intervention whenever such a decision is supported by a specific reading of the text and context of the play. We have also seen how Dawson attributes this tendency to an influential and generalized materialist orientation toward textual practices in the field today. But, Dawson’s critique of these textual practices is also tied to the relationship he sees between the modern scholarly edition and performance. It is here that the role of the reader influences each edition.

In respect to his readers, Dawson relates the privileging of the material text in textual theory and practice to an increasing tendency in performance circles to increasingly rely on ‘original’ (most often *Folio*) texts in developing successful stage performances. But, their approaches toward the material text are rather different for performers than for textual scholars. For textual critics, reference to the material text tends to emphasize the instability, uncertainty and ambiguity of most early play texts. Yet in the context of the theater, the early texts are often treated in an exactly opposite fashion as more authorial, authentic and therefore stable bases for performance. Consequently, performers often closely read early texts for performance cues even though early printing practices (as Dawson convincingly shows) don’t serve as a fixed or reliable guide to performance actions (“Curse 148-151).

By referencing an ideal text, the *Arden* edition of *Timon of Athens* seeks then to establish a clearer, more complete version of the play not only for scholars and casual readers but for performers as well. In attempting to bring out a sense or apprehension of the text that is more “amenable to performance,” they are specifically concerned with creating a text that better represents aesthetically a more complete idea of the play that might give performers a more reliable guide on which to base performance decisions. And this kind of text, accordingly, can serve as a stronger historical basis for the development of present-day performances than relying more on the often misleading original, material, in this case, *Folio* text.

This concern with how the printed critical edition represents a performance-minded vision/version of the play to performers is, I think, a rather interesting and complicating factor in deciding how to intervene editorially in a text. In his assessment of the familiar printed form of the *Arden*, *Oxford*, and *Cambridge* Shakespeare series, Jowett defines the readers of these editions in a more limited way. While he observes that “In fact the precocious compaction of these editions is a sign that they are catering to many needs”, he goes on to enumerate a

surprisingly small list of graduate/undergraduate students and professional academics as the primary readers of these texts (*Text* 164). Even though he limits his discussion almost entirely to scholarly and pedagogical uses of these editions, he does in one instance interestingly point to the relationship between a printed version and a theatrical readership. He cites Steven Urkowitz's idea of "magazine-style editions of Shakespeare with . . . areas of the page that can be used more whimsically, for instance to enlarge on the theatrical potential of a given passage or to comment on the differences between texts," and he goes on to explain that "It [the edition] would have particular kinds of use-value, for instance, in opening up new performance possibilities by presenting text from alternative versions (*Text* 163). The interesting point here is that in considering the printed versions relation to theatrical development of the play, the editorial intention is close to that of Dawson and Minton's. But, the editorial practice that he outlines is quite different. Whereas Dawson and Minton see the focus on the material muddle of the text as a limiting and inhibiting influence on performance, Urkowitz here sees the same material muddle (reading different versions side by side) as an invitation to reading performance more imaginatively.

Dawson points out theater professionals' lack of facility with early texts when compared with the highly specialized knowledge of textual critics: "Performers who seized on the increased interest in looking closely at old texts have absorbed the lesson of textual uniqueness but have deployed it in ways that make textual scholars wince" (Dawson 153). It would seem unreasonable and probably undesirable for performers to turn themselves into textual experts, but this is another place where editors approach readers differently. Dawson's approach quietly asserts a more authoritative role for the editor. The responsibility for interpreting textual difficulty is shifted more squarely onto the shoulders of the editor. Dawson more directly wants to interpose the intellectual activity of the editor between the reader and the confusion of

different material versions of a text. While this describes all editorial activity in some respect, Urkowitz's approach seeks to shift more of the responsibility for interpreting textual difficulty back onto the reader. Dawson's text offers a vision of what the text of *Timon* could be; a successful material version should present an idea of what a text is materially and offer the reader the opportunity to imagine what the text and what the relationship between texts could be.

Ultimately, editing with an eye toward how a text might be read and used in the context of developing a performance, widens the scope of an editor's activity and provide different criteria for emending a text. And while it is important to recognize that a focus on its material manifestation does not tell the whole story of a given text. It is equally important to realize that this is not the claim or the goal of a materialist approach. Focusing on the different material versions of a text is a practice that allows different readers to recognize and rethink the different assumptions that accumulate around a text over time. As Leah Marcus explains, "'Unediting the Renaissance' is proposed not as a permanent condition, but as an activity that all editors should engage in as part of their own revisionary efforts, that all readers should practice mentally even as they make use of edited texts"; and later she claims, "Our goal is not to abolish idealist interpretation, but to resituate it as one interpretive agenda among others, one that should not always receive automatic preference over others" (Marcus 5, 33). A materialist approach does not necessarily preclude the imaginative considerations that Dawson wants to bring forward. It does shift the responsibility for these considerations a little more onto the reader's shoulders.

Interestingly, Dawson ends his article with a consideration of the editorial dilemma presented by Timon's epitaphs, and the epitaphs do offer a clear example of how the differences between these editorial approaches coalesce around the reader. After reviewing the textual difficulties of the first epitaph, he concludes, "What these passages need is a considered act of historical interpretation—a way of making sense, based on a reconstruction of probable

intention”, and he further concludes, “this supposition derives from the grammar of performance not from the modalities of print” (Dawson 157). Reading for historical intentionality is one way to investigate this passage. The epitaphs, though, do not only present problems in the text but on the stage as well. Throughout most of its stage history, *Timon* routinely fails to win over critics and audiences. One of the most commonly cited reason for this opinion is dissatisfaction with the play’s ending. The textual problems, then, do in some way seem to reproduce themselves in performance. Rather than reading any deficiencies of the text through the lens of an imagined, original performance-based context, we can also look at the epitaphs as they have existed in the grammar of actual performances. How people have read and deployed the lines in different performance contexts can offer different ways to imagine the original performance context of the play and its relation to the printed play. This is especially true if we keep in mind that different performances bear a different relationship to the “modalities of print” than the *Folio*-fixated relationship that Dawson describes. This is one way that reviewing the stage history of *Timon*’s epitaphs can help to explore some of the difficulties of the text of the play.

## CHAPTER III

### SOME APPROACHES TO TIMON'S EPITAPH ON STAGE

If the epitaph scenes have contained difficulties for editors constructing printed versions of *Timon of Athens*, they also create a distinct set of problems for theater practitioners attempting to put these scenes on the stage. We can see one group of performers engaged with some of these difficulties over the course of a single production. These performances concluded the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 1892 and were headed by F.R. Benson, who also acted the role of Timon in the play. Benson fashioned this production, which consisted of three performances staged over two consecutive days, into a true Victorian spectacle, focusing on “Banquets, dancing girls, flutes, wine, color, and form” in order to effectively contrast with Timon’s later misfortune (G. Williams 172). The effect, according to one audience member, was the creation of “a picturesque and classic picture” that was “only too congruous with modern taste (S. Williams 277). If we can generalize from this account, Benson seems to have had more success pleasing his audience in the lavish first half of the play, while his handling of the second half of the play becomes more unsatisfactory and uncertain. How this group of performers chose to handle the final moments of the play was apparently notable and seems to highlight this uncertainty: “The termination was varied at each representation. On Friday Timon was found dead by his friends and the speechifying was at his side. On Saturday, the reading of his gravestone was among his friends in another scene; and the death scene was only a momentary tableau, a finer effect, a solitary ending for the solitary man” (S. Williams, 277). Here, then, in little more than one twenty-four hour period, Benson presented two alternate endings to this play. While we don’t have a clear idea about why this change took place, the endings themselves are

quite distinct. In the first, the other characters become witnesses to Timon's physical death. In a solemn and funereal fashion, they gather around Timon's dead body and deliver their final, eulogistic pronouncements on the life and death of the great misanthrope. In this ending, both the characters on stage and the audience have direct access to the fact of Timon's physical death. On the following day, it is the epitaph that mediates and displaces Timon's physical death in Benson's second ending. The other characters here do not gather around Timon's body but rather around his epitaph. The play ends in this version not with a witnessing but with a reading. But Timon, of course, is not entirely absent from this ending either. While the other characters do not have direct access to Timon's death, the audience does witness his death in the form of a "momentary tableau" (277). This change is somewhat surprising because it would seem to mark out a different relationship between Timon, the other characters, and the audience. In the first ending, Timon seems to be reclaimed and reabsorbed into Athenian society as he is encircled and eulogized by "his friends" (277). Even more, the audience, as a fellow witness to this event, joins the characters in this action, completing the community that Timon's misanthropy so violently sought to undermine and disrupt. The second ending seems less harmonious. Here, Timon does not and cannot physically rejoin the community of Athens. The gravestone simultaneously functions as a memorial that brings him closer to the other characters (brings him into their minds) and as a boundary that separates him from them. The epitaph then serves, in way, to keep intact the radical break that Timon has made with Athenian society. This probably helps create the feeling of a "solitary ending to the solitary man" (277). But even though the stage action here does not allow the Athenians to fully reclaim Timon (no matter how hard they try) the audience can make such a claim. The audience does witness Timon's death. Their relationship is not mediated then by the epitaph but rather is suspended in a "momentary tableau" (277). This suspension can mark both a cessation and a continuation of Timon's relationship



with the audience. In doing so, the audience is also separated from the community of Athens through their respective proximity to Timon's death. The first ending, then, seems to unite Timon, the Athenians, and the audience, while Benson's second ending seems to pull them apart and estrange them. While we don't know whether Benson and his troupe had anything like these specific theatrical relationships in mind as they were altering these performances, the differences are significant, enough so that the account of our sole audience member can notice and definite improvement and contemplate a "finer effect" evoked by the second ending (277).

As this example shows and as we will continue to see, the presence or absence of Timon's body on stage at the end of the play becomes an interesting point of distinction between different productions of *Timon of Athens*. In most cases, theater practitioners are trying to deal with what many have perceived as a specific theatrical dilemma or deficiency they face in presenting the play. The problem is a general feeling that Timon's death happens too quickly and too obscurely for the audience to comprehend the magnitude and significance of this event. Gary Williams summarizes this dilemma nicely, and in doing so relies on the distinction between the play as a written thing and as a lived event in performance: "The impression that Timon's death is not marked clearly is one a performance may leave more strongly than a reading of the play wherein one can dwell upon the implications of Timon's last speeches. The actor and director must use means that leave little doubt that Timon shakes his fist at the sun and dies" (G. Williams 177). This problem may be one of proportion. It is especially pronounced because the stage action is dominated by its central character to such a large degree. Timon's almost unbroken presence on stage, especially in the long scenes that make up most of Acts Four and Five, makes his absence at the end of the play all the more conspicuous. It may also be that Timon's absence strikes many as a rather un-Shakespearean ending. Whether it is Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Othello, Macbeth, Caesar, Hamlet, Lear, etc. we are used to seeing the dead bodies

of Shakespeare's tragic characters on stage with accompanying speeches reflecting on their deaths. This again makes Timon's death stand out. While there have been many approaches to these scenes throughout the play's life on stage, we can begin to categorize these performances based on the appearance of Timon's dead body and on the emphasis given to the epitaph as a stage property.

These issues are certainly at play in the very first known performances of *Timon* that took place in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first of these occurred in December, 1678 at the Duke's Company's Dorset Garden theater in London. This performance was based on Thomas Shadwell's adaptation of the play with Thomas Betterton acting the role of Timon. In keeping with the Restoration's freer attitude toward the altering of Shakespeare's texts and Shadwell's own claim that the text was now "Made into a play," we find a strikingly different version of *Timon* than the one presented in the *Folio* text (Shadwell, title page). The final act in particular is "totally changed" (S. Williams 270). Michael Dobson, among others, traces the relationship between Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare and the prerogatives and conflicts of Charles II's court. One of the primary functions of the theaters, therefore, was the celebration and legitimization of the restored monarchy. This accounts for the increased attention given to Alcibiades as a Charles-like figure, a wrongfully exiled leader who returns and claims his position as the unquestioned ruler of Athens. This Royalist perspective is on full display in Act Five when Alcibiades confronts the Senators before the city gates. In this scene, the Senators kneel before Alcibiades, confess their wrong-doing, and beg him for forgiveness. Then, in a pretty straight-forward piece of political theater, they are ordered to present themselves with halters on their necks as a sign of obedience before Alcibiades in front of the entire, assembled population of Athens. This is clearly a kind of fantasy of royal power, and it is juxtaposed in the next scene with one of the most affective and sympathetic treatments of Timon's death in the

play's stage history. In this scene, Evandra (who is an adaptation of the faithful steward character, Flavius, now turned into one of Timon's love interests) and an ailing Timon emerge from his cave in the woods. To her horror, Evandra discovers that Timon has drunk a lethal poison. At his bidding, she helps lead a rapidly diminishing Timon over to his already-prepared grave. They reassert their constant love for each other, and Timon charges Evandra to forget him completely and live happily after he has died. As she vows to kill herself rather than live without him, he begs her for forgiveness, and then he dies at her feet. Faithful as always, Evandra promptly stabs herself and dies as well. This scene, we can note right away, is almost exactly the opposite of what we find in the *Folio* text. In the *Folio*, of course, the death occurs off stage, cold, impersonal, far removed from the sympathies of the audience or fellow Athenians or from the world of the theater (appearance) altogether. In Shadwell's version, Timon's death becomes a very touching, close, intimate affair between him and his true love. This ending seems to leave little doubt about where the audience's sympathy should lie; Timon, whatever his faults, does not deserve such a disastrous outcome. If there were any doubt about this, the point is driven home by the reading of Timon's epitaph in the following and final scene of the play. As they bring in the submissive and haltered Senators, Alcibiades ascends a pulpit and addresses the assembled Athenians. In this speech, he gives his own partisan account of the recent political history of Athens and the role he has played in this history. After he ends his speech and the Athenians shout their approval, a previously unmentioned messenger arrives bearing Timon's epitaph. Alcibiades reads out the epitaph and gives us his final thoughts on Timon's story:

Poor *Timon!* I once knew thee the most flourishing Man  
Of all th' *Athenians*, and thou still had'st been so,  
Had not these smiling, flattering Knaves devour'd thee,  
And Murder'd thee with base Ingratitude. (Shadwell 68)

Here, Alcibiades expunges any role that Timon might have played in his own misfortune. He even goes so far as to interpret Timon's death not as suicide but as a kind of murder at the hands of his creditors and false friends. Despite Stanley Williams' description of these final moments as ones in which "The play ends as all lament the deaths of Timon and Evandra," Timon is not the focus at the end of this final scene (270). The epitaph serves almost as a footnote to Alcibiades' political objectives: another example of injustice and ingratitude at the heart of Athenian society. Alcibiades' closing words direct the Athenian people back into a newly restored and ordered life in the city: "Now all repair to their respective Homes,/ Their several Trades, their Business and Diversions" (Shadwell 68). The play ends then not with everyone lamenting Timon and Evandra, but with everyone shouting and praising Alcibiades and the new political order and stability that he has apparently brought about. Dobson identifies two main goals of the royal theater companies in the decade after the theaters were reopened, "they were not only to celebrate the coronation of the new monarch and the establishment of a wholly new regime, but also create the impression that the previous royal government had never really fallen" (20). Shadwell's *Timon*, though written at slightly later (1674-5) date, still seems to fit into this project. As we have seen, it certainly celebrates the establishment of a new regime and its head. But, the play also signals a small shift in this strategy as well. Rather than completely repressing any idea of Charles I's downfall and the events of the Revolution, Shadwell, at the end of the play, paints a rather white-washed picture of Timon (reading Timon here as a stand-in for previous Stuart monarchs) as an almost blameless victim of the base, corrupt greed and ingratitude of his fellow Athenians. In this context, both Timon's death and the reading of his epitaph seem to have the same purpose; they serve to highlight the justice of Alcibiades' actions by juxtaposing them with the injustices suffered by Timon. A little more ambiguous are Alcibiades' statements about the nature of this new regime. He concludes,

but when the Government

Is in the Body of the People, they will do themselves no harm

Therefore henceforth I do pronounce the Government

Shall devolve upon the People, and may Heav'n prosper 'em. (68)

While it's not certain exactly how a courtly audience would have received these lines on the ultimate location political power, they do not seem to have affected the generally positive reception of the play. As John Downes reported, "it wonderfully pleased the Court and City; being an excellent moral" (qtd. in S. Williams 271). In its early stage history, people frequently cite the play's "moral" as a justification for its staging in spite of any other flaws it might contain. In this case, it seems rather unlikely that the moral is any bourgeoisie denunciation of prodigality and excess but is more a lesson about the greed, rapaciousness, ingratitude and injustice of political subjects toward their rightful king.

In this context, the Shadwell-based productions use Timon's absence at the end of the play to their advantage as an opportunity to shift the focus onto Alcibiades. Timon's tragedy becomes a foil to Alcibiades' triumph. In this case, the move to personalize Timon in his final scenes is also a move to minimize him as well. The audience is better left dwelling on Alcibiades' fate than on Timon's. Their handling of Timon's epitaph seems to bear this out. The epitaph is minimized as a stage property. Shadwell eliminates the scene in which the soldier discovers Timon's gravesite and reads the first epitaph and copies out the second. This reduces the epitaph's presence on stage to the few lines given over to it as part of Alcibiades' final speech. Most likely, the inscription is delivered on a piece of paper or tablet small enough to be handed over and read out by Alcibiades. The epitaph is also minimized textually. Shadwell cuts the second of the epitaphs that are read by Alcibiades in the *Folio* text. As we might expect, he retains the first containing Timon's curse on humanity and removes the second, which invites

everyone to come and curse him at his gravesite. We can also see the move to personalize Timon here in a further alteration that Shadwell makes to the epitaph text. In the *Folio*, the first epitaph does not announce Timon's name but specifically directs its readers to "Seek not my name" (*Folio* 714). This directive is immediately contradicted by the second epitaph in the *Folio*, but, of course, the second epitaph, which announces his name, has been eliminated in Shadwell's adaptation. As we have seen, Timon's misanthropy never becomes such a vast, impersonal thing in Shadwell's play. It is not a nameless hatred, so Shadwell accordingly inserts Timon's name into the first epitaph, replacing the phrase "Seek not my name" with the phrase "Timon my Name" (Shadwell 68). Timon's epitaph is therefore personalized. It does not leave any kind of enigma regarding his character. It is a straight-forward announcement of his (justified) hatred, which does not become any grander, more excessive or more philosophical than this. It leaves more room for the presentation of Alcibiades' greatness at the end of the play. In this way, the Shadwell productions effectively alter the presentation of Timon's death and his epitaph to fit the specific aims of their project and the basic orientation of Restoration theater at that particular time. The approach to the text of the play is so heavily influenced by the political motives of the Restoration, which lead to performances that bear only passing resemblance to the original, source text.

In Shadwell's version, Timon's death on stage clearly overshadows the presentation and recitation of his epitaph. This approach, for various reasons, seems to hold true for most of the subsequent productions to follow based on Shadwell's text. The first attempt to truly invert this relationship between Timon's bodily death and his epitaph and to really give the epitaph itself a larger presence and significance in performance comes almost a century later with Samuel Phelps's 1851 production, which was revived again in 1856. These productions were remarkable for a number of reasons. First of all, they were some of the most successful productions—both

financially and critically—of the play with over forty performances at the Sadler’s Wells theater in the two years combined. Gary Williams even suggests, “Perhaps no other production of *Timon* pleased its time as much” (171). Secondly, it is remarkable textually since at that time it followed the *Folio* version more closely than any previous performance. Williams explains, “His [Phelps’s] text was the most complete yet to have been produced, and there were no added scenes. Phelps’s promptbook shows he cut about twenty percent of Shakespeare’s lines (463 lines), a percentage not uncommon in the century” (167). The performances were also notable theatrically for their production value and stage devices, such as the “Greek interiors,” the “classical landscapes” and the “rich garments and costly materials” (S. Williams 108). One reviewer admired the scenery as a “not only archaeologically correct, but also picturesquely beautiful” spectacle at the sight of which “The applause burst out in spontaneous volleys” (S. Williams 108). In this case, these theatrical and textual matters are not unrelated, which we can see most clearly in the elaborate ending that Phelps contrived for these performances.

Phelps himself was a little bit of an anomaly in the theatrical world of mid-nineteenth century London. His eighteen years as lessee of Sadler’s Wells was one of the longest continuous tenures of any actor-manager at the time, twice as long Charles Kean’s run at the Princess’s Theatre. The taking on of the lease at Sadler’s Wells by an actor like Phelps was something of an experiment as well. Phelps took this position in 1844 in the year after the royal patents were repealed, giving all licensed theaters in London the right to produce plays. The theater’s location (outside of the West End in Islington) and its reputation, “a place of low amusements and rough audiences . . . a theatre for clowns, acrobats, and sensational melodrama, not for Shakespeare,” did not recommend it as a site for producing “legitimate” theater (Allen 75). But, it became part of Phelps’s project to show that “high” drama could succeed with the middle- and working-class audiences in Islington as well as draw the more

usual upper-class theater-goers from the center of the city. What makes Phelps stand out, though, as an actor-manager is both his promotion of and resistance to some of the more recognizable trends and approaches to theater at that time. And it is his adherence to a Romantic idea of authorship that allows Phelps to negotiate or blend these often competing theatrical notions and practices into rather successful (at least in his critics' minds) performances. In short, Phelps found a middle road between the more traditional, actor-driven theater of William Macready and the archaeological realism of Charles Kean. Phelps's own conception of theater was a more poetic and author-driven one.

In developing his performances, Phelps subordinated all the aspects of a performance to the author's poetic conception, whatever he understood that to be. He developed an increasing awareness of "the total impression of a performance with the result that productions at Sadler's Wells had an internal unity never before displayed in Shakespearean performances" (Allen 206). Constructing this "total impression" became Phelps's guiding principle, which had an effect on all aspects of a performance from the acting and the staging to the scripting of the play. In contrast to Macready, he rejected the tradition that some contemporary critics came to refer to as the "star system," in which the appeal and success of the theater relied heavily if not solely on the cult of personality and the bravura performances of great lead actors, such as a David Garrick, John Kemble, Edmund Kean, or Macready. This system often enough led to the suppression of supporting roles that might intentionally or unintentionally distract from the lead role. The difference in Phelps's approach struck critics immediately. Henry Morley described it this way, "He takes heed that every part, even the meanest, shall have in the acting as much prominence as Shakespeare gave it in his plan, and it is for this reason that with actors, many of whom are anything but 'stars,' the result most to be desired is really obtained" (Allen 207). By the same principle, Phelps negotiates the trend toward archaeological realism in the staging of



plays, when historical accuracy in the creation of the stage-picture became an ideal. Again Phelps falls somewhere between Macready and Kean on this issue. Richard Schoch nicely summarizes the difference between the latter two on this issue: “If Charles Kean’s goal was to use Shakespeare to represent history, then Macready’s was to use history to represent Shakespeare” (3). Macready’s goals are always theatrical, where historical accuracy was regarded as a means to theatrical success. For Kean, theatrical success is defined by its presentation of history. Though greatly extending this move toward archaeological realism that began with Charles Kemble and Macready, Phelps avoided Kean’s excesses in replicating historical minutiae. For Phelps then, more like Macready, history is in service of Shakespeare since, according to Allen, “he did not aim at realism in his settings” (209). Morley observed at the time that “the scenery is always beautiful, but it is not allowed to draw attention from the poet, with whose whole conception it is made to blend in the most perfect harmony” (Allen 211). The realization of historical detail, in his view, has its limit precisely where it begins to interfere with or overshadow the poet’s conception and the unity of the play as a poetic project.

This adherence to a poetic concept of theater is certainly at work again in Phelps’s approach to the play text. For his Shakespeare plays, Phelps replaced the established acting versions (those passed down from 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century adaptations) with versions based more completely than any previous theatrical text on an “original” Shakespearean source text. Allen claims that “He did more than any single manager to restore the original versions of Shakespeare’s plays to the theatre” (214). Again, it was Macready who began to adopt this approach but who again left it to Phelps and others to realize more completely. Allen also correctly notes that this preference for original texts had extra-theatrical sources: “The ideal of original Shakespearean texts came from outside the theatre, with the new veneration for ‘the Bard’ in the Romantic critics of the early nineteenth century. Macready, influenced by these

writers, fought his inclinations as an actor and set himself a goal of restoring pure Shakespeare to the stage” (214). We might characterize the difference between Macready’s and Phelps’s approaches to the text in much the same way that Schoch has depicted Kean’s relationship to Macready’s historical realism. For Macready, then, textual accuracy is a means to theatrical success, while Phelps defines theatrical success as the accurate depiction of the poet’s conception as it is embodied in an “original” text. This difference, I think, marks an important shift in the history of Shakespearean theater. Stephen Orgel points out how this is quite different from the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the work of textual scholars was rather foreign to theater practices. He states, “For the [18<sup>th</sup> century] theater, the reality of Shakespeare was the reality of performances,” and that despite the regular production of new scholarly, authoritative Shakespearean texts, “it never occurred to any actor or producer that those were the versions to perform” (Orgel 50). While Garrick, Kemble, and Macready all made moves toward more “authentic” play texts, they were also ready to sacrifice this authenticity when it clashed with their sense of established theatrical values. Phelps, of course, also had to alter his Shakespearean play texts in order to make them fit in with 19<sup>th</sup> century standards regarding things such as performance time and stage space, act breaks and intermissions, along with standards for decency and obscenity. Yet in Phelps’s approach, we begin to see how textual authenticity (as it was conceived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) really begins to determine the stage-worthiness of the material. It is a pretty clear transposition of Coleridge’s well-known claim that we should read Shakespeare’s play texts as great poems which stands behind Henry Morley’s admiring declaration that “Shakespeare’s plays are always poems, as performed at Sadler’s Wells” (Allen 206).

However, the increasing emphasis on fidelity to an “original” source text accentuates the specific theatrical problems at the end of *Timon of Athens*. As we have seen, nearly all previous performances arrange a death scene to culminate Timon’s misfortunes. Yet a performance such

as Phelps's, hewing much more closely to the *Folio* text without any additional, extra-textual scenes, cannot do what so many previous performances had done and present Timon's physical death on stage. In order to give the figure of Timon any presence on stage in the final moments of the play, Phelps is almost forced to make much more out of Timon's epitaph by his commitments to a source text. And this is precisely what Phelps does. He turns the reading of Timon's epitaph into an impressive theatrical spectacle and the most memorable moment of the entire play. In order to accomplish this, Phelps devised a panorama to visually translate the verbal description of Timon's tomb, "his everlasting mansion/ Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,/ Who once a day with his embossed froth/ The turbulent surge shall cover" (*Arden* 5.2.100-103). This continuous painted scene could be scrolled across the stage in order to simulate the effect of movement over larger distances than the stage space would allow. So following Alcibiades' negotiation with the Senators before the walls of Athens, Alcibiades' messenger brings him word of Timon's death. Upon hearing this news, Alcibiades (no longer following the *Folio* text) insists on viewing the gravesite for himself. At this point, the panorama begins to roll, and Alcibiades' troops march in place, transporting everyone from Athens to Timon's gravesite complete with "a sunset backing and rolling waters" (G. Williams 168). Here in front of the tomb, Alcibiades reads the epitaph, and the play ends with everyone mourning Timon's death in a type of formal military observance. Shirley Allen looks at the practical aspects of this ending. She suggests that this action allowed Phelps to slow the play's "rush toward its conclusion" and served to "prepare his audience for the fact of Timon's death" (243). It was also used "to heighten the effect of the epitaph, which for the Elizabethan audience could just as well be read from an imaginary wax impression as from an imaginary tomb" (Allen 243). Phelps, then, seems to be using these stage effects to compensate for these problems in the play's action, but this creates some discrepancies between theatrical and textual meanings. The first of

these involves the epitaph text itself. The epitaph commands its viewers to “Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait” (*Arden* 5.5.71). Phelps, though, does not obey this command, bringing Alcibiades’ whole procession and the performance itself to halt before the epitaph. This leads to another discrepancy between theatrical and textual meaning. After reading the epitaph, Alcibiades reflects on the significance of Timon’s monument:

Though thou abhorred’st in us our human griefs,  
Scorned’st our brains’ flow and those our droplets which  
From niggard nature fall, yet rich conceit  
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye  
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven. (5.5.73-77)

The text here contrasts the miserly human capacity for grief and sympathy with an excessively and infinitely generous mourning not only of the inhuman, natural world but also of the equally inhuman god, Neptune. In Phelps’s performance, Alcibiades’ grand procession to Timon’s gravesite and his public mourning reconciles this distinction between a human and inhuman mourning. Human grief and sympathy are allowed to participate in the same vast, inhuman mourning of nature and the gods. In doing this, Phelps seems to have adapted previous stage approaches to Timon’s epitaph while trying to adhere as strictly as possible to his “original” text. In the first place, it is significant that Alcibiades wants to see the gravesite at all in Phelps’s play. We have seen how other productions of *Timon* contrived a death scene with other characters serving as witnesses to the fact of Timon’s bodily death. Since the “original” text does not explicitly offer the opportunity to present Timon’s dead body on stage, Alcibiades’ march to Timon’s grave is the closest thing to a direct witness of Timon’s death that Phelps can present. Phelps’s ending, it should be noted, operates rather differently than Shadwell’s. Gary Williams gives his opinion of the “moral and dramatic values” contained in this scene: “They [the stage

effects] bind the main plot and subplots together and tend to idealize both figures. Alcibiades' march on Athens is translated into the coming of a righteous, avenging conqueror . . . . His march to Timon's tomb provides a final ennobling of the fallen man, a rite of honor that in turn recommends Alcibiades to us as a future leader" (168). We saw how Shadwell attempted to shift the focus onto Alcibiades at the end of the play by minimizing the presentation and reading of the epitaph. Phelps also attempts to aggrandize Alcibiades' character, but he does so not by minimizing but by aggrandizing the epitaph moments. Timon's and Alcibiades' ultimately great and noble natures reflect, recognize and affirm each other in this ending. In this case, producing the play with a concern for textual accuracy draws attention to the difference between what textual and theatrical traditions understood to be authentically Shakespeare. Phelps's production of *Timon*, knowingly or unknowingly, attempted to reconcile these competing views, and later 19<sup>th</sup> century productions, like Benson's alternate ending production, still seem to be struggling with this kind of reconciliation.

If Phelps's *Timon* was perhaps the most successful production in the stage history of the play, the next production I will discuss, performed almost exactly a century later, was almost unanimously judged to be a failure. This version was directed in 1956 by Michael Benthall at the Old Vic Theater and featured Ralph Richardson in the lead role. Gary Williams describes this production as "a major reference point in the play's performance history" (177). While he may be simply referring here to the size and scale of the production, we can also read this production as a turning point in the play's history because in several ways Benthall's production is something of a throwback. We can see this more easily by contrasting Benthall's play with the two previous post-war productions of *Timon* in 1947 and 1952 by Barry Jackson and Tyrone Guthrie, respectively. Both of these productions develop the play more as a social satire rather than as a tragedy. The main thrust and interest of these performances then resided in their

critique of contemporary society. Barry Jackson's *Timon* was, in fact, the first modern dress version of the play and was described as "a rhetorical indictment of man as a social animal" (G. Williams 176). And Williams also sees Guthrie's "satire against materialism" as a "welcome, sharp rejection of the idealized Timon" (176). As a result of developing the play along these lines, the first half of the play, when Timon is still in the heart of Athenian society, was the most effective in both the Jackson and Guthrie productions. Williams again notes that "Guthrie shows little interest in the play at precisely the point where Shakespeare seems most earnest, where Timon reaches for the most intense and imaginative expressions of rage and despair" (177). Following this general critical opinion of these performances suggests that the beginning of the play tends to overshadow the ending. Benthall's production, on the other hand, reverses this trend; the ending of the play, in this case, provided some of the more notable and interesting moments of the performance. Benthall's ending attempts to give Timon's epitaph a large theatrical presence on stage and an increasingly significant and direct role in the action of the play. It is the most significant use of the epitaph as a stage property since Phelps's *Timon* a hundred years earlier. Benthall, as might be expected, uses the epitaph quite differently from Phelps. In Phelps's play, the reading of the epitaph functions as a something of a coda; a final punctuation on the action of the play after the action itself has been resolved. It becomes funerary ritual, an act of public mourning for everyone to participate in and reflect on. In other words, it says unequivocally that Timon is to be mourned and pitied. Benthall's epitaph, however, is not really such an object of reflection. It plays a much more direct role in the action of the play. First of all, the epitaph makes its first appearance on stage much earlier than in most performances. The epitaph was set on the top of a kind of large outcropping of rock placed in the center of the stage. This rocky overlook served as a retreat for Timon, taking the place of the cave used more often in other performances. The epitaph appears on stage just after Timon's

encounter with Apemantus in the middle of Act Four. Timon was placed on top of his outcropping chiseling his epitaph onto “a huge slab, like a tombstone” while delivering the speech (“I am sick of this false world. . .”) in which the epitaph is first mentioned in the play (Walker 130; *Arden* 4.3.371). The rectangular, tombstone-like slab was a pretty impressive piece of stage property, quite a bit larger than Richardson himself. The epitaph, which does not appear at all in some productions of *Timon*, then remained as a rather looming presence on stage for the rest of the play. Secondly, Benthall strategically reorders Alcibiades’ reading of the epitaph to a slightly earlier point in the story. In almost every stage production, as well as in the *Folio* text, the reading of the epitaph comes after Alcibiades has worked out his terms of peace with the Athenian Senators. Benthall, though, changes this and moves the reading of the epitaph to the moments just before Alcibiades reconciles with the Senators. Roy Walker describes the scene:

Only the first two lines of v, iii were spoken by the Soldier, who was interrupted by the entry of Alcibiades and his forces, not before Athens but at the base of Timon’s rocky retreat, where they were confronted by the frightened Senators and people who enter from the opposite side of the stage. Alcibiades rejected the Athenian pleas for mercy and ordered the assault; but at this moment the Soldier, who had climbed up to examine the inscription, called urgently to him and Alcibiades halted the attack to read the epitaph himself. It was this reminder of human mortality that melted the banished general to pity, a bold rehandling of the end of the play which at least tied the main and sub-plots together in a theatrically effective way. (131)

For Walker the effectiveness of this ending comes from the fact that it provides a clearer reason for Alcibiades to stop his assault upon the city, since the text, he believes, offers “no

dramatically adequate reason” for this (131). In this binding together of the main and sub-plot, Gary Williams sees a similarity between Benthall’s production of *Timon* and those of Phelps’s era: “In spirit this idealizing ending seems not unlike those of the nineteenth century. The misanthrope was reduced to being chiefly a motive for the rather sentimental conversion of Alcibiades” (178). For Williams, though, the effect of this is to delimit and narrow the scope of Timon’s expansive, exhaustive “misanthropic vision;” he continues, “ In Benthall’s ending, Timon was mourned as a formerly noble man gone mad; his despair discounted, he was to be pitied as one might pity the death from rabies of a pedigreed dog” (178). This representation of Timon as a basically noble but flawed character definitely moves away from the satirical picture of Athens in Jackson and Guthrie’s performances, in which Timon himself is another figure among “the pack of comic scarecrows” that comprises the upper echelon of Athenian society (Walker 131). And it does also hearken back somewhat to the nineteenth century and even further back than that by featuring a Timon who is an example of a noble and generous spirit whose only fault is in having too much faith in his friends. For Walker, the main problem with this depiction is that Benthall’s Timon does not come across as noble enough. He concludes, “Whatever its intention, the impression made by this production on audiences who had small knowledge of the play was that Timon was entirely to blame. The early scenes suggested to them not the noble magnanimity of a largess universal like the sun, only a reckless extravagance. Yet it was presumably the poet’s intention to show how selfish society drives out true generosity (and makes of it a judgement on itself)” (Walker 131). From his point of view, understanding Timon’s generosity as anything less than instances of pure gift-giving turns the story into just another middle-class morality tale on the “ideals of prudence and economy” (Walker 131). What I would point to, though, in this ending is how the epitaph as a text operates as a kind of border or barrier between Alcibiades’ hatred and the consequences of that hatred, the complete



destruction of the city. Both Williams and Walker point out the irony of this ending in which Timon, who so stridently wished to see the city destroyed, ends up saving the city by creating this monument. His epitaph almost becomes a kind of wall, protecting the city. While this kind of irony certainly seems to be at play here, it is limited if we note the distinct character of the epitaph as an object. It is very plausible that Benthall could have replaced the epitaph with Timon's dead body on stage given the already rather large deviations from the source text and given the several instances of this in the play's history. But, Benthall seems to insist upon the epitaph's theatrical significance. The irony, I think, would have been heightened if in the course of his mad march against Athens, Alcibiades would have come across the dead body of his former friend and then relented in his aggression. This scenario, though, seems like it would have the opposite effect on Alcibiades' character and be more likely to feed his anger and resentment towards the Athenians, especially if we remember it was his outrage at another injustice to one of his friends that led to his banishment in the first place. In any case, it would be much less likely to have the softening effect that the epitaph does. The epitaph limits the irony of this ending precisely because it is a text. A writer, however cautious, cannot ultimately control how readers may receive and interpret the written text. If Timon's madness and misanthropy is in part a kind of reaction against this kind of unreliability in signs and his death a kind of escape from the confusion and disorder that he feels it implies, then he must in some way also be aware of the possibility that people will misread and misappropriate the words on the epitaph. The fact that Alcibiades does misread the epitaph is not so much an irony as an eventuality. It is a logical consequence of using the epitaph as a theatrical sign. If Timon wanted to leave a clearer sign of violence, confusion and decay, he could have left perhaps the closest thing that we have to an unmistakable sign, a corpse. If we read the epitaph in this performance in this way it is somewhat different than the more sentimental endings of the

nineteenth century. Alcibiades' misreading of the epitaph (which could also be Benthall's misreading) then serves to reinforce Timon's harsh judgment of human society and his decision to leave it for good.

Another way that Benthall's production recalls the productions of the nineteenth century is his handling of the play-text. Benthall brought the playing time for his performances down to about two hours. Doing this involved cutting more than five hundred lines from the original *Folio* text, which were more lines than Phelps cut from his play in 1851. Gary Williams described it as "probably the most altered version seen in the century since the 1910 Frederick Warde production (based on Calvert's text)" (177). This free handling of the text is another reason why critics disliked the play, and the cuts in many places were pretty surprising. Benthall almost inexplicably removed several of Timon's most caustic lines and some of his most memorable speeches entirely. This also seemed to reverse the trend toward more textual accuracy that had developed in the previous decades of the twentieth century. Continuing the claims to present an authentic and unaltered Shakespeare which began with Garrick and were subsequently developed by the likes of Kemble, Macready and Phelps in the nineteenth century, the 1930s and 40s placed a new emphasis on textual accuracy under the influence of the New Bibliography. The first completely uncut performances of Shakespeare's plays, for example, began in the 1930s. In this climate, Benthall's cuts seemed pretty egregious. In her review of the play, Muriel St. Clare Byrne declares, after discussing some the cuts to the text, that "What was left was not Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* but another play of the same name" (467). What seems strange about this statement is that Byrne is also very much aware that the *Folio* text itself does not offer any clear picture of what "Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*" might look like: "It could be argued that it is less reprehensible than usual to take considerable liberties with a text in which the author's intentions are doubtful. On the other hand, when structure and

arrangement are not wholly clear, is it not essential to see the play faithfully represented in the theatre, as there, if anywhere, light may be shed on its problems?" (466). While I definitely agree with Byrne's assumption here that a performance can further our understanding of a text and vice versa, this statement reveals quite a different understanding of the relationship between the text and performance than in earlier claims of textual accuracy and thus authenticity of a given performance. In those earlier claims such as those made by Phelps in presenting his *Timon*, it's clear that reference to an original Shakespearean text served to vouchsafe the authenticity of the performance on stage. It signaled to an audience that this is a true Shakespearean performance because it is based on a true Shakespearean text. Byrne's statement, on the other hand, almost completely reverses this view of text and performance. Rather than the text enhancing the authority and authenticity of the play on stage, performance in this case seems to exist primarily to enhance and further the goals of reading. It serves as a kind of supporting apparatus, another critical tool that aids in a better reading and understanding of the text. This is perhaps where a text-centered view of dramatic performance reaches its height of contradiction. Benthall's play then existed historically in a kind of weird limbo. It was certainly a rather conservative, reactionary production that looked back to the Victorian theater in order to counteract the contemporizing trends seen in the Jackson and Guthrie productions. In some aspects of the performance, such as the staging, critics praised this more conservative approach. Byrne, for example, described "the echoes of Charles Kean's Act I *Tempest* setting for the sea-shore scene [in *Timon*]" as "a purely personal treat" (468). But when it came to handling the text in a more open manner, the critical ground had definitely shifted farther away from the values of the nineteenth century. It creates an odd case where reference to an original Shakespearean text becomes a kind of double barrier to theatrical performance. Adhering strictly to the very difficult and problematic *Folio* text creates particular theatrical problems, especially those at the

end of the play, which nearly every producer of the play attempts to alter in some way. But in altering the text in order to address these problems, the play is criticized for being un-Shakespearean. It is a particular bind that arises only with this particularly text-centered view of theatrical performance.

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