TIMON OF ATHENS
Shakespeare's Pessimistic Tragedy
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With a stage history by Gary Jay Williams

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Contents

Preface  1
1 Facing the Depth  3
2 At the Boundary of Tragedy  15
3 The Turn of Fortune's Wheel  30
4 The Rise of Alcibiades  50
5 Timon the Misanthrope  64
6 Apemantus and the Others  83
7 Patterns and Image  97
8 The Ills of Society  114
9 The Uses of Nature and Art  129
10 Fortune and the Globe  143

Appendices  159
   Stage History  161
   Text  186
   Date and Sources  201
Notes  219
Index  237
To My Parents
Preface

Charlton Hinman's observation that "critical responses to *Timon of Athens* have not always been characterized by moderation" should have a sobering effect on any critic of the play. But since most violations of moderation have been committed by those who dislike *Timon*, I may be forgiven if I have lapsed occasionally into fervor when defending its merits. I have tried to write a comprehensive critical analysis of the play in its dramatic and cultural contexts. I have felt no need to take up the so-called authorship question; few people now doubt that *Timon* is wholly Shakespeare's. Three other questions much debated in the past are merely marginal to my purposes: when *Timon* was written, what its sources are, and how to explain the defectiveness of the only text we have, that of the First Folio. Such thoughts as I have on these subjects are in the Appendixes.

After completing the manuscript, I had the good fortune of meeting Gary Williams, of the Catholic University of America, whose interest in the play and fascination with it parallel mine. He kindly accepted my invitation to contribute a stage history—the more welcome an addition to this book as he speaks with the rare authority of a man who has directed *Timon* on the stage.
My approach has made it necessary to discuss some key passages of the play in more than one chapter; the reader in search of their total interpretation may consult the Index of Lines. The edition of Timon quoted and referred to is H. J. Oliver’s in the Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1969); plays other than Timon are cited from The Riverside Shakespeare, text ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). For illustrating the intellectual background, I have sought to quote sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources in preference to secondary, modern ones; but I have cautiously modernized their punctuation and spelling. I have followed the same procedure with the Bible, which I quote in the Genevan version (London: Christopher Barker, 1599).

It remains for me to acknowledge the magic of bounty received in writing this book. Two grants-in-aid from the Humanities College of the Ohio State University helped me to travel to research libraries. The personnel of these libraries—the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Newberry Library—was most generous and helpful. For reading and criticizing parts or all of my manuscript at various stages, I am indebted to my colleagues Lee Cox, John Gabel, Robert Jones, James Kincaid, and Edwin Robbins. Maurice Charney of Rutgers University gave me the benefit of his learning and intimate knowledge of the play. Thelma Greenfield of the University of Oregon read what I thought was my final version and convinced me for my own good that it still needed considerable revision. Last but not least, I am grateful to Weldon Kefauver, director of the Ohio State University Press, for his consideration and encouragement, and to Robert Demorest, the editor, for guiding the manuscript through the press.