Facing the Depth

*Timon of Athens* opens on a casually ominous note. A poet and a painter meet and, after mutual greeting, the poet asks: “How goes the world?” Whereupon the painter answers: “It wears, sir, as it grows.” Shakespeare’s audience was familiar with the idea that the world was now in the last stages of its life; therefore, the poet can treat it as a cliché: “Ay, that’s well known.” But this hackneyed notion could still conjure up the fearful image of a doomed humanity as it did effectively in medieval Christian eschatology and as it does again in the blind Gloucester’s cry when he meets his wracked and tortured old master Lear: “O ruin’d piece of nature! This great world / Shall so wear out to nought” (4.6.134–35).

The painter’s offhand reminder of the world’s impermanence is followed by the poet’s alarmingly cynical portrayal of man and society in the allegory of Fortune he is about to present to Timon: it depicts a world of fortune-seekers where “all deserts, all kinds” greedily congregate at the foot of Fortune’s hill. The one man—a person “of Lord Timon’s frame”—whom the goddess wafts upward to her throne is obsequiously adulated by those below; but when Fortune displays her proverbial fickleness by rejecting her erstwhile darling and he slides down the hill, the odious sycophants
abandon him, "Not one accompanying his declining foot" (1.1.90). This satire on greed and ingratitude is a fitting overture to the strident displays of meanness and the breaking of societal bonds in the play. This may be a shrinking and decaying world, but what is dramatized is the sickness and degeneracy of man. "The strain of man's bred out / Into ba- boon and monkey" says the cynic Apemantus when Alcibiades and his followers arrive at Timon's hospitable house and exercise their pliant joints in courtesy (1.1.249–50). Apemantus's inverse Darwinism is an apt expression of the feeling of the human regression the unfolding play conveys; one is reminded that most Renaissance moralists thought that men too were shrinking and degenerating along with the universe. The cynic's remarks bristle with biting invectives against the hypocrisy and depravity of this human world.

The initial cynical statements, borne out as they are by the accompanying action, are mild compared with what is to come: in the second part of the play, a virulently pessimistic voice is raised and spews forth hatred and disgust, the voice of Timon the misanthrope, a man who has rudely awakened from his long dream of universal friendship and love to the reality of his destitution and his friends' villany. He is now misanthropy personified; he cannot be moved from his fixed hatred by finding gold, which would permit him to be rich and honored again, nor by the subtle plea of Alcibiades to help him against Athens, nor by the Athenians' desperate supplication to save them from Alcibiades' army. While his countrymen strenuously seek to extend their sojourn on the ultimately doomed globe, Timon becomes an insistent apocalyptic voice, a prophet of gloom, a preacher of destruction, and a destroyer of himself.

Episode after episode demonstrates the meanness and venality of men, the relentless insistence varied only by the disturbing inversions of irony, sarcasm, and grotesquerie. There is no substantial relief. Too much, I think, has in this respect been made of Timon's faithful steward. His role, after all, is relatively minor, that of a warning voice against Timon's extravagance and of a choric commentator on his fall. Flavius loses all claim he might have of being the moral center of the play when he takes the gold proffered to him by the misanthrope with the uncharitable advice to hoard it and to show charity to none. Even though he and Timon's other loyal servants attract some sympathy, we realize that they are reduced to ineffective laments that heighten the pathos of Timon's ruin. There is no prominent and totally likable exemplar of honesty in Athens because Apemantus, who might provide it, enjoys too much his job as castigator of
Facing the Depth I 5

vices. The milieu in which Timon's monumental hatred develops is permeated with corruption, and the incidents that release his curses are evidence of a general detestable ingratitude. As much as these curses jar our sensibilities, we must admit that they are amply motivated.

*Timon* begins with a potentially disquieting note, continues with stronger accents as the action progresses, and comes to a climax in the most wildly nihilistic speeches ever penned. The most memorable lines of the play are pessimistic. This is not merely a declarative pessimism; it penetrates, as I shall show, into the structure, the characterizations, the imagery, and the themes of the play. It is far from being dispelled by the rather short Alcibiades business of the ending. E. K. Chambers says justly that *Timon* constitutes "the ultimate summing up of the remorseless analysis of human nature" that Shakespeare undertook in his tragedies.¹

This pervasive darkness of the atmosphere has been a major stumbling block for the just appreciation of the play. Coleridge, as J. P. Collier reports, saw the problem:

> His admiration for some parts of the tragedy was unbounded; but he maintained that it was, on the whole, a painful and disagreeable production, because it gave only a disadvantageous picture of human nature, very inconsistent with what, he firmly believed, was our poet's real view of the characters of his fellow creatures.²

Even more strongly, Andor Gomme complains in our own time about "the characteristic *Timon* whine, which has proved so prominent a pointer to what is most unattractive in the play: the unexplained mood of cynicism which seems to inform the whole movement of the verse."³ Although few indeed have been as outspoken as Coleridge and Gomme, the history of criticism shows that, consciously or unconsciously, commentators have been influenced by their human but entirely uncritical resistance to the play's pessimism. These are facts with which a critic of the play has to come to terms, and it is best to face them at the outset. A brief look at the history of the play's reception with focus on the reaction to its pessimism is therefore in order.⁴

We may profitably begin with the method of criticizing Shakespeare favored during the neoclassical period: altering his plays. It is not surprising that an age that could not endure a starkly tragic *Lear* would also seek to lighten the load of *Timon*. Thomas Shadwell's brightened-up version entitled *The History of Timon of Athens, the Manhater* was performed for the first time in 1678 and held the stage into the later eighteenth century; this version had eight printed editions between 1678 and 1732. Shadwell kept so little of what he called "the inimitable hand of Shakespeare" and intruded so
much of his own that his boast should have been not that he
made Timon into a play but that he made it into a non-Shake­
spearean one; he altered characters, speeches, and ideas
quite irreverently, and he supplied others incongruous with
the drama’s ethos. No single overriding principle can be dis­
cerned in these changes, but many were clearly dictated by
Shadwell’s belief that the play had to be made more “noble”
and less depressing. Thus, for instance, he dropped the For­
tune allegory and the derogatory comments on human nature
by the strangers and servants in the first three scenes of the
third act. Apemantus became a benevolent warner rather
than a scurrilous cynic. The general villainy of Athens was
much reduced by the conflation of Timon’s friends with the
ungrateful senators. Most perversely, Shadwell provided a
romantic entanglement for Timon, making him desert his
betrothed, Evandra, for a meretricious coquette only to re­
alize his mistake at last. The loyal Evandra followed him
even into exile and death. Timon expired grandly on stage:
“Thou only! dearest! kind! and constant thing on earth!”
His faithful fiancée joined him promptly. Of course, Timon’s
doting on the coquette made him look ridiculous, and the
faithful companionship of Evandra deprived him of much of
the reason for his quarrel with the world.

The tendency to allay Shakespeare’s pessimism is also
observable in Richard Cumberland’s version, *Timon of Athens,
Altered from Shakespeare* (1771), which David Garrick, in spite
of reservations, put on the stage. Cumberland, it is true,
was somewhat less violent in his changes than Shadwell;
as he said, he retained “many original passages of the first
merit,” and he lightened the play’s mood primarily by omis­
sions. Apemantus’s role was much reduced; not only were
his obscenities removed but he was also absent from Timon’s
banquet and thus had no occasion to utter his cynical prayer
and his comments on the dance as a hypocritical exercise of
fortune seekers (in fact, there was no masque and no dance).
Sempronius, the most odious of Timon’s friends, did not
appear, and some of Timon’s misanthropic speeches, such as
his address to the walls of Athens, were deleted. Worst,
Timon had a noble daughter, Evanthe, who joined Alcibiades
in warning him against his prodigality. Alcibiades too was a
much ennobled man who naturally fell in love with Evanthe
and became engaged to her. No prostitutes for him. The end­
ing of this version was, if anything, worse than Shadwell’s:
Timon, trembling between sanity and insanity, died a Lear-like
death in the presence of his family; unlike Lear, however, he still
managed a fatherly blessing.

Not until 1816 was something approaching Shakespeare’s
*Timon* performed when Edmund Kean, who like Garrick
cherished the play, acted in the title role. Kean's romantic portrayal of the misanthrope, of which we have a vivid but probably not too accurate account by Leigh Hunt, assured the play at least a succès d'estime. George Lamb, the author of this version, informed the reader that "the present attempt has been to restore Shakespeare to the stage, with no other omissions than such as the refinement of manners has rendered necessary." Naturally this refinement necessitated the elimination of the prostitutes and the sexual innuendos. But Lamb was somewhat less than ingenuous; he also added a few non-Shakespearean touches, most notably by having Alcibiades mete out justice to Lucius and Lucullus, Timon's odious creditor-friends. Poetic justice was thus restored, Alcibiades ennobled, Timon vindicated, and the play grossly sentimentalized. And so, in some manner, it has been until recently; directors and actors have flinched from the play's pessimism and introduced modifications to alleviate it. (See Gary Williams's Stage History in the Appendixes.)

Eighteenth-century literary critics generally avoided facing the full pessimism by moralizing on Timon's failure and by disregarding the moral to be drawn from the Athenians' villainy. So Dr. Johnson: "The catastrophe affords a very powerful warning against ostentatious liberality, which scatters bounty, but confers no benefits, and buys flattery but not friendship." However, a new direction came in with the Romantics, who had a tendency to sympathize with the wronged hero, idealize him, and identify him with Shakespeare, and Shakespeare with themselves. Timon now was widely admired; however, what was acclaimed was not the stage play but the somber document read as Shakespeare's spiritual autobiography whose mood resembled romantic melancholy, Weltschmerz, and dégoût du monde. William Hazlitt found Shakespeare in earnest throughout; this was his only work in which "spleen is the predominant feeling of mind." Timon especially appealed to Hazlitt because he faces misfortune "with a lofty spirit of self-denial and bitter scorn of the world." Charles Lamb saw in him an ideal being whose free and generous nature is too trusting for the world.

The reading of Timon as Shakespeare's somber confession was most eagerly practiced in Germany, where philosophical idealism and melancholy romanticism were married and where they engendered the greatest of the pessimistic philosophers. It is hardly accidental that several of the strongest admirers of the play in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have come from Germany, Friedrich Schiller, Karl Marx, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Bertold Brecht among them. For Schiller, the enthusiasm for Timon was part of a passing pessimism during his Mannheim years, before he met and
Timon of Athens

joined the more optimistic Goethe. During these years, he himself attempted a tragedy of a misanthrope, entitled Der Menschenfeind, which he did not finish. In an essay of 1774, Schiller recommended Timon for performance on the German stage, saying that he knew no work of Shakespeare that presented greater truth about man, appealed more strongly and eloquently to the heart, and taught more wisdom of life.9 The German critic most influential on interpretations of Timon as a somber spiritual autobiography was Hermann Ulrici, for whom the play was the fragment of a great confession from Shakespeare's last London years. There had been guesses before that the play might have been one of Shakespeare's last and that it was not fully complete; Ulrici spun these notions into a romantic fantasy about its being left unfinished by a depressed and despairing Shakespeare, whose feelings on his departure from London and from the theater resembled Timon's when leaving Athens. Shakespeare had seen his art profaned and despised by a rude populace as society became increasingly degenerate. Bitterly resenting the commercialization of his deepest thoughts, he hurriedly sketched a play that allowed him to give vent to his nausea. When he became calmer, he abandoned the project; and even though he later tried to complete it, he could not recapture his original mood and therefore gave up.10

An interesting variant of Ulrici's hypothesis of Timon as a late-Shakespearean spiritual testament was devised by the Dane, Georg Brandes, whose William Shakespeare (1895) influenced more than one generation of Shakespeare students. Brandes painted a broadly gloomy picture of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean England of which, he argued, the play was a reflection. The Essex affair, in which the wisest and meanest sage of mankind turned against his former benefactor; the anxiety about the approaching death of the queen and the grief for her after it; the new king's lack of political wisdom; the religious tensions and conflicts; the moral depravity of the court, with its unworthy favorites and unscrupulous scramblers for office; even the affairs and poisoning activities of Lady Essex—all served Brandes to draw a picture of an age that amply deserved a Timonesque scorn. He characterized the Shakespeare of the Timon period as an aging, broken man in a nation that was drifting toward its predestined doom, the conflagration of the Civil War. Brandes claimed that Shakespeare condensed all his bitter experiences, all his disappointments about man's ingratitude to man, and all his sufferings into this play. To purge himself of the excruciating spiritual pain that threatened to destroy him, Shakespeare created this drama around the huge,
despairing figure of the misanthrope, who became a dark secretion of his own bitter gall.\textsuperscript{11}

It is perhaps not surprising that when the conjecture of Shakespeare's writing \textit{Timon} in depression and despair crossed the Atlantic to what was then the heartland of optimism, it was seized upon to support the dislike for the play's theme and major character. Henry Hudson surmised in 1855 that Shakespeare wrote the play when his normal judgment was suspended by a melancholy, self-brooding earnestness; only thus could it be explained why he took up a subject so unsuitable for dramatic treatment—with a predictably deplorable result.\textsuperscript{12} This hypothesis was often accompanied by another hypothesis: Shakespeare, it was claimed, left the play unfinished because, so to speak, he despaired of the possibility of making poetic profit from his despair. This is patently unlikely, and it should be said to the credit of Edward Dowden, who among the nineteenth-century English critics is most associated with the notion that Shakespeare wrote his tragedies \textit{de profundis}, that he held the playwright to have been in a reflective rather than a desperate mood when he composed \textit{Timon}, near the end of his career after his irascible impulses had subsided.\textsuperscript{13} Yet the notion of the play's being a direct record of the author's depression has crept up among later critics. Even the generally sane and judicious E. K. Chambers suggested that Shakespeare may have been neurotic and ill when he wrote \textit{Timon}, "under conditions of mental and perhaps physical stress, which led to his breakdown."\textsuperscript{14}

Since C. J. Sisson's keen strictures,\textsuperscript{15} critics have become shy of romanticizing about Shakespeare's sorrows (although playwrights may still profitably engage in this fantasy). Shakespeare was too impersonal an artist to let us infer what events made him happy or unhappy, and the chronology of his plays, such as we can establish it, shows no simple emotional curve. In the case of \textit{Timon}, we not only lack the biographical facts to determine Shakespeare's state of mind at the date of composition, but we are also in doubt about the date itself—various years in the span of about ten having been proposed. We must remain shy or becoming psychotherapists no matter how much the play nudges us into saying something about why Shakespeare wrote it. We must also remain aware of the influence of our own temperament and outlook on life when we face the great misanthrope. Harry Levin has argued that the problem with \textit{Timon} is that Shakespeare undertook an erroneously conceived task that he could not help finding uncongenial.\textsuperscript{16} Levin does perhaps
prove that Levin finds the task uncongenial; his presupposition (the same as Coleridge’s) that Shakespeare was predominantly optimistic about life is as unprovable as any other.

The most ardent champion of the play has been strangely unaffected by its pervasive pessimism: George Wilson Knight. For him Timon is Shakespeare’s culminating tragedy, a work with a “movement more precipitous and unimpeded than any in Shakespeare; one which is conceived on a scale more tremendous than that of Macbeth and King Lear, and whose universal tragic significance is of all most clearly apparent.” This significance lies for Knight in the hero’s allegorical journey from an earthly paradise with a magnificent “erotic” display to a realm of loneliness and universal loathing, in which he “fronts his destiny, emperor still in mind and soul, wearing the imperial nakedness of his hate.” Few lovers of the play will be altogether able to soar with Knight beyond optimism and pessimism and beyond all good and evil; the “humanism” he sees in Timon is an odd term to apply to the abstraction the character becomes under his enthusiastic pen. To admire without reservation both Timon’s indiscriminate giving and boundless hate is to go outside ordinary human standards; to do so would hardly have struck Shakespeare’s audience, whose moral measurements were still influenced by Christian humanism, as human or humane— interchangeable words in their time. Yet it should be said that Knight offers a counterweight to the plethora of unsympathetic interpretations and that he sees details brilliantly: the glorious sensuousness of the earlier part, the pyrotechnics of Timon’s passion, and the grandeur of his rejection of the world.

For most critics, at any rate, the question of why Shakespeare gave Timon so somber a hue has imposed itself. The only answer that can be given with assurance is that dramatic considerations required a gloomy atmosphere and tone; it Timon’s misanthropy was to be motivated, there had to be good reasons for it. Shakespeare certainly set himself a difficult task in representing misanthropy tragically. Misanthropy is an emotion more palatable in an at least slightly amusing context, more comfortable to view as a human oddity than a tragic affliction. We can smile at Molière’s Alceste, who despises the artificiality of society but is hopelessly in love with Célimène, one of society’s most artificial products. The satiric situation allows us still to smile, even if with embarrassment, when Gulliver prefers the odor of his horses to the embraces of his wife. Also, literary misanthropes are generally not all-out pessimists but pejorativists, as we ourselves are at one time or another; they are more like Apemantus, the critic
Facing the Depth

of society, than Timon, the all-out hater. Gulliver, it is true, has touches of the darkest hue, but he is in a land of horses when he becomes a misanthrope, not in a realistically portrayed society. Alceste's inconsistency and the absurdity of Gulliver's situation allow us to distance ourselves from them as characters while we respond to the satirical message. It cannot be quite so with a tragic hero like Timon; we must enter more deeply into his mental processes. And for many it seems easier to enter the mind of a murderer like Macbeth than that of a misanthrope, to sympathize with a man who hates Jack, John, and Peter and kills them than with one who suffers from the abstract and life-denying affliction of misanthropy.

Shakespeare decided to make Timon's misanthropy into a humanly plausible experience and a tragic phenomenon by dramatizing it as a reaction to an ingratitude that hits Timon like an avalanche. For this purpose, Timon had to be an idealist; but Shakespeare did not make him into a flawless hero—his gullibility is too visible—and this, I think, was dramatically the right decision. To have done otherwise would have detracted from the stature of his misanthropy, which is, paradoxically, an improvement on his philanthropy. If the later Timon were not in some sense greater than the earlier, he would not command amazement, awe, perhaps even respect for his uncompromising rejection of the world; the tragedy would lose interest just when it proceeds to the heart of the matter.

Given the subject of tragic misanthropy, Shakespeare surely also made the right decision to present Timon's misanthropy as a total microcosmic and macrocosmic pessimism. Had he let Timon hang on to any consolatory notion, trust in a person or belief in a nonhuman order and beauty, he would have run the risk of creating not an essential misanthrope but a sentimentalist or disappointed idealist. Of the former danger, the eighteenth-century adaptations with their Evandras and Evanthes bear witness. Of the latter, Schiller's failure with Der Menschenfeind is an indication: Schiller tried to balance his hero's misanthropy with a Rousseauistic admiration for the order and harmony of nature, which men have done their best to pervert. Shakespeare's conception is surely more fascinating psychologically because it is unrelieved and is cosmically extended into a horror of nature as a whole. In toning down the light on Timon the philanthropist and in generally painting with dark pigments, Shakespeare showed his sense of dramatic coloring and gradation. The focus on Timon would have been disturbed had he made Alcibiades or any other character into a
shining hero. The world Shakespeare created for this play is a fitting one: a corrupt, upside-down world, a place of insidious evil and ruthless ambition where the bitch-goddess Fortuna is adored and feared. The tragedy of the extremist has its appropriately extreme setting.

But we are still faced with the question of why Shakespeare chose a subject that required such somber colors. Not, I think, by accident and mistake. Timon is the end and climax of a series of partial misanthropes: Jaques, Hamlet, Thersites, and Lear. Shakespeare evidently wished to create a hero who took cleansing the body of the infected world totally seriously. And, as Chambers says, the play is "continuous with the development of pessimistic thought that is traceable along the whole line of tragedies." All Shakespeare's tragedies have nadirs of disillusionment and despair, such as Othello's "This was Othello," Macbeth's dismissal of life as a walking shadow, and Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never." There is a special pessimistic momentum in the later tragedies, beginning with Lear. It is thought-provoking that in both Lear and Timon Shakespeare took stories that were not tragic in his sources and gave them a very dark configuration. Also, both Coriolanus and Timon present particularly corrupt societies, if not societies in dissolution. So, of course, does Troilus and Cressida, but only the two tragedies establish very close connections between disintegrating societies and the heroes' fall. Both Coriolanus and Timon are placed in tragic predicaments because they pay tribute to the ostensible ideals of their society; both try to break the societal fetters but fail to achieve freedom.

If we locate the pessimism of Timon of Athens in Shakespeare's personal experience and world view, we transcend the limits of legitimate criticism, although it is possible that this is part of the explanation. Certainly an incorrigible optimist would not have looked so deeply into the well of despair. In any case, it is fair to conclude that the opportunity of deepening the pessimistic aspects inherent in all tragedy drew Shakespeare to the Timon story, of deepening them not merely emotionally but also, perhaps primarily, intellectually. The play proves Shakespeare's exposure to, and interest in, the pessimistic ideas that were in the air. And this interest, unlike his personal feeling and temperament, can be demonstrated.

I shall argue that Timon is more deliberately anchored in a pessimistic intellectual tradition than has generally been supposed. But Ulrici, Brandes, and others provide examples on how not to proceed in this matter. We cannot relate the play to political, cultural, and religious failings of the Jacobean age that have left no discernible reflections in it;
for that matter, F. P. Wilson has warned us not to simply identify Jacobean and pessimistic. Certainly the societal debacle nourished pessimism, but did not create it. We must seek to understand the Timon atmosphere in the context of a general European crisis to which literature responded without necessarily concerning itself with particular events. Trevor-Roper points out that the artists reacted to this crisis with cynicism, despair, and disillusionment, and he quotes Gerald Brenan’s dictum that the Baroque age “was a tight contracted age, turned on itself and lacking in self-confidence and faith in the future.” Trevor-Roper mentions Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, Quevedo, and the painters and sculptors of the Spanish baroque as examples. Shakespeare, too diverse and individualistic to be placed wholly into one category, belongs at least partially here, most signally with Timon. The play is imprinted with the strains of the age.

For the spread of pessimism in England we should not look merely to such major Renaissance propagators as Machiavelli and Montaigne; there were older and more domesticated voices. Christian humanism had not made the contemptus mundi obsolete but had absorbed it. The notion of the decay of the world, a concomitant of Christian conceptions of the Fall and the Last Judgment that keeps coming back to haunt mankind, reached a high point in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Two of the very sources Shakespeare used for Timon were impregnated with contemptus mundi and decay-of-the-world rhetoric: Pierre Boaistuau’s Theatrum Mundi (translated by John Alday in 1586, and repeatedly reprinted) and Richard Barckley’s A Discourse of the Felicity of Man (1598; rpt. 1603, 1631). In humanistic fashion, the Theatrum combines a lament for the miseries of existence and an onslaught against the vices of mankind (in the first part) with a praise of the dignity of man (in the second part); but the praise is too short and superficial to mitigate the fierce thrust of the pessimism. Barckley’s odd mélange of Christian piety and historical anecdotage is imbued with a distressingly somber outlook on man and the world: the post-lapsarian universe is for him dominated by disorder instead of order and discord instead of harmony, so that it resembles “a chain rent in pieces, whose links are many lost and broken and the rest so slightly fastened that they will hardly hang together.” No Tillyardian chain of being for Barckley!

Barckley also demonstrates how easily the new pessimism could infiltrate and strengthen the old. One of his sallies against man and society has a familiar ring to readers of Renaissance history and literature:

The time is so changed and men’s manners with them so corrupted that the precepts heretofore given by wise men for the
commodity of life grounded upon virtue and honesty will not serve their turn; friendship is grown cold, faith is foolishness, honesty is in exile, and dissimulation hath gotten the other hand. That is effectively done which is commonly spoken: he that cannot dissemble cannot live. Machiavel's rules are better followed than those of Plato, Aristotle, or Cicero. . . . So long as thou hast no need, thou shalt find friends ready to offer thee all manners of courtesies; but if fortune begin to frown upon thee, and a tempest chance to arise, they will find quarrels to leave thee and cover their infidelity with thy fault.  

Notwithstanding the dissociation from Machiavelli, these lines are a paraphrase of a famous passage in The Prince. It evidently appeared to Barckley that Machiavelli could have been talking about the England of Barckley's own time, and it appears to us that both could have been talking about the Athens of Timon.

It may finally be noted that the very location of the play supported, for Shakespeare and his audience, an emphasis on man's corruption and degeneracy. Ancient Greece, particularly post-Periclean Athens, furnished the Renaissance with spectacular examples of what happens to states when men become vicious and beastly. As T. J. B. Spencer points out, Shakespeare and his fellow writers took the unsympathetic Roman view of the Greeks, even darkening it—a tendency well demonstrated in Troilus and Cressida as well as in Timon. In popular consciousness, Greek and crook were practically synonymous. The satirists and moralists vied with each other in depicting the Greeks as "licentious, luxurious, frivolous, bibulous, veneral, insinuating, perfidious, and unscrupulous. . . . Timon and his circle lived like Grecians." This, of course, is moral rather than local coloring; Greek materials—Timon is no exception—were still treated as an appendix to the matter of Rome.

The location of the play and some of Shakespeare's sources account at least partly for the somber view of man and society that permeates it. They do not account for the deepening of the tone toward tragedy, if indeed it is a tragedy. As the title of my study indicates, I think it is. But since some have denied this, the play's status as a true tragedy will require a defense.