Fortune and the Globe

All broken implements of a ruined house

Although the poet's allegory of Fortune is trite by itself, it is highly significant for the meaning and quality of the play. Not that it is really revelatory of Timon's tragedy beyond the mere outward movement from fortune to misfortune. Rather, it functions as a kind of prologue that puts the action, as it were, under the aegis of the goddess Fortuna and invites the reader or spectator to view it from a pessimistic perspective.

Fortuna was a Roman goddess of older origin—the Greeks knew her as Tuche. She had become somewhat uncertainly acclimatized to the Christian scheme of things in the Middle Ages, and she continued and enlarged her dubious reign in the Renaissance. From a strictly Christian point of view she had no legitimate role except as Divine Providence. But it could hardly be denied that she represented something real that was going on in the world, something to hope for or feel threatened by even though its connection to the will of God was often opaque. In Timon, Fortuna presides, as it were, from the allegory onward; her influence is attested by the frequency of the word "fortune" in the remainder of the play. It occurs particularly often in the plural form, in which it primarily referred to wealth, estate, and possessions.

Although the worship of the goddess is not unknown in our own time, allegories about Fortune—along with allegories in
general—have lost their appeal, and it is therefore understandable that a few years ago Timon was performed without the poet's recital of his composition. Director or designer invented an ingenious substitution: a female statue, suggestive of the goddess, became visible on the stage when the curtain rose; later it gazed in a lurid light at the ruins of the mock banquet. One hopes that the audience sensed the significance of this prop, a prop that Shakespeare's audience, familiar with Fortuna iconography and alert to its occurrence not only in the allegory but also in the play at large, did not need. Since the Middle Ages, literature and art had worked together to draw Fortuna's picture; it is not fortuitous that the miniature paragone between the poet and the painter erupts on who can better depict the goddess.

However, the painter's self-important assertion that he can show the poet "a thousand moral paintings" that demonstrate the blows of fortune more pregnantly than words is disingenuous. Although there were Renaissance and baroque paintings of Fortuna, her major impact came from the area somewhere between literature and art, from emblems and from symbolizations in trionfi, pageants, and processions. It is to the emblems, in particular, that the poet's allegory and the allusions to fortune in the play offer parallels. Since the emblems, like drama, were a picta poesis combining word and picture, they had a mutually fruitful relationship with the stage. Shakespeare's stage and the acting on it, as we have come to see, were in some manner emblematic. Through using the symbolic donnée of the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage and augmenting it by props, groupings of characters, movements, costumes, and even sound effects, the dramatists created a symbolic language; Shakespeare was as much a master of this language as of the verbal idiom. Moreover, he could and did make the verbal images suggest conventional visual ones to give a graphic extension to the text or provide an ironic commentary. I shall in this chapter try to re-create the thematic patterns that arise from this interplay of literary and visual suggestiveness in the Fortuna allusions of Timon by drawing on emblems and processional symbols. We must be satisfied here with a plausible reconstruction; we cannot witness a Jacobean performance of Timon, nor can we put ourselves in the minds of Shakespeare and his audience and say definitely that every single association was intended or perceived. Their total effect is beyond doubt.

First the allegory and its immediate implications for the play. The poet says, "I have upon a high and pleasant hill / Feign'd Fortune to be thron'd" (1.1.65–66). We are struck here, at first, not by a likeness but by a contrast between the poetic image and the usual visual images of Fortuna in the emblems.
"Fortune," says Shakespeare's Fluellen, "is painted blind, with a muffler afore her eyes, to signify to you that Fortune is blind, and she is painted also with a wheel, to signify to you, which is the moral of it, that she is turning and inconstant, and mutability, and variation: and her foot, look you, is fixed upon a spherical stone, which rolls, and rolls, and rolls" (Henry V, 3.6.30-36). Fortuna seated on a throne does occur in literature, but rarely, it appears, in art, and then with a symbolism different from that in Timon. Likewise, one can find a hill of Fortune in medieval romances and in miniatures illustrating them, such as in manuscripts of The Romance of the Rose, but I have failed to locate this hill in Renaissance emblems or paintings. Shakespeare evidently was aware that poetry and painting, although sister arts, sometimes choose different iconographic details.

Shakespeare's Londoners, however, had seen a symbolic hill of Fortune of sorts a few years before Timon was presumably written and performed. It crowned one of the triumphal arches through which King James passed during his coronation procession in 1604 (which, ironically, had been delayed because of the outbreak of the plague in 1603). The fifth "pegme," or structure, entitled Hortus Euphoriae (Garden of Plenty), showed Fortune standing on top of a little temple or palace, which in turn was on top of a hill, a "high and pleasant hill" like that of the Fortune favorable to Timon. Moreover, the device made the dependence of man's fortune on material prosperity evident: under Fortuna "sat two persons, representing gold and silver, supporting the globe of the world between them." But this hill lacked the allegory's slippery slope down which Fortune's rejects slide. Shakespeare's hill of Fortune, as we have noted, is a variant of the conventional visual and literary wheel of Fortune, and this conception of the wheel accentuates the structure of the play.

In this context, the poet's reference to the throne of Fortune has an interesting stage symbolism. The throne, of course, was a frequent stage prop, particularly in the history plays, which often began with a king seated on a throne that he later lost or relinquished by death, a dramatic emblem related to the iconographic tradition of an enthroned king on top of Fortune's wheel. The reference to a throne in Timon draws attention to its absence on the stage, and it underlines Timon's foolishness in dreaming of dealing kingdoms to his friends (1.2.219). He emulates, as David Cook says, "the indiscriminate giving of an abstract goddess like Fortune." It is Fortuna Bona, the benefactress of mankind, with whom Timon comes close to identifying himself; he dreams, we might say, of sitting on her throne. And this, naturally, is a kind of hubris.
Timon's hubris makes it impossible for him to have anything more than a kind of collegial attitude to the gods. Even so, he and Apemantus are the only Athenians in the play who recognize the gods and pray to them, odd as their prayers are. By contrast, the merchant's god, as Apemantus says, is "traffic." Later Timon says much the same thing when he calls gold the Athenians' "visible god" (4.3.389). Religious or spiritual feelings of any kind are inconceivable in Athens. The pursuit of fortune is the only worship there; the loss of fortune, the only hell: "Let molten coin be thy damnation," says Flaminius to Lucullus (3.1.52). To his credit, Timon does not worship the Athenian ersatz gods; but he is unable to call on the gods for anything more than the expression and affirmation of his own desires. When he thanks them in prosperity, it is for having so many friends who will help in need. When he leaves the city, he removes the gods from the human scene so that they will escape contamination, just as he removes himself. Timon's gods resemble the gods of Epicurus and Lucretius; like these they are quite superfluous.

Chummy in his attitude toward the gods, Timon scatters gifts and favors from what he assumes to be an inexhaustible treasure, a cornucopia of the kind from which Fortuna Bona distributes her riches in the emblems. We must not balk at the identification of Timon with Fortuna because of his sex. The mythographers noted that the ancients represented fortune sometimes as a young man, presumably because of the association with Chairos, the Greek god of opportunity, and they recollected from Pliny that the Romans erected a statue of a male Fortuna. This conception was also embodied in an illustration of Vincenzo Cartari's influential Le Imagine dei Dei degli antichi, an illustration that has an intriguing resemblance to Timon's situation. The woodcut shows two Fortunas: one, Felicitas-Fortuna, is seated at the left, with a cornucopia, as the presiding goddess, and a male Fortuna hovers in the air at the right with the Roman attributes of plenty—a dish, an ear of corn, and a poppy—in his hands. This latter image represents the extravagant dream of the winged struggler beneath on Fortune's wheel, whose feet, like Timon's, are on the wheel that will sometime turn down. On the right, Adulation, like Timon's friends, adores the favorite of Fortuna. An emaciated Envy stands next to the struggler, the Envy that always looks unfavorably on anybody who does not fear her.

Timon's eminence, like that of this struggler on Fortune's wheel, is not merely a self-projection but also the making of his adulatory friends. They do their best to nourish his delusion that he sits on Fortune's throne. When one of them says that "Plutus the god of gold / Is but his steward" (1.1.275–76), he
casts Timon in a Fortuna role since Plutus was generally conceived to be Fortuna's helper and companion. In a typical emblem drawn by Jean Cousin, a blindfold Plutus holds a blindfold Fortuna by her hand. Timon's flatterers, in fact, act as if he commanded the globe with its four elements: they make earth, water, air, and fire attest to his glory. Such symbolic reign was traditional in Fortuna iconography. The Londoners saw it depicted on one of the structures through which King James passed during his coronation procession: the central device of the sixth pegme, entitled Cosmos Neos, was a globe presided over by Fortuna, her foot treading the turning circle that contained the insignia of the various estates; the circle itself was turned by four allegorical figures that represented the four elements. One is reminded of Coriolanus's phrase "O world, thy slippery turns!" (4.4.12), and one wonders whether all viewers accepted the official iconography of the device, that is, the promotion of virtue and justice by fortune. The circle must have suggested to thoughtful observers the inexorable wheel on which those who are carried up will also be carried down.

The poet's allegory in Timon certainly emphasizes the bipolarity of Fortune, and Timon's career is its manifestation. When Fortune is described as wafting Timon to her with her "ivory hand" (1.1.72), the implication is, as Samuel Chew proposes, that she has an ebony hand with which she will turn him away later. In emblems, Fortuna was presented as having opposite sides and qualities, and sometimes she was shown as half-light and half-dark. In his two banquets, Timon enacts the antithetical behavior of the goddess: at the first he distributes, Fortuna-like, lavish gifts; at the second he serves his friends symbols of their worthlessness, stones and lukewarm water. He calls them now "fools of fortune, trencher-friends, time's flies" whose "perfection" is smoke and lukewarm water (3.6.85–92)—smoke being a symbol of the vanity of the world's glory. The discomforted guests have a point when they feel he acts like an ambivalent Fortuna: "One day he gives us diamonds, next day stones" (3.6.115). The goddess was similarly depicted in emblems as scattering crowns, scepters, tiaras, and precious objects with one hand, worthless things like stones and foolscaps with the other. She is also shown distributing gifts with one hand while holding a whip or rod in the other. The two banquets bring out Timon's assuming these polar roles of Fortuna as rewarder and punisher; it is likely that Shakespeare conceived the contrast of the banquets, which has no equivalent in the sources, so to point up these roles.

From the second banquet, Timon impersonates solely Fortuna Mala, an enemy of man and a frequent subject of the
image-makers. In her punishing function, she was often identified with Nemesis. It is in practice difficult to distinguish the two figures in art; Dürer's famous engraving has been called both Nemesis and Great Fortune. One might say that Timon's earlier career aspires to be a Triumph of Fortune, his later a Triumph of Nemesis—the contrasting pageants that were pictorial motifs.

The most vivid feature of the poet's allegory, one that has much correspondence in the visual arts, is the bipolarity of the Fortuna landscape, the luxuriant slope of Fortuna Bona and the steep and barren one of Fortuna Mala—a change of setting as it is symbolized in Timon's career. In the emblems, the change is sometimes one from an urban center, such as Timon's Athens, to a woodland like that of Timon's later days. Trees, as Werner Habicht points out, were generally associated with Fortuna. The symbolism of the movement from the city to the wood in Timon is the more significant since it was Shakespeare's own interpretation of the story. None of the sources has anything like it; in them, Timon lived in Athens or in a hut of the fields. Timon moves, like two figures in an emblem by Denis Lebey de Batilly, from a walled city on the left, symbolizing prosperity, to a wood of adversity on the right. The two men are propelled in this direction by the wind of Fortune above them; but while one of them resolutely marches on without turning his back, the other foolishly turns around and attempts to blow back the wind toward the heavenly force: necessity must be obeyed, says the text. Timon's gesture on leaving Athens goes against this commonplace Fortuna moral; and his mighty stream of condemnation and defiance of the Athenians, who have created his adverse fortune, is quite a different matter from the weak breath of Batilly's wanderer. Shakespeare was not interested in convenient little morals.

The Fortuna iconography of Timon raises the question of for what theater the play was written. Several scholars have argued that its particular theatrical qualities indicate that it was intended for an indoor stage. J. M. Nosworthy, though not rejecting the possibility of a Globe performance, thinks that the spectacular scenes with the masque as central interest may have been assembled to provide an entertainment at court. E. A. J. Honigmann suggests that Timon (and Troilus and Cressida) may have been intended for an evening performance at one of the Inns of Court; it would have appealed to young lawyers, and the emphasis on food and drink and the masque would carry a warning against their prodigality. In her intriguing reconstruction of the play's first performance, M. C. Bradbrook claims that it was an "experimental scenario
for an indoor dramatic pageant" with which Shakespeare's company opened their new Blackfriars Theater. What a subject for an opening!

None of these arguments seem to me plausible enough to deny the play to the Globe, where Bernard Beckerman puts it. There is no reason to think that Timon required the special properties of an indoor theater if one assumes that the style of the performance was emblematic: a table and benches for the banquets, a stage tree for the wood, and a small stage rock for the cave would have been quite sufficient. For the rest, the bare Globe stage provided some excellent emblematic possibilities, such as for the house of Timon, the city walls of Athens, and the heavens above. Banquets and masques were not inappropriate for the public stage, and it is quite gratuitous to suggest, as does Bradbrook, that a waterworks or wave machine may have been employed for Timon's watery grave; it is onstage, and, in any case, the ending provides that Timon's joining of Neptune be transformed into a conceit rather than a bath. The Fortuna symbolism of the play suggests to me strongly that the public playhouse was the setting of Shakespeare's vision when he wrote. This does not exclude the possibility that the play was also intended for performances in the private theater, but I believe that the Globe had a definite edge in producing the appropriate pictorial suggestiveness.

There is, first of all, Timon's actual house. Much of the earlier action takes place either in front of it or within; all of act one and, except for the first very short scene, of act two plus a large portion of act three are set here. Although Shakespeare's plays do not require definite localization, the Globe stage in this case made the house setting fitting. The pillars that carried the roof of the stage would have helped suggest such a setting to the audience's imagination; they imitated classical architecture, and they may have been painted to look like marble if they were like those of the Swan Theater. The movement of the actors from the forestage to the area under the pillars or through the tiring-house would signify their entering Timon's mansion, or, for that matter, their passing from one part of it to the other. The banquets would be served "indoors," that is, under the pillars; tables, chairs, and dinnerware carried in by the servants would provide the setting. When Timon hides himself from the creditors in his house, that is, behind the tiring-house facade, the pillared stage would appear like a portico.

In conformity with Timon's impersonation of Fortuna, his house would also evoke emblems in which the goddess in her smiling mood is associated with a building, a large palace or
spacious house, “Fortune’s hall,” as it is called in *Troilus and Cressida* (3.3.134). For that matter, Fortuna was also at home in the theater—a symbolism to which we shall turn later. Interestingly, in Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, Alcibiades was said to have dwelled in “Fortunys halle” during his prosperity;28 and a house of Fortune had been put on the stage in a masque-like morality play, *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality*, performed about 1576 and printed in 1602. When Timon impersonates the goddess, his house takes on a duality similar to the house of this morality: it is a real dwelling but also an illusion created by the people who worship Fortune. The tall pillars of the Globe would appropriately suggest a hall worthy of the goddess. Under its roof, that of the stage, are enacted scenes symbolic of her allurement, such as banquets and dances—emblems associated both with activities and the goddess.29 Of course, the house of Fortune carries a warning: splendid today, it may be a ruin tomorrow.

The liberal and symbolic meaning of Timon’s house is brought home by strong verbal emphasis. When Timon says of his servant, “To build his fortune I will strain a little” (1.1.146), the strain on his property can be felt. Later, when Timon’s great house, so hospitable and so freely accessible before, becomes his retentive jail, a servant coins the convenient Fortuna moral: “Who cannot keep his wealth must keep his house” (3.3.43). This moral resembles an emblem by Batilly in which a man takes cover from the storms of Fortune behind the thick walls of a house30—Timon, of course, rather than remaining in the shelter, breaks forth violently. We are made aware not only of Timon’s house but also of the houses the others keep because these structures are a measure of their standing with Fortune. The fool offers a wittily relevant paradox when he compares the house of his mistress, the prostitute, with those of Timon’s usuring friends: “When men come to borrow of your masters, they approach sadly, and go away merry; but they enter my mistress’s house merrily, and go away sadly” (2.2.102-5).31 Fortuna was often called a hussy because of her promiscuity; and the userers’ houses as well as the house of the prostitute share in the function of the house of Fortune in which the sad are transformed into the merry and the merry into the sad, according to the whims of the goddess. The inhabitants of Timon’s house, in which the fool turns his paradox, will soon be transformed from happiness to misery.

The world judges Timon by the house he owns and reverses its judgment when he loses it. Keeping “so good a house” appears to Lucullus the essence of nobility (3.1.23). When the substance is gone and the house lost, the nobility of the owner is foreclosed too. The magnificent houses of the creditors, enlarged with spoils
of Timon’s, now support their preeminence as one of their servants snobbishly reminds the steward: “Who can speak broader than he that has no house to put his head in? Such may rail against great buildings” (3.4.63–65). But building to great height is apt to lead to disaster, as one of La Perrière’s emblems warned and as Timon’s fate shows.32

In the mock banquet, Timon’s turn toward misanthropy is accompanied by the rejection of the house in which he has presided: “Burn, house! Sink, Athens! Henceforth hated be / Of Timon, man and all humanity!” (3.6.100–101). This “unhousing” is followed in the next scene by undressing: house and clothes imagery are linked here as they are in Lear and climax in the hero’s dramatic gesture of stripping himself. In his allegory, the poet speaks of Timon’s “large fortune, / Upon his good and gracious nature hanging” (1.1.56–57); but Timon’s estate, like a garment, “shrinks from him” and he is “shrunk indeed” (3.2.7, 62). After leaving Athens, he lives with the naked creatures “whose bare unhoused trunks, / To the conflicting elements expos’d, / Answer mere nature” (4.3.231–33).

Timon’s gesture of tearing off his clothes as he glances back at the city walls has the configuration of a Fortuna scene:

Nothing I’ll bear from thee
But nakedness, thou detestable town!
Take thou that too, with multiplying bans!

(4.1.32–34)

The image here, doubly impressive because it is both verbal and mimetic, resembles one of Batilly’s emblems in which a naked man leaves a city that is on fire. (“Burn, house!” said Timon at the mock banquet.) Yet the moral of the emblem is quite different: the man leaving the city is naked because a wise man puts no trust in the goods of Fortune, as the motto says.33 In contrast, Timon’s gesture accompanies his attempt to free himself from the causality of Fortune in which a dishonest world seeks to cloak him. What for the emblem figure is an act of deliverance undertaken with a composed mind is for Timon a rage in which he violently tears off the lie that men are better than beasts. The clothes are left behind not because they are a ballast for the wise man but because they are symbols of a rotten civilization, the corruption of which Timon’s rage wishes to “multiply” to the destruction of society.

The mood is that of pathos rather than rage in the next scene when the steward and the servants intone an elegy on the fall of master and house:
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Such a house broke?
So noble a master fall’n, all gone, and not
One friend to take his fortune by the arm,
And go along with him.

(4.2.5–8)

Timon’s house is deserted by its former guests, “familiars to his buried fortunes,” who slink away as if its owner had been thrown into his grave; Timon’s servants are now mere “broken implements of a ruin’d house” (10–16). These images have a general resemblance to emblems that, like two of Jean Cousin’s, symbolize the blows of Fortune by broken columns or a falling house; in one of the drawings, a falling ceiling is in the process of burying a victim underneath.

After Timon’s departure from Athens, all evocations of a dwelling, be they through the stage location or verbal imagery, have a way of recalling contrastingly or ironically Timon’s splendid house. When that foremost implement of the broken house, the steward, sights his ragged and savage former master, he visualizes him as a ruined edifice: “Is yond despis’d and ruinous man my lord? / Full of decay and failing? O monument / And wonder of good deeds evilly bestow’d” (4.3.462—64). Timon reciprocates the steward’s solicitation with gold and with the advice to use it in order to “build from men” a house of hate where charity is shown to none (530—31). The phrase is a sad reminder of what Timon said in his house of plenty when he sought to build his servant’s fortune even if it diminished his own.

In the wild, wooded region that Timon inhabits in exile, his dwelling becomes a cave. On Shakespeare’s stage, the contrast between the earlier spacious and illuminated house, practically equivalent to the stage itself, and the dark and narrow cave, presumably represented by the small discovery space behind an intimated rock, must have been visually impressive. Like the wood, the cave was Shakespeare’s addition to the Timon legend, and he chose it surely for its association with fortune and despair. In Spenser’s Faerie Queene (1.9.44), the Cave of Despair serves as a refuge from the world in which “fickle fortune rageth strife.” As in Spenser, irony overcomes the pathos: the cave proves no haven. The heap of Timon’s newfound gold in front of the cave symbolizes the allurement that again draws those who seek fortune to his abode.

By the kind of imaginative transformation that Shakespeare’s stage made possible, the roof over it became now literally what it was called figuratively, that is, the heavens. Shakespeare availed himself of this bit of theatrical illusionism when he made Timon ask the earth to “Teem with new
monsters, whom thy upward face / Hath to the marbled mansion all above / Never presented” (4.3.192–94). I do not think that the image of heaven as marbled, a common idea, had an application to the Blackfriars; it is mere speculation to say that it had a ceiling painted in imitation of marble.\textsuperscript{53} If the Globe had marble columns (admittedly also a speculation, but one made more likely by those of the Swan), the description would have been fitting for the “mansion” above, particularly if the lower part of the columns was covered with stage trees. In any case, the significance of the marble is metaphorical and emotional: the mansion with its cold and hard marble is the dwelling of “perpetual sober gods” remote from mankind and indifferent to it. This mansion, however, cannot fail to suggest another contrast to Timon’s once radiant and now ruined Athenian house, symbol of his fortune. Another such contrast is suggested poetically in Alcibiades’ tribute to the dead misanthrope: “Timon has made his everlasting mansion / Upon the beached verge of the salt flood” (5.1.214–15). The narrowness of Timon’s last mansion is an apt reminder of the spaciousness of the Athenian palace he once inhabited. The pulsating sea, vividly described by Alcibiades, evokes the up-and-down movement of his life. Lapped by the waters that change and obliterate, his grave is a powerful symbol of the ultimate fortune to which all men must come: death.\textsuperscript{36}

Besides the house, another architectural structure is significant in the play’s Fortuna iconography: the walls of Athens. Fortuna was the guardian of the cities: emblems showed her above or in front of walled cities. In one of Cousin’s, she stands before the gate with a lock and a key in her hands.\textsuperscript{37} The theatrical ambiance of Shakespeare’s public playhouse would have made the city walls an appropriate feature to evoke; the playhouse was itself surrounded by a frame that resembled such walls. When the stage represented Timon’s house or some other location in Athens, Shakespeare’s audience could consider themselves inhabitants of that city and could empathize with its fortunes. The satirists who used ancient Athens as a pseudonym for Shakespeare’s London encouraged such typological identification; Thomas Lodge, for instance, with an unmistakable reference to London, made Diogenes say: “Good lord, what a city Athens is: here are fair houses, but false hearts.”\textsuperscript{58} With this identification, the ironies, the pathos, and the fears inspired by Fortune in Timon must have had a strong topical relevance.

The freedom of visualizing diverse locations on Shakespeare’s stage made it possible to change quickly the imagi-
native orientation when action and circumstances required it. Such is the case when Timon leaves Athens. Until this time, the tiring-house facade would have suggested a wall in or on Timon’s house. When Timon leaves Athens, the situation changes and, with it, the significance of the facade, as W. M. Merchant has well noted: “For the feast we have an elaborate interior scene; with the removal of the banquet and the helpless search of the affronted suitors for the jewels, caps, and gowns, the function of the setting is literally reversed: without a break in the action, Timon emerges to address the walls of Athens.” The outer walls of the Globe now assumed the meaning suggested by the theater’s emblematic name: they became the frame of the world, and the back wall of the stage, the tiring-house facade, took over the function of the city walls.

In this imaginative climate, Shakespeare’s Londoners would have had good reason to refer Timon’s valediction to the walls and his cry for their fall not only to Athens but to all cities, particularly their own:

O thou wall
That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth
And fence not Athens!

(4.1.1–3)

This, I think, is a moment when for Shakespeare’s audience, or at least for many of them, the impression of Fortune’s ironies and of the pathos engendered by her frown must have given way to awe. Accustomed as they were to think of the fall of Athens as a warning example, Timon’s words must have had a credible application for their present and future. The prophetic ring of these lines would have been even more awesome to those who were aware that the walls of Athens did indeed come down when, after the death of Alcibiades, the Athenians razed them at the request of the victorious Spartan general Lysander. Stephen Batman spoke for the apocalyptically inclined when he had them come down at the blast of a trumpet, like those of Jericho. With this orientation, the final appearance of Alcibiades before the walls of Athens—the tiring-house facade again—gains an ironic perspective beyond the ordinary Fortuna associations. Alcibiades’ appearance before the walls Timon left behind emphasizes the contrast between his and Timon’s fortunes, and it demonstrates the familiar turn of the wheel: once Timon was the city’s protector, now Alcibiades is its master.

It remains finally to speak of the Fortuna imagery in Timon’s rhetoric of condemnation. However unwise his own
position toward Fortuna, he knows now how to draw graphic characterizations of those congregated at the foot of Fortune's hill. He begins with fairly traditional iconography in his first soliloquy in the wood, backing up his call for universal destruction by pictures of the wholesale perversion of men through fortune: "Raise me this beggar, and deny't that lord, / The senators shall bear contempt hereditary, / The beggar native honour" (4.3.9-11). This resembles an emblem like Cousin's "Sign of Fortune's Inconstancy," in which a blindfolded Fortune sits in the middle of the beam of a see-saw; a senator is carried upward on one side while a scholar dips downward on the other. If Timon's image puts the beggar in the place of the scholar, his subsequent words about the "learned pate" ducking to the golden fool (18) glance at the latter.

Timon refurbishes the traditional imagery by imbuing it with various associations, such as those of flattery in "If one be [a flatterer], / So are they all, for every grise of fortune / Is smoothed by that below" (15-17) and again in "The sweet degrees that this brief world affords" (255). The allusion here, of course, is to the conventional ladder of Fortune, that same ladder by which Fortuna climbs to her seat at the beginning of The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality. It is, however, in fusions with nature images that the Fortuna imagery becomes most allusive and brilliant, as, for instance, when Timon identifies himself with a tree—appropriately in the presence of the advocate of the simple life of nature, Apemantus—and remembers that

The mouths, the tongues, the eyes and hearts of men At duty, more than I could frame employment: That numberless upon me stuck, as leaves Do on the oak, have with one winter's brush Fell from their boughs and left me open, bare, For every storm that blows.

(4.3.263-68)

Images of the seasons, of fortune, and of flattery are conflated in this speech. Timon likens himself to the tree of life, now stripped bare by the blast of winter. This tree also resembles that in Ripa's emblem where Fortuna on its top shakes down, as if in a storm, the crowns, scepters, miters, and jewels like ripe fruits. The leaves on Timon's tree of Fortune, however, are not her gifts but the tongues and hearts of the flatterers who have left him in the lurch.

Sun and moon furnish other images of multiple allusive-ness in which Fortuna looms large. Timon's career is appropriately likened to that of the sun, and both suggest the analogy to the wheel of Fortune. Even when Timon appeared to be in his glory, Apemantus warned, "Men shut their doors
against a setting sun" (1.2.141). After his fall, a creditor’s servant moralized that a prodigal’s course is “like the sun’s,” but not, like his, recoverable” (3.4.13–14)—the word “sun’s” is here suggestive of the sums lost by Timon. Timon takes up this latter idea in an image that identifies him with the moon, a frequent symbol of Fortuna’s inconstancy. To Alcibiades’ question of how he came to be changed from prosperity to adversity, he answers:

As the moon does, by wanting light to give.
But then renew I could not like the moon:
There were no suns to borrow of.

(4.3.68–70)

Timon thus hints sarcastically at the sums that are the suns of the world of Timon’s friends—sums-suns they keep to themselves. His identification with the moon here gives him a Fortuna persona; but paradoxically, he obtains through the quirk of the figure the constancy of a permanent eclipse not undergone by the changeable moon, whereas the reproach of inconstancy is attached to his former friends.

Timon’s last speech climaxes in the apocalyptic demand “Sun, hide thy beams” (5.1.222). Whatever associations may be evoked by the phrase, foremost is surely that of an extraordinarily powerful sunset as Timon’s course comes to a halt. The light that formerly illuminated Athens is extinguished, and with it an unrealized potential for generosity and friendship. As Cicero said in a sentence that became proverbial, “They seem to take the sun out of the universe when they deprive life of friendship.” When Timon spoke his final words on Shakespeare’s stage, it was late afternoon or evening, and the sun would indeed soon be setting on the theater open to the skies, the theater that symbolized the world. The shadows were descending over the wooden frame that in the medieval-Renaissance view suggested the idea of the universe as a structured and bordered organism. New philosophy had drawn this view into doubt, and prophets only somewhat less vehement than Timon had declared the world to be ripe for destruction. Like the new microcosm, Shakespeare’s Globe now looked like a less stable structure; it was after all a fragile thing easily subject to destruction; in fact, it burned down a few years after Timon was written. Shakespeare’s audience would have found the theater a fitting setting for the apocalyptic strains of the play.

Timon is a play of fortune; from the beginning to the end, Fortune is evoked with strong pictorial suggestiveness: the verbal patterns, the images, and the configuration of the stage bring to mind again and again the goddess, her settings, her attributes, and her influence. It is almost as if
Shakespeare had appropriated the motto of the Fortune Theater, then in competition with his Globe. But the Fortune had no monopoly on the idea of an association between Fortuna and the theater. "Fortune is like a theater" reads the motto of one of Cousin’s emblems, which depicts the outside of a theater. The kind of play performed in such a structure is emblematically depicted by Boissard and Batilly: it is a tragic pageant of the misery and wickedness of mankind under the aegis of the Fortuna seated on the stage. So, in a sense, is Timon. This orientation of the play is one of the main features that takes it beyond Renaissance drama in the direction of the baroque, which was to prevail on the Continent in the seventeenth century. The trend was from the Theatrum Mundi to the Theatrum Fortunae.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Timon is a didactic lusus fortunae or moral fable on the working of the goddess. Timon is not the poet’s allegory writ large: it does not instruct us about the ways of fortune; it illuminates one particular way. The moralists and emblematists of the Renaissance acted as if they knew the enigmatic goddess and her activities well; so do Shakespeare’s poet and the painter. But Timon, a drama of ideas without being a drame à thèse, shows that one cannot really know her. The play presents us with an imaginative experience of what men call Fortune; if we try to abstract it, we lose the experience for a simplistic generalization. We may, of course, say that Fortune is the grand illusion for which men strive and for which they exploit others. We may say that a world in which, in Thomas Nashe’s phrase, “gold is the controller of fortune” is a world of villainy and hard hearts. We may also say that he who, like Timon, tries to impersonate Fortuna is apt to be overtaken by her ironies and to come to a premature end. But this gets rather away from the tragedy of the philanthropist turned misanthrope, and it leaves unanswered the important questions with which we are vexed when we consider the action morally and philosophically, such questions as whether Fortuna represents an agent or force in a purposive design or a willful and random spirit and whether the human struggles, victories, and defeats for Fortune’s sake make sense. The play, as we see and read it, gives Fortune an imaginative reality; it leaves her meaning and purpose a mystery, a dark and rather threatening mystery.