According to the presently prevailing opinion, the text of *Timon* in the First Folio reflects a not-quite-finished manuscript of Shakespeare. This opinion may be stated in Charlton Hinman's characteristically judicious words:

*Timon* is consistent in mood and temper; the execution of all its parts seems firmly governed by a single general scheme; the same patterns of image and idea recur throughout; details which all critics have found characteristically if not uniquely Shakespearean are scattered through the very passages which are in other respects so far below the expected standards, and the flaws which mar these are by no means peculiar to them alone. The play is of a piece, and Shakespearean. Yet it undeniably contains hosts of such relatively small anomalies as . . . metrical irregularities, signs of false starts and of alterations planned but not made. The simplest and most satisfactory explanation of these is that the manuscript used by the Folio printer was, in the sense of the word already suggested, unfinished: substantially complete but not yet what could forthwith be made the basis of a promptbook and of stage presentation.¹

The theory that an unfinished manuscript of Shakespeare was the basis of the Folio text may be the right explanation, but we should be wary of letting it harden into orthodoxy. Unless accompanied by an insistence on the essential unity of the play such as Hinman's, this theory can be, and has been, outrightly harmful for critical appreciation. Implications have crept in that somehow *Timon* is not worthy of the critical atten-
tion given to other plays and does not warrant a faithful render-
ing on the stage. The evidence presented by the Folio text is complex and ambiguous, and some features do not seem to me to fit into the unfinished-play concept.

First, it should be said that the textual problems do not set the play apart from the others. Every type of problem occurs in some “good” text: they are merely more crowded and more acute here. Also, as Honigmann warns, the state of the Folio should not bias our attitude toward the play as a whole; a better text than the present one may have existed at one time, and it would be a great mistake to suppose that the text we now have proves Shakespeare’s dissatisfaction with his own achievement. Opportunity for a considerable post-Shakespearean corruption existed in the printing house since the text was set by the less-careful of the two main compositors of the Folio, the compositor B, probably together with some even less-expert help. If they were working from a badly legible, perhaps damaged, manuscript, they would have introduced numerous errors.²

It should also be said that the text is not as bad as it is sometimes made out to be. Editors and critics have a tendency to see symptoms of incompleteness in cases where in other dramas they look for dramatic exigencies or even discover felicities. Thus arose the notion that Timon, in Una Ellis-Fermor’s influential and damaging verdict, is “roughed out, worked over in part, and then abandoned; full of inconsist-
tencies in form and presentation, with fragments (some of them considerable); bearing the unmistakable stamp of [Shake-
speare’s] workmanship throughout.”³ It is salutary to be reminded of Coleridge’s contrasting opinion: “as originally written, he apprehended that it was one of the author’s most complete performances.”⁴

The theory of Timon as in some manner unfinished, which goes back to Ulrici and was developed by Wilhelm Wendlandt in 1888, has taken the place of the now-defunct theory, also of nineteenth-century origin, that Shakespeare was not the sole author.⁵ The older belief had died of its own even before the advent of the new bibliography.⁶ But many of the discrep-
ancies that the keen eyes of these detectives spotted here, there, and everywhere have been used by those who declare the play to be unfinished. We should also be warned that even apparently objective conclusions about the nature of the text may be influenced by subjective reactions to the play’s pervasive pessimism. One senses that E. K. Chambers’s feeling that this somber play was a product of Shakespeare’s temporary neurosis made him underestimate its literary qualities and declare that “the structure of Timon as a whole is inco-
Consistent with this view, his diagnosis of the text stressed its faultiness and all-too-readily made him conclude that the play was left unfinished.

I have argued that the structural deficiencies disappear when we consider *Timon* from the point of view of regular Renaissance tragedy; we must make allowance, of course, for the particular nature of the play. The lack of relatedness and of interaction among the characters, to which Ellis-Fermor drew attention, is appropriate for the emphasis on the theme of isolation, which, in agreement with other scholars, I have found characteristic. Even Ellis-Fermor had a hunch that this theme may have been partially determinative of Shakespeare's dramatic conception, but she rejected the idea because she felt that the theme was not developed. I think it is, threading itself as it does through the play from the beginning to the end. The flatness of characterization that Ellis-Fermor censured is the result of streamlining for dramatic emphasis. All that is needed is there. We do not really have to know who Timon's parents were, when they died, how he was brought up, and where his wealth came from. Such background details would merely clutter up the plot and detract from the most significant developments, the loss of Timon's wealth and the consequences of this loss. These and similar alleged deficiencies could have been removed only by Shakespeare's writing a play totally different in kind.

Other inconsistencies of plot structure and loose ends exist merely in the imagination of the critics; some are even subtleties of dramatization. I have already dealt with the delayed entrance of the poet and painter, which occurs almost two hundred lines after they are first sighted near Timon's cave; rather than being a defect, I see it as a plot device that underlines the acceleration of the visits to Timon and gives the arrivals an impromptu appearance. I have similarly argued that the apparent inconsistencies in Alcibiades' account of what he knows about Timon's misfortunes (4.3.56–57, 78, 93–96) come from the general's caginess. If it is claimed that the episode with the fool in 2.2 is not sufficiently integrated into the play, as much could be said about other appearances of fools in tragedy. It is true that Shakespeare generally found better use for them; but as Frank Kermode has noted, there is no more point to the fool's contribution in *Othello*—I would say that there is less.

Timon's speech in 4.3.377–95 offers an example of a passage that a modern editor, H. J. Oliver, considers indicative of the play's lack of finish but which is quite defensible on dramatic grounds. Here, after Timon and Apemantus have engaged in insults, Timon expresses his disgust with the false
world, speaks of his grave, and then erupts in a denunciation of gold. Timon, says Oliver, begins what “reads” like a soliloquy: “Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave . . .” (380). Oliver argues that Apemantus does not seem to be needed for this passage, so the reader is surprised to find him still present after the end of the speech; he therefore suggests to put an “exit” for Apemantus after line 377 and have him reenter about line 392. Thus he overhears Timon’s final words and interrupts to bring the news of the bandits’ approach.

The trouble with this argument is that it is a reader’s argument. On the stage, Timon’s forgetfulness of Apemantus’s presence makes an effective point. Timon’s disgust with the false world includes Apemantus; he will love nothing but “the mere necessities upon’t” (379); as he now realizes, the only necessity left for him is the grave. As Timon, self-absorbed, ponders the reduction of his wants and expresses his desire for death, his thoughts fix themselves on the deadly object of human desires: the “sweet king-killer” gold. The incident dramatizes the shrinking of Timon’s desires and interests; the point is emphasized by his forgetting the presence of the apostle of minimal needs, Apemantus, who has to pull Timon back to reality.

Something too much has been made of the roughness of the language. The unevenness in some of Apemantus’s speeches, as I have argued, is characteristic of his purposely rude and boorish manner of speaking. Similar reasons of dramatic propriety account for some metrical and syntactical irregularities in speeches by other characters, such as in Alcibiades’ defense against the senators. Ellis-Fermor and Oliver think the speech mere jottings, intelligible in its thought but not yet made into firm verse paragraphs. If we realize that it shows Alcibiades’ anger rising when he is rudely interrupted by a senator, we shall find the slight irregularity of the lines emphasize his clipped accent, irritated questions, and the stinging axioms he throws at the senators.

Alcibiades begins with a metrically regular first line—he tries to be reasonable—but then stops short, leaving the second line incomplete:

My lords, then, under favour, pardon me,
If I speak like a captain.

(3.5.41–42)

The pause is dramatically appropriate; it betrays Alcibiades’ growing anger, which vents itself in the series of rhetorical questions that follows. I see nothing really irregular in these until Alcibiades comes to the end:
To be in anger is impiety;  
But who is man that is not angry? 
Weigh but the crime with this.

(57-59)

The last two lines, a tetrameter and a trimeter, show how Alcibiades' breath is getting short as he Justifies his anger. One feels him choking, and the senator's ensuing comment is therefore suitably sarcastic: "You breathe in vain." Regularizing these lines would do only harm.

The case for incompleteness is thought to be clinched by an alleged confusion in the text about the value of the talent. It has long been noted; advocates of the theory of multiple authorship used it to support their claims. The main problem is that the numbers of talents mentioned early in the play, the five talents Timon gives to Ventidius and the three to the old Athenian, seem small compared with later figures and with what appears to be Timon's total indebtedness, which the senator calculates as 25,000 talents (2.1.3). Then there is the matter of apparent irregularities concerning the three-times fifty talents Timon sends his servants out to borrow from his friends. In 3.2., "so many talents" is thrice used instead of the fifty talents specified earlier, and this phrase has been thought a stopgap. It has been considered strange that the servant asks Lucius for "so many talents" (35) and that the latter answers: "He cannot want fifty five hundred talents" (37)—so the Folio has it, without the hyphen or dash that editors usually put between "fifty" and "five hundred." Oliver and others explain this puzzle as originating from Shakespeare's writing both 50 and 500 (probably in figures) as alternatives and forgetting to strike out one of them.

An intriguing explanation of this "talent muddle" has been devised by Terence Spencer, who argues that Shakespeare did not know the value of the talent when he started out, became confused about it, and therefore sought and obtained the correct information. He then began to revise the figures, and in some places got them right. According to this explanation, the three and the five talents of the first scene are the correct sums, and the later, larger figures are the sums he had used before. The phrase "so many talents," Spencer argues, represents the stage when Shakespeare became uncertain; he did not get around to supplanting it with the correct number.10

There are problems with this explanation. For one, the allegedly revised figures seem too high if the ancient talent is rated according to its comparable value in Shakespeare's time, that is, something between £120 and £180. At a time when a manual laborer could expect to earn no more than
£10 or £15 a year and a playwright got as little as £6 for a
finished play, a Jacobean audience would surely have found
it hard to swallow that this Athenian landowner endowed
his servant with about £450 as an advance gift for match­ing
his bride's father's "all"—whatever this may be. Another
objection to the idea that the early figures are revised comes
from their resembling those in Lucian and the Timon comedy,
Shakespeare's presumable sources. Both Bradbrook and Bul­
man have suggested that Shakespeare took over these sums
as well as the confusion from the comedy; Timon here re­
leases Eutrapelus from a five-talent bond, the exact sum of
Timon's loan to Ventidius. The author of the comedy, al­
though expert in Greek, did not seem to know the value of
the talent either or he would not have had his Laches bring
in sacks filled with talents.11 In fact, this author refers to
pounds in a way that makes it impossible to gauge their ex­
change value with talents. There is no proof that Shake­
speare ever learned or cared to learn the exact value of the talent.
It is symptomatic that in a later occurrence of "talents" in
Cymbeline, 1.6.80, the word stands merely for an indefinite, large
sum.

By focusing on the value of the talent, it appears to me, critics
have both understated the extent of the "money muddle" and
made it appear as if it had dramatic significance, which, I think, it
has not. The muddle is even greater than is generally realized
since Shakespeare referred not only to talents but also to
"crowns" and "pieces," and it is impossible to ascertain their
value. To Varro, Timon is said to owe 9,000 talents (2.1.2), but
also, elsewhere, 3,000 crowns (3.4.29), and the latter sum cannot
be reconciled with the former if the crown is given its English
value; the confusion is increased when one realizes that French
and Flemish crowns of differing values were also circulating in
Shakespeare's England. And a "piece" could be any kind of coin.
We do well to look at these and other figures not from the point of
view of a financial expert but from that of Shakespeare's
audience, who did not know the value of the talent any more than
he; for that matter, a modern audience is as blissfully ignorant
about it. The reviewer of a recent performance who asked that
the exact value of the talent be stated in the program evidently
did not suspect that the sums were inconsistent. I think that they
do have a sufficient surface plausibility and dramatic consistency
provided one does not know the value of the talent and assumes
it to be in some manner larger, but not hugely so, than the pound
in Shakespeare's time.

Shakespeare seems to have begun with the figures of the
talents in Lucian and the Timon comedy in mind without
knowing exactly what they stood for in terms of pounds. He
could not have thought about their value as anywhere
near their actual rate in ancient Greece since he hardly wanted Timon's loan to Ventidius and endowment of his servant to represent exorbitant sums but rather show his everyday extravagance that by this time has built into a huge deficit. Let us assume, for argument's sake, that Shakespeare operated with the idea that a talent was about five pounds. Ventidius's indebtedness would then be about £25, and Timon's gift to the servant £15, plus the promise of another and larger gift in the future. Certainly, these monetary expenses, together with the remunerations for the poet's and the painter's works, the purchase of a pearl, the rich entertainment of the banquet and the gifts distributed there, constitute enough of a day's effort toward financial ruin. If this ratio of one to five for talent and pound or a similar one is assumed, all other figures come nearer to being reasonable. Timon's total indebtedness as estimated by the senator would be £125,000, a huge but not unbelievable sum in Shakespeare's time. To list only a few spectacular examples of financial losses of Elizabethan-Jacobean aristocrats, as chronicled by Stone: the earl of Oxford, between 1575 and 1586, sold all his property for over £70,000 and had nothing to show for it in the end; the earl of Northumberland incurred a debt of £15,000 in eighteen months between 1585 and 1586; and the earl of Dorset ran through a marriage portion of £17,000 and through £80,000 from the sale of land in the ten years from 1614 to 1623.12

As to the sums Timon tries to borrow from his friends, he does what was not and still is not unusual in such circumstances. He does not acknowledge his total indebtedness, and he tries to tap a number of sources for smaller amounts. The three-times fifty talents (£750 in our hypothetical model) are mere pebbles to throw at a dike about to burst; but we must add to these the 1,000 talents (or £5,000) Timon tries to borrow from the senators and the 1,000 "pieces" (whatever these are) he has sought from the lords (3.6.21–26). The total effort amounts at least to an attempt at stopping the rising flood by sandbags, and he might have succeeded temporarily had he obtained these sums. By the time we hear one creditor's servant demand 3,000 and another 5,000 crowns (3.4.29–30), we realize that the dike has burst; I do not think that is is important that we learn the exact amount of these demands. What with the addition of new creditors' names and new and larger figures, we get the feeling that Timon's indebtedness must be greater than the senator calculated earlier and we thought. The three occurrences of the phrase "so many talents" and the "fifty five hundred" do not prove that Shakespeare was becoming uncertain about
the value of the talent and penned them in embarrassment. "So many talents" is first used by the stranger as the sum Timon has sought to borrow from Lucullus (3.2.11); the stranger is apparently ignorant of the exact sum, but the audience, of course, knows it to be fifty talents. Lucius, not knowing the exact amount, would naturally repeat the phrase: "I should ne'er have denied his occasion so many talents" (23). Thus he blithely implies his unlimited generosity. When the servant then also asks for "so many talents," as Steevens suggested, he may be showing Lucius a note with the figure on it—there is humor in his unconsciously using the phrase by which Lucius has protested his generosity. But it is also possible that the compositor slipped and used the words he had twice before set to precede "talents" instead of the "fifty" that may have been in Shakespeare's manuscript. Lucius's answer, of course, must indicate that he knows the specific sum asked of him, and it does indeed show this if a pause is put between fifty" and "five hundred": "He cannot want fifty—five hundred talents" (37). As Deighton explained in the Old Arden Edition, Lucius means that no sum, however large, "fifty or even five hundred talents," can add significantly to Timon's already large wealth—the nuance of Lucius's thinking that five hundred talents would save Timon is ironic. The servant's answer keeps strictly to the request for fifty: "But in the meantime he wants less, my lord" (38).

It is certainly hazardous to conclude from this "talent muddle" that Shakespeare was engaged in a revision of the figures that he failed to complete because he abandoned the play. The figures as they stand add to the impression of Timon's violation of number, weight, and measure, and they bear out the merciless exploitation he is subjected to even if they do not allow us to judge the extent of his debt accurately. They would not be satisfactory in a currency exchange, but provided the audience is ignorant about the exact value of the talent, they are effective enough in the theater where complicated financial calculations are impossible.

Nor does the often-invoked duplication of Timon's epitaph in 5.4.70–73 prove that Shakespeare abandoned the play before fully revising it. In fact, the repetition could be used to argue the opposite. The customary explanation is that Shakespeare copied down both epitaphs as Plutarch quoted them, the one attributed to Timon himself and the other to the poet Callimachus, even though they contradict each other, and that he failed to expunge one of them later. But in similar scenes of duplication with variation, such as Love's Labor's Lost, 4.3.280–362, and Julius Caesar, 4.2.143–58, 166,
181–95, textual scholars have usually thought that the explanation lies in a revision of the original lines by Shakespeare; somehow, both the first version and the revision remained in the manuscript and were printed. This could also have been the case with the epitaphs. The epitaph of Callimachus may have seemed to Shakespeare to express better what Alcibiades calls Timon's “latter spirits” and he may have thought that evoking Timon's name at the end, as it does, was a good idea. Perhaps Shakespeare wrote Timon's own epitaph first, and then during a revision remembered the more fitting lines of Callimachus; he turned once more to Plutarch in order to paraphrase them, and somehow both epitaphs got into the printed text.

Ellis-Fermor and others seem to me at least partially right about the defectiveness of the fifth act. Even as the act stands, it brings the play to a logical conclusion; the large design, at least, is complete. But there is a certain unevenness and jumpiness in the movement; something appears to be left out. I have already noted that I incline to think that cuts were made for purposes of performance. If so, the possibility also exists that one of the two versions of the epitaph represents a revision for theatrical reasons by Shakespeare or somebody else.

It is unfortunate that the textual problems have generally been discussed with the underlying conviction that the play was never performed in the theater. This questionable thesis sometimes has been thought to be supported by the play's irregular placement in the Folio. I have argued that this placement does not indicate that the editors were in doubt as to whether Timon was a tragedy; similar reasons militate against the assumption that they considered it not to belong to the regular repertoire. When they placed Timon between Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar in the gap left by the temporary withdrawal of Troilus and Cressida, it was surely not because they needed a play—almost any kind of play, even a mere fragment—to save themselves the embarrassment of a gap in the pagination (and they did not save themselves this embarrassment altogether). Timon must have been from the beginning intended for some place in the Folio; there is no reason to think that the editors disbelieved that they had one of “the true and original copies” of Shakespeare's plays here, the plays they were presenting to the public “perfect of their limbs.” They may have made the mental reservation, of course, that these copies were as true and original and as perfect of their limbs as they could obtain them.

The absence of any record of performance of Timon in Jacobean times should not be taken to indicate that the play was never performed. No records exist that Antony and Cleo-
patra and Coriolanus were performed, but who would doubt that they were? It is indeed possible that the lack of a performance record for all three of the last tragedies points to their being less popular than the preceding ones, but it is extremely unlikely that any one of the three was withheld from the stage. Until the fantasy arose that Timon is Shakespeare's spiritual autobiography, editors and critics took for granted that the play was performed in Shakespeare's time, and they attributed the corruptions to the actors; Coleridge, among others, did so. In 1905, Deighton still opined that there was "some player, to whom the editors, failing to find portions known once to have existed, had entrusted the task of putting together the incomplete material." The new bibliography, with its sharp distinctions between good and bad quartos as well as foul papers and promptbooks, has made such arguments unfashionable. But for Timon, at least, these distinctions may set up too rigid a frame to explain all peculiarities of the text. If indeed the manuscript was very defective and recollections of some stage version existed, would it not have been likely for the editors to seek reconstruction of missing or deficient parts through assembling a text in whatever way feasible, the kind of procedure often assumed to be behind the "bad quartos"? In this case, the text would reflect Shakespeare's "foul papers" as well as a stage version, perhaps one considerably altered from Shakespeare's original manuscript.

We should therefore consider three possibilities for the true textual deficiencies: one stemming from Shakespeare's failure to polish his autograph, the second deriving from compositors' errors, and the third owing to attempts to reconstruct defective or missing passages through the actors' memories or even through one or the other of their parts that had been preserved.

In practice, it is not easy to assess the probabilities even in apparently simple cases. The mislineations, the printing of verse as prose and prose as verse could have come about by the compositors' working from a badly legible manuscript; but memorial reconstruction could also have occasioned some of these. A compositor may have been responsible for the mistake of "Flavius" instead of Flaminius in 2.2.189; the manuscript perhaps had merely "Fla". But Shakespeare was not beyond slipping in such minor matters. Likewise either the compositors or Shakespeare himself may have spelled some names inconsistently: Apemantus (Apermantus), Ventidius (Ventigius, Ventiddius, Ventidgius), Phrynia (Phrincia), and Timandra (Timandylo). But renaming by the actors is also a possibility.

Lines that are excessive or defective metrically and pas-
sages that are neither quite verse nor prose are generally explained as due to Shakespeare's failure to finish or polish the play. I find this not always plausible. For instance, I am unable to accept this explanation for the strange condition of the steward's elegy on his master's fall (4.2.30-51)—an example used by both Chambers and Oliver. Chambers says that the speech impresses him as "not so much un-Shakespearean as incompletely Shakespearean." But very little would have been required to "finish" it, and I wonder therefore why Shakespeare should not have done so at the first try. Consider the lines:

Who would not wish to be from wealth exempt,  
Since riches point to misery and contempt?  
Who would be so mock'd with glory, or to live  
But in a dream of friendship,  
To have his pomp and all what state compounds  
But only painted like his varnish'd friends?

(4.2.31-36)

Obviously, the first and the last two lines are complete and "finished." The third line could be made into a regular and more speakable line with a stroke of the pen, and the fourth line requires only a small addition to make it metrically and syntactically regular. For example, (with apologies to Shakespeare):

Who would so mock'd with glory be to live  
But in a dream of friendship? Who would wish  
To have his pomp and all what state compounds  
But only painted like his varnish'd friends?

"Ein Federstrich," Tschischwitz said long ago, was all that was needed in most cases of deficiencies of the Timon text. I find it hard to believe that Shakespeare, whose reputation was to have never blotted a line, would not have supplied these touches immediately. More plausible than the text's here representing an unfinished draft appears to me the intrusion of some kind of post-Shakespearean corruption; but I find myself unable to decide between the alternatives. It is certainly possible that the manuscript was so illegible through some damage that the compositor left out a few words and made some errors. But it seems to me also possible that the speech was reconstructed with the help of an actor's faulty memory. The kind of garbled speeches one finds in Timon occur in the "bad quartos," which may have been assembled texts, granted that even the best of these is inferior to the Timon text.

The feature of the Timon text that makes me most incline toward believing in some influence from a stage version are the stage directions. They have, of course, generally been
taken to prove the derivation of the text from Shakespeare’s “foul papers.” Yet critics also have often noted that the directions are unusually detailed and explicitly realized. Thomas M. Parrott, who still thought that Shakespeare was not the sole author of *Timon*, said: “One of the characteristics of the Folio text is the fullness and specific character of the stage directions. This would seem to me to indicate that the manuscript had been carefully annotated for performance.”

Even Chambers, as much as he felt that the play was textually and structurally unfinished, noted the special theatricality of these directions: “There are some elaborate stage directions resembling those of *Coriolanus.* Occasionally . . . a touch seems superfluous for theatrical purposes, but in the main there is nothing which an author, wishing to give careful directions for the ordering of his groups, might not write.” We shall in what follows ask the unorthodox question whether there is anything in the stage directions that an actor or some other person intimately acquainted with the play on the stage could not have observed.

In several examples, both “foul papers” and performance observation offer explanations. One instance is the listing of a “ghost character,” the mercer, in the opening stage direction. It is generally thought that Shakespeare intended the mercer to appear in the first scene but changed his mind and forgot to expunge him from the direction. It is at least possible that in a stage version a mercer did appear. Even in a mute role, his livery would make him an ironic exemplar of feeders on Timon’s extravagance. The occasional indefiniteness and permissiveness of the directions need not be attributed to their derivation from Shakespeare’s “foul papers.” Some indefiniteness is to be expected in a play that required a large number of actors, as large a number as the varying resources of the theater permitted. For instance, the direction “Enter Alcibiades with the rest” (1.1.246) may sound indefinite, but it is clear that there should be twenty attendants (240), and the direction presumably indicates that supernumeraries of a number as close to twenty as possible were to appear or did appear. Similarly, such apparently “permissive” phrases as “certain senators” (1.1.39) and “diverse friends” (3.6.1) may merely indicate that the number depended on availability. For that matter, they could have come from an observer who did not remember the exact number.

Besides indefiniteness and permissiveness, the feature most thought of as characteristic of stage directions in “foul papers” is their descriptiveness. The prompter, it is argued, would have pruned the directions, made them tidier and
directly relevant to the performance. Be it said that there is no general sloppiness in the stage directions of Timon. The movement on the stage, the visual drama, is rendered in them with an evident knowledge of stage conditions. The entrances of the characters are marked in anticipatory technique (as Chambers noted), that is, the entrances are so placed that the characters have sufficient time to arrive at the points of interaction. (Cf. 1.1.176, 239; 1.2.111, 118; 5.1.29.) We do not know, in fact, how much promptbook stage directions differed from authorial ones, and we may have given prompters too much credit for alterations. According to researches in the sixteen extant Elizabethan-Jacobean-Caroline playbooks by William B. Long, the inquiry into this matter has suffered from two major misapprehensions: first, that the actors needed much assistance from both playwrights and prompters; and second, that the playbooks of an earlier period must be marked in accordance with our contemporary expectations. Much less is changed in the playbooks than we would assume.19

For our present purposes, Long’s most significant observation is that on authorial advisory directions, that is, directions in which an author specifically instructs an actor what to do or how to do it. Long finds them very sparingly used by professional playwrights. Yet directions of this kind are frequent in the Timon text. The question therefore arises as to whether they are really all Shakespeare’s. To take an example of one of these directions, that for the first banquet:

Hautboys playing loud music. A great banquet serv’d in; and then enter Lord Timon, the states, the Athenian lords: Ventidius with Timon redeemed from prison. Then comes, dropping after all, Apemantus, discontentedly like himself. (1.2.1)20

I do not find convincing Oliver’s argument that Shakespeare had to remind himself that Timon redeemed Ventidius from prison. Nor do I believe that the characterization of Apemantus is “at best an indication of what an author would like to see on the stage”; it sounds so much more like what somebody saw on the stage and later remembered. Is it not more plausible that a person who observed the actor of Apemantus would describe him as entering “like himself” than that the author of the play did? It may be significant that almost all the descriptive stage directions are from scenes in which Timon appears. The actor of this role, the text of which is most nearly perfect, one may surmise, had an influence on them.21

To add other visually or auditively impressive directions:
Trumpets sound. Enter lord Timon, addressing himself courteously to every suitor. (1.1.97)
Flaminius waiting to speak with a Lord from his Master. Enter a Servant to him. (3.1.1)
Enter Alcibiades, with drum and fife, in warlike manner; and Phrynia and Timandra. (4.3.49)

To these stage directions may be added those that relate a character to the scenery, the kind of scenery created by simple emblematic stage props.

Enter Timon in the Woods. (4.3.1)
Enter Timon from his Cave. (5.1.30)
Enter Timon out of his Cave. (5.1.139)
Enter a soldier in the Woods seeking Timon. (5.3.1)

These directions may have come from Shakespeare’s visualizing imagination; but they also could have been derived from an actor’s or observer’s memory of the play.

Even more impressively worked out than the visual drama in the directions is the musical one: music is a specific and integral part from the beginning to the end. Dramatic points are repeatedly made through music: several trumpets, for instance, announce the first entrance of Timon, only one that of Alcibiades. Everywhere the exact musical instruments are prescribed: the lutes and oboes of the masque, the drum and fife of Alcibiades’ march across the stage, the trumpets when he demands the city’s surrender, and the drums that strike as he exits in the end. John Long, accepting the prevailing opinion of the unfinished state of the play, surmises that these directions indicate that Shakespeare generally composed his plays with the appropriate orchestration from the beginning. I find it hard to believe that he would not have left some of these details for later elaboration, perhaps after a talk with the musicians. The minimal conclusion to be drawn from the musical directions seems to me that the play has a high degree of structural finish. They have the ring of having been tested or witnessed on the stage. The directions for the masque, in particular, give me a distinct impression that whoever phrased them heard the music not merely in his mind:

Second tucket. Enter the maskers of the Amazons, with lutes in their hands, dancing and playing. (1.2.111)

The lords rise from table, with much adoring of Timon, and to show their loves, each singles out an Amazon, and all dance, men with women, a lofty strain or two of the hautboys, and cease. (142)

If indeed the “Amazonian Masque” in a British Museum
manuscript of court music is the original score for the Timon masque, as Bradbrook thinks, we lack nothing for reconstructing the masque. We would then also have evidence that the play was performed in Shakespeare's time. In any case, the burden of proof is on those who say it was not.

It has not been my purpose to advance a new theory of the derivation of the text but rather to ask for an open-minded reexamination of the possibilities. Timon presents a special case among the Folio texts since it is a notch below the others. Perhaps we shall never know for certain why this is so. Even in the case of plays where a good and a bad text exist, scholars often disagree about the reasons for the latter's deficiency; the difficulties multiply in Timon, where there is only a bad text. If the possibility of an influence on the text by a staged version of the play has merit, as I believe it does, we should seriously consider it. I have sought to go a step in this direction.

When the suggestion of an influence by the actors on Timon (or for that matter, on other plays) has been made in the past, this influence has generally been thought as corrupting. Our brief inquiry intimates that this is not the only way to look at it. The performance features of the text, particularly the stage directions, allow us to consider it as a theatrical document. And at least one modern director appears to believe that the Folio text has a special value for producing the play: she tracked down the "directional hints and signals" of the text for a performance. At any rate, we should be careful not to overstate the deficiencies of the text. It certainly does not vitiate a detailed and organic criticism; it does not lack any significant details, nor is it replete with loose ends. Rather, it presents a fully planned play, executed with care in all important aspects.