

Date and Sources

The date and sources of *Timon* concern us in this study because of their bearing on the play's pessimism. We shall ask the following two related questions: when was Shakespeare likely to have written this somber tragedy; and, what earlier or contemporary works inspired or helped him in conceiving it? Arguments by previous scholars will be discussed from the perspective suggested by these questions.

To seek to place *Timon* into Shakespeare's life story, as some early critics attempted, can be nothing but speculation; we shall therefore use literary criteria. We must concede at the outset that no argument that can be used furnishes a definite proof by itself; several such arguments together, therefore, also fail to constitute proof. For tying *Timon* to a specific date, we have only weak links and can therefore forge only a fragile chain. Such as the evidence is, it makes me incline to 1607 as the date of the composition of the play and its first performance; but I would not be surprised if in truth it were somewhat earlier or later. Style and versification are of Shakespeare's later or last tragic period; the affinities with *Lear* (which confidently can be dated between 1604 and 1605) and with *Coriolanus* (which is tentatively put between 1607 and 1608) are evident. Like most recent critics, I have seen *Timon* as closer to *Coriolanus* than to *Lear*.¹ *Timon* and *Coriolanus* are placed in similar situations: prominent citi-

zens, they are alienated from their societies because of banishment and turn against their native states. Both conceive of themselves as victims of fortune and ingratitude. (See *Cor.* 4.4.12–26.) In addition, Alcibiades has some affinities to both Coriolanus and Aufidius: a professional soldier turned rebel, he leads an army against his native city like Coriolanus; yet, like Aufidius, he is a pragmatist who resists being ensnared by tragedy. With regard to socioeconomic issues, however, *Timon* may be said to be closer to *Lear* since both castigate the luxury and extravagance of the rich more explicitly than *Coriolanus*.² I therefore tend to put *Timon* after *Lear* and before *Coriolanus*. This sequence, I shall argue later, is also made credible by the presumptive relationship of *Lear* and *Timon* to one of the latter play's sources, the comedy often called the Old *Timon*.

This placement is supported by what seems the most logical relative chronology of Shakespeare's later classical plays. A reawakened fascination with Plutarch, whose *Lives* he had not used since *Julius Caesar* in 1599, may have led Shakespeare to "The Life of Marcus Antonius" and made him write his *Antony and Cleopatra*. Plutarch's story of Timon in this Life in turn may have stirred him to write his tragedy of the misanthrope. His search for materials would then have led him to Plutarch's "Life of Alcibiades" since the general is mentioned in the Timon biography. Alcibiades would have drawn Shakespeare's attention to Coriolanus because Plutarch parallels the careers of the two soldiers banished by their native cities. If *Antony and Cleopatra* was written between 1606 and 1608, and *Coriolanus* between 1607 and 1608, as is usually assumed, *Timon* could then be dated between late 1606 and early 1608. It must be fully admitted that the dates of the other plays are also tentative and that Shakespeare could have followed a different sequence, less logical though it is; he could have dramatized the Timon story before that of Antony, from which it came, or after that of Coriolanus in a delayed reaction.

The plausibility of a date not earlier than late 1606 is increased by the strong probability that Shakespeare was inspired for Timon's mock praises of gold by the dythirambic encomia of Volpone and Mosca in Jonson's *Volpone*. If there is a dependence of one play on the other in these speeches, I have argued that it is Shakespeare's on Jonson's.³ Jonson's speeches are in a simple eulogistic pattern that points up the naive greed of his characters, whereas Shakespeare's more subtly heighten the mock praise into an accusation of the world's subservience to gold by accentuating the odious metamorphoses it brings about. *Volpone* was first printed in

1607, but as the title leaf and the colophon of the second quarto of 1616 indicate, it was performed by "the King's Majesty's Servants" in 1605. The uncertainty as to what style of calendar is used makes it possible that 1605 may also cover the earlier part of 1606, and some contemporary events that may be alluded to in the play have induced scholars to prefer the later date.⁴ Although Shakespeare is not listed in the colophon among the "principal actors" who performed in *Volpone*, he surely saw the play of his competitor when performed by his own company. He may have put this experience to good use in *Timon* soon after that.

Considerations based on the economic and social conditions of England between 1606 and 1608 support a dating of the play in these years. These were generally hard years for the economy. The harvests were poor and prices, which had been rising almost continuously, were particularly high. Borrowing was widespread, but money was scarce. A remark like that of Shakespeare's Lucullus that "this is no time to lend money" (3.1.41-42) would have had a familiar ring to Shakespeare's audience. The conditions that brought about loss of estates would also have been quite topical for Shakespeare and his audience. Shakespeare's own property in and around Stratford was threatened by the enclosure movement, and the 1607 revolt of the "diggers," who squatted on some of the enclosed land in his native Warwickshire, was a reaction to the economic pressures.

There is one possible topical reference in the play that, if accepted, goes far toward proving a date of 1606 or 1607. Maxwell, among the modern editors, notes it but rejects it because of its conflict with his general belief in the precedence of *Timon* to *Lear*. Says the servant who castigates the hypocrisy and villainy of Sempronius:

How fairly this lord strives to appear foul! Takes virtuous copies to be wicked, like those that under hot ardent zeal would set whole realms on fire: of such a nature is his politic love. (3.3.33-36)

Coleridge suspected here an "addition of the players" during the time of Charles I because he thought the passage was "introduced so *volenter volenter*, by the head and shoulder."⁵ There is no need to assume that Shakespeare did not write these lines; they fit into the theme of the play since they anticipate Timon's later apocalyptic strains. Yet they are still extraneous enough to the immediate context to suspect a topical allusion. In this respect, the note by Maxwell is intriguing: "Per[haps] he [i.e., Shakespeare] was thinking specifically of the Jesuits (rather than, as Warb. [Warburton]

thought, the Puritans), whom it was customary a little later to describe as incendiaries."⁶ This supposition gains likelihood because of Shakespeare's famous stab at Jesuitical equivocation in *Macbeth* in the "porter-at-hellgate" speech (2.3.8–11), which refers to Father Garnet's trial in the spring of 1606 for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. The *Timon* passage seems to me to echo the kind of analogies drawn between the plot and the ultimate conflagration of the world at the Last Judgment. King James, in fact, had drawn this analogy, gently, in his speech to the Parliament, arguing that the threatened and avoided explosion was merely a warning and a call for purgation.⁷ The Gunpowder Plot made references to setting realms on fire under the pretext of religion particularly topical during the year or two following it, that is, 1606 or 1607. No event ever excited in England so much horror about human degradation. It furnished ammunition for the pessimists.

We shall now proceed to the question of what literary sources induced Shakespeare to shape *Timon* into a pessimistic tragedy. There is one clear negative answer: if the inquiry is restricted to the sources as narrowly defined—the story of Timon in Plutarch's "The Life of Marcus Antonius" and Lucian's dialogue "Timon the Misanthrope"—the answer must be that they could have had little part in suggesting to Shakespeare a tragic plot of any kind. Nor was the inducement greater if he also knew, as seems likely to me, the old *Timon*, an anonymous manuscript comedy of uncertain date. None of these three versions takes Timon seriously; none seeks to generate feelings for him deeper than curiosity, amusement, or contempt. Furthermore, none of the three contains any notable criticism of the society that caused Timon to become a misanthrope. Shakespeare, as much as he drew plot details from Plutarch and Lucian or the Lucianic tradition, including probably the *Timon* comedy, owed very little to them for the character of his hero and even less for the tragic vision of his play.

A solution to this dilemma is proposed by Peter Pauls in "Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*: An examination of the Misanthrope Tradition and Shakespeare's Handling of the Sources" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1969).⁸ Pauls pays greater attention than do other scholars to two sources of the *Timon* story that are usually considered secondary or wafted aside as mere analogues, Pierre Boaistuau's *Le Théâtre du monde* (1558), translated into English by John Alday under the title of *Theatrum mundi, The Theater or Rule of the World* (1566, rpt. 1574, 1581), and particularly Richard Barckley's *A Discourse of the Felicity of Man* (1598, rpt. 1603, 1631). Pauls considers these two works not merely for the

short and largely traditional accounts of Timon's life they contain but also for their general contents. He argues that when direct sources prove inadequate as they do for this play, we must look for "indirect" ones, for the kind of material Geoffrey Bullough classifies as "subsidiary." Pauls locates these in moral traditions of flattery, friendship, ingratitude, anger, and mutability. I would add to these the traditions of the *contemptus mundi*, of *vanitas*, of the decay of the world, and manifestations of the economic crisis as well as notions on art, nature, and fortune. Of course, these traditions pertain largely to the intellectual background and the socio-cultural context of the play; but I think Pauls is right in treating such materials as subsidiary sources. Shakespeare appears to have made up for the scarcity of facts and ideas usable for shaping the Timon story into a tragedy by casting widely beyond the direct sources that gave him most of the plot situations. I shall therefore extend my discussion of sources beyond the usual three; but I shall restrict it to works that make at least a passing reference to Timon, works that provided a counterweight to the comic-satirical tradition. Anything available to Shakespeare in which Timon's misanthropy engenders sympathy or is taken as an at least partially justifiable reaction to the world's wickedness is a potential source of *Timon* and should be examined as such.

We shall look at the sources generally thought to be immediate, that is, those most significant for plot details, first. The clearest case here is the short Timon biography in Plutarch's "The Life of Marcus Antonius." That Shakespeare used it proceeds from his transcribing two epitaphs of Timon, one that Plutarch ascribes to Timon himself and the other that he assigns to the Poet Callimachus (5.4.70-73). Plutarch's account is the primary warrant for the linkage between Timon and Alcibiades and for Timon's association with Apemantus. Shakespeare accentuated two features of Plutarch's story to make them significant for the pessimistic implications of his play. The first of these is Plutarch's suggestion that Timon suffered from the ingratitude of his friends. (This was Plutarch's reason for including the tale since this ingratitude paralleled that of Antony's friends after his defeat.) The second touch lies in the Plutarchian Timon's ominously forecasting here and in "The Life of Alcibiades" that Alcibiades would bring about the ruin of Athens. Shakespeare's Timon echoes this sentiment (4.3.105-30), which may also have been a general incentive for Shakespeare's making Timon call on soldiers and war as allies in the destruction of mankind. But the character of Plutarch's Timon bears no resemblance to Shakespeare's. He is a jester and

vituperator, not a great spender and wild hater, and he does not leave Athens. Apemantus is said to have imitated his manners rather than becoming, as in Shakespeare, a kind of model for the later Timon. Altogether, Plutarch's Timon is hardly more than a nuisance, the proverbial "critic Timon" (*Love's Labor's Lost*, 4.3.168) as Shakespeare seems to have conceived him in his earlier years.

Honigmann suggests that Shakespeare drew suggestions not only from Plutarch's biography of Timon but also from "The Life of Marcus Antonius" in general as well as from "The Life of Alcibiades" and its companion biography "The Life of Coriolanus."⁹ But Shakespeare could not have found much material for a tragic shaping of the Timon story in any of these. From "The Life of Alcibiades," he could have gained an impression of national decay in Athens; but this was also a familiar subject of the Renaissance *Diogeniana*, where it was presented as a warning for London and England, and it is this tradition that must have prompted Shakespeare to create a kind of Jacobean Athens for his tragedy. The complicated political and military events told by Plutarch could have provided him with a plot for a tragedy of Alcibiades but were of little use for his tragedy of the misanthrope. However, I have argued in chapter four that although Shakespeare disregarded the external details of the Alcibiades biography, he gave a definite Plutarchian coloring to the general's character. Honigmann draws attention to the fact that both Shakespeare's Alcibiades and Plutarch's Coriolanus are professional soldiers; but I see no similarity in the characters of the two. Shakespeare did not model Alcibiades' reaction to banishment on that of Coriolanus; his Alcibiades does not lose control over himself. Shakespeare possibly may have conceived the idea of contrasting the temperament of Alcibiades with that of Timon from reading Plutarch's comparison of Alcibiades' and Coriolanus's anger; if so, he thought of Timon, not of Alcibiades, as Coriolanus-like.¹⁰ The Shakespearean Alcibiades, like the Plutarchian, subordinates anger to his purpose and reneges when the Athenians repent.

The second most important source for the main plot, Lucian's dialogue "Timon the Misanthrope," presents a peculiar problem: it is impossible to say how Shakespeare knew it. It was not available in English, although Latin, French, and Italian translations existed. He could possibly have had it in Latin in grammar school, as T. W. Baldwin suggests, and remembered enough of the plot when he came to write the play; this would explain the lack of convincing verbal parallels.¹¹ He could also have read it in Italian or French, although the claims for this possibility are not persuasive. Neither is R. W. Bond's

argument that Shakespeare knew and used Boiardo's *Il Timone*; as Bond himself admits, the non-Lucianic elements of the Italian comedy do not appear in Shakespeare's play.¹²

The whole question of Lucian's influence on Shakespeare is bedeviled by the existence of the old *Timon* comedy, which is even more difficult to date than Shakespeare's play—dates from before 1600 to 1611 have been suggested. If this *Timon* preceded Shakespeare's and he knew it, he could have derived most, perhaps all, of his Lucianic material from it. If, however, Shakespeare did not know the play because it postdated his or was not accessible to him for some other reason, Lucian looms much larger as a source. It is possible to derive most of the material that Shakespeare could have acquired from the comedy also from Lucian, and attribute the rest to accident or other influences, as does Honigmann. It is also possible to suppose with J. C. Maxwell, M. C. Bradbrook, and others that the comedy was written before Shakespeare's play and that he drew on it.¹³ It is even possible to suppose, as does G. A. Bonnard, that there was a common source, now lost, on which both Shakespeare and the author of the comedy drew, although this theory is too speculative to hold much attraction.¹⁴

The evidence, such as it is, points to some connection between the comedy and Shakespeare's *Timon* and to Shakespeare as the borrower. The conviction, dominant in earlier criticism, that the comedy depended on Shakespeare's play rested on nothing better than the feeling that Shakespeare could not have been inspired by what was then considered a very silly product; this feeling was leagued with the belief that he had no chance of seeing the play since it was attributed to one of the two universities. Recently, however, M. C. Bradbrook and James Bulman have associated the comedy with the Inns of Court; if this is true, the chances of Shakespeare's having seen it increase because of his connection with the Inns, where some of his plays were performed.¹⁵ However, Bradbrook's belief that the comedy followed the tragedy and satirized, parodied, and burlesqued it seems to me quite untenable. A drama that satirizes another drama must have allusions to it which an audience that sees the second play after the first can easily grasp, and none of Bradbrook's instances are of this sort. There are many easily understandable barbs in the comedy: against Lucianic satire, Homeric heroism, inflated rhetoric, mythological lore, quiddical logic, lying travelers' tales, Jonsonian comedy, stock motifs of drama, and what not. But there are no recognizable barbs against Shakespeare's *Timon*. It will not do to create them and to claim that the comedy mocks the "extensive Jove imagery" of Shakespeare's play. I discern no such imagery, the one

reference to the god being casual (4.3.110); if Shakespeare's Timon impersonates a classical deity, it is Fortuna rather than Jove. The mockery of the comedy is clearly directed against the Jove of Lucian's dialogue. Surely if the comedy were a satire of Shakespeare's *Timon*, one could expect some burlesquing of the Plutarchian materials, some reference, at least, to Apemantus and Alcibiades, and there are none. Bulman, who opposes Bradbrook, strengthens the presumptive evidence for the precedence of the comedy to the tragedy by developing arguments that the comedy burlesques Jonson's "comical satires," arguments that had been adumbrated by Hart and by Herford, Percy, and Simpson in their editions of Jonson's plays. The last of these satires, *Poetaster*, was produced in 1601, and Bulman opines that the comedy, in order to retain its topicality, must have been performed soon thereafter.

I am not really persuaded that it must have followed very soon. It is true that satirizing Jonson's satires would have been *démodé* by 1611, the date Bradbrook gives to the comedy. (She puts Shakespeare's *Timon* at 1609.) Contrary to Bulman, I think that spoofing at Jonson's satires may have been appropriate a considerable time after their performance; they must have remained popular reading at the Inns. And even if one accepts Bulman's date of "soon after 1601" for the comedy, his corollary does not follow that Shakespeare's play must have been written soon after the comedy. There is no telling how long Shakespeare may have remembered some details from the Old Timon if he saw it performed or read it in manuscript.

Although I am unconvinced by G. A. Bonnard's speculation that Shakespeare and the anonymous author had a common source, I see merit in one of Bonnard's other claims, namely, that the comedy echoes *Lear*. I believe that he is right when he reads Gelasimus's urging Timon to jump from a rock as a spoof at the Edgar-Gloucester episode at Dover Cliff and when he points out that the servant's disguise as a soldier in the comedy resembles Kent's in serving his old master. To Bonnard's parallel may be added some others noted by Robert Goldsmith, notably the resemblance of cursing speeches by the comic Timon to Lear's raging on the heath.¹⁶ Goldsmith, it should be said, believes that Shakespeare was the borrower (and not only for *Lear* but also for *Timon*); yet his parallels between the comedy and *Lear* could also be claimed for the opposite and, to me, more plausible relationship. In particular, the comic Timon's "All things are made of nothing" (5.2) sounds like the proper academic answer to Lear's "Nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.90), reminding the audience, as the phrase does, that God made the world of nothing. Shake-

spere's *Timon's* "And nothing brings me all things" (5.1.187), I shall show, is in a different pattern. If the comedy spoofed *Lear* along with Jonson's satires and contemporary dramatic fashions, a date of 1605 or 1606 would be appropriate for it; the date of 1607, to which I incline for Shakespeare's *Timon*, would also be quite apt.

To return to the source question, it seems to me likely then that Shakespeare knew the comedy and borrowed from it. But he probably also knew the Lucianic dialogue in some manner since a few details of his plot can be better derived from it. From Lucian, either directly or indirectly, Shakespeare took over the notion that *Timon's* misfortune and ensuing misanthropy were caused by his financial ruin. The comedy was here the more rewarding source since it dwelled on *Timon's* prodigality and pointed it up by a servant's agonizing over it, a pattern Shakespeare adopted. Lucian, however, seems to have realized more obviously than the writer of the comedy that one could be of two minds about *Timon's* spending habits and ensuing fall. This passage, which has been claimed to have influenced Shakespeare, is intriguing:

Why, if you like to put it so, it was his kindness and generosity and universal compassion that ruined him; but it would be nearer the truth to call him a fool and a simpleton and a blunderer; he did not realize that his protégés were carrion crows and wolves; vultures were feeding on his unfortunate liver, and he took them for friends and good comrades, showing a fine appetite just to please him. So they gnawed his bones perfectly clean, sucked out with great precision any marrow there might be in them, and went off, leaving him as dry as a tree whose roots have been severed; and now they do not know him or vouchsafe him a nod—no such fools—, nor ever think of showing him charity or repaying his gifts.¹⁷

The animal and cannibal images and the identification of *Timon* with a tree are at first sight suggestive of Shakespeare's borrowing; but it should be said that the images were common for usury in Shakespeare's time, and that the pictures of the tree of life and fortune were emblematic commonplaces. No specific resemblance is evident between the animal images either of the dialogue or of the comedy and the animal imagery of *Timon*. In neither source is there a systematic undergirding of the plot by animal and nature images as in Shakespeare's play. Although Shakespeare may have modeled some individual features of *Timon's* odious friends on these sources, he had no incentive in them to portray a whole corrupt society. And though Lucian saw the possibility of depicting a *Timon* that might strike some as humanitarian and others as prodigal, the actual *Timon* of his dialogue is not ambivalent but rather an ignorant boor, incapable alike of the generosity and the apocalyptic hatred of Shakespeare's character. When

impoverished, Lucian's Timon is relatively content with his primitive life in nature. After finding the gold, he becomes a miser and hoards it in a tower. This is much the way Shakespeare's Timon advises his steward to take the gold and "build from men" (4.3.530); but it differs totally from Timon's use of gold for the destruction of man. Lucian's Timon would not make a tragic hero; he was intended to be the vehicle and butt of satire rather than a character to be analyzed seriously.

Some similarities between Lucian's dialogue and Shakespeare's play have no exact equivalent in the comedy. Only Lucian has a character resembling Shakespeare's poet (the comedy has a musician), and only in Lucian are the circumstances of Timon's finding of gold and his reaction somewhat like those in the tragedy; in the comedy, contrary to the dialogue and the tragedy, Timon does not apostrophize gold. On the other hand, Timon's rejection of his friends has some resemblance to the way in which this matter is handled in Shakespeare's play, and, most important, it is crowned by a mock banquet. In both plays, Timon hurls stones (painted like artichokes in the comedy) at his guests, and his guests therefore think him mad, whereupon Timon leaves, cursing Athens.

When it comes to materials that could have helped Shakespeare create a pessimistic tragedy, the comedy seems to me to render as little as the dialogue. Bulman, in seeking to advance the comedy above Lucian's dialogue as a source, goes astray when he calls it "the only source which could have provided Shakespeare with the *De Casibus* tragic pattern of Timon's rise and fall from fortune."¹⁸ The comedy is the only source merely if one forgets Barckley, and I do not see that it really gives any prominence to this pattern. It is certainly not underlined verbally—a *sententia* about the change from riches to poverty and an image of ebbing and flowing mean very little. I also fail to discern that "Timon himself, though the comedy's central character, remains oddly at the periphery of the comic action—a misfit, a railer, whose fall from fortune follows a distinctly tragic curve." Through most of the play, the comic Timon is the main target of the satire, a rascal who is taken in by every blatant cheat and liar and is infatuated with a too-obvious little minx. This Timon is ruined not because of his prodigality but because his ships are wrecked (a stock motif of drama); his character and actions have no direct bearing on his fall. Nor is he tragic in his reaction to misfortune. Near the end of the play, he indeed makes a short speech that demands the disruption of natural order as does Shakespeare's hero. But this seriousness is not sustained; presumably the author of the comedy seems to have intended the speech as a satire on the cursing convention of tragedy. Altogether, I find

it impossible to believe that Shakespeare gained from this comedy the inspiration for transforming into a tragedy what had been looked upon as a satirical story and was treated here as an excuse for multiple parodies. Bulman himself admits that the comic author's tone is not at all akin to Shakespeare's.

To summarize, Plutarch, Lucian, and the *Timon* comedy, the works that are usually looked upon as being the sources of any moment, offered Shakespeare next to nothing to suggest tragic possibilities for the character of Timon or to invite writing anything but a comical or satirical play about him. What he needed, first of all, was a Timon who could be taken more seriously than an odd character to be laughed at. Here a passage in Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, often noted by scholars without much comment, is of seminal significance. Shakespeare is likely to have known this fundamental work, some of it perhaps in Latin, since grammar school; it was translated by Philemon Holland in 1601. Pliny mentions Timon among men of strange and peculiar natures and temperaments. Such were the founders of philosophical schools like Diogenes, Pyrrho, Heraclitus, and Timon; the latter was "so far gone in his humor that he seemed professedly to hate mankind." Pliny saw Timon as having "a corrupt, perverse, and froward nature."¹⁹ No matter that he may have conflated here Timon of Athens with Timon of Phleius, a skeptic philosopher and biter of other philosophers; the point is that he took Timon seriously. Also, he confirmed an earlier brief diagnosis by Cicero of Timon's misanthropy as a sickness of the soul, intense, persistent, and deeply rooted.²⁰ In the inveteracy of his hatred, Shakespeare's Timon is in the tradition of Pliny and Cicero rather than of Plutarch and Lucian: the senators rightly conclude that "his discontents are unremoveably / Coupled to nature" (5.1.223-24). We should note that the context of Pliny's allusion carries pessimistic implications about the nature of man. Timon is depicted as extreme among a group of serious thinkers whose dislike of man, though constitutionally conditioned in its severity, is at least in part attributable to a reaction to human misery and wickedness. Pliny also provided material for the pessimists by turning an old commonplace about Mother Nature into a troublesome question, asking whether she "hath done the part of a kind mother or hard and cruel stepdame" in bringing forth man naked rather than in equipping him with wool, hide, and feathers.²¹ Pliny enhanced the pessimistic applicability of his question by following it with a catalogue of man's miseries that point up his foolish arrogance. Pliny's question and lament provide the *locus classicus* for Lear's speech on "unaccommodated man" and they also echo into *Timon* (4.1.32-36).

Features of the Plinian-Ciceronian Timon, the unbending

hater, appeared in various Renaissance versions of Timon's life. Of these, the most influential was Pedro Mexía's in *La silva de varia lección* (1540), translated into French by Claude Griget (first three books, 1552, and often reprinted with additions. Mexía followed Plutarch's account of events; however, he made Timon live not in Athens but in a hut in the fields. He emphasized his strangeness, isolation, and remorseless hate even beyond death. Timon's burial at the seaside was for Mexía an express gesture of his scorn of men: he chose it to be protected against them by the waves. It is doubtful, however, that Shakespeare knew Mexía's story since it was not in the partial version of the collection translated by Thomas Fortescue (1571). Neither does Shakespeare seem to have owed much, if anything, to the story as told in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566), which depends largely on Mexía. And it should be said that neither Mexía nor Painter portrayed a particularly evil society to which Timon's misanthropy was a reaction. Painter, in fact, spoke of Timon's beastliness rather than that of the Athenians.

The two sources of the Timon story available to Shakespeare that took Timon seriously and shifted the emphasis away from the horror of his misanthropy toward a pessimism about human nature were Pierre Boaistuau's *Theatrum mundi* and Richard Barckley's *A Discourse of the Felicity of Man*. Although neither Boaistuau nor Barckley concerned themselves particularly with Athenian society, they spoke strongly in condemnation of their own. Both saw in Timon not a human oddity or a vehicle of satire but an ancient witness to their own pessimism. This pessimism is indebted to old Christian assessments of unregenerated man's depravity, which Calvin and others revived. Shakespeare found here misanthropic arguments he could adapt to the pagan climate of his play, and these might send him to similar works for further materials. The proviso to be made is that Shakespeare did not merely read Boaistuau's and Barckley's brief accounts of Timon's life, which add little new to the facts, but that he was sensitive to the contexts and leafed, at least, through the rest. This is not an unreasonable assumption.

Boaistuau saw Timon in the Plinian tradition. In his Epistle Dedicatory, he recalled that "certain ancient philosophers have framed marvelous complaints against the ungratefulness and forgetfulness of man." On the first pages of the tract itself, he reminded his readers of some "vigorous censors of the work of nature" who called her a "cruel stepmother in the stead of a gracious mother" (shades of Pliny). He gradated these, beginning with those who laughed scornfully, continuing with those who wept, and concluding with those who were not

content to "murmur against human nature or to complain of her effects" but who hated man and discharged their "wrath and malediction" against him. "Amongst the which, Timon, a philosopher of Athens, was the most affectioned [i.e., passionate] patriarch of this sect, the which declared himself open and chief enemy to man. . . ." It did not suffice Timon, said Boaistuau, "to have men only in horror and detestation and to fly their company as the company of fierce and cruel beasts, but in forsaking them he sought their ruin and invented all the means he could to extinguish human kind."²² Shakespeare's contrast of Apemantus and Timon may well owe something to this gradation of philosophers: Apemantus is the murmurer against human nature and Timon the misanthrope who seeks to extinguish mankind.²³

For Boaistuau, Timon was a pagan who could teach Christians a proper contempt for man and the world. Even though he looked upon him as a strange creature, he applauded his view of man as a miserable, ungrateful, and wicked creature. Boaistuau saw signs of the human deterioration all around him. The pride and deceit of merchants, the amassing of gold and silver, the spread of luxury, the eruptions of war, the increase of murder, treason, fraud, covetousness, usury, and theft—all indicated to him that the apocalyptic predictions of the ancient philosophers were being fulfilled. And this worst of societies was placed in a threatening cosmic setting; the elements as executors of God's wrath had a fearful potential for man. Therefore, as I have suggested previously, Boaistuau could have inspired Shakespeare to create some of the cosmic apostrophes and images of his misanthropic speeches.

One intriguing parallel here is that between a passage in the *Theatrum mundi* which takes its departure from the Plinian commonplace about Mother Nature, and Timon's address to the earth. Boaistuau shifts the point of gravity of the commonplace toward the earth's destructiveness, and so, but much more strongly, does Shakespeare's Timon.

Boaistuau:

The earth that is the most gentlest and tractablest of all elements, which is our common mother of all, receiving us when we are born, that nourisheth and sustaineth us . . . notwithstanding it bringeth forth all the venoms and poisons with which our life is daily assaulted. . . . And yet it is a thing more marveled at and turneth to more confusion the pride and loftiness of men that the earth bringeth forth certain little beasts that oppress and make war upon him.²⁴

Timon:

Common mother, thou
Whose womb immeasurable and infinite breast

Teems and feeds all; whose self-same mettle,
 Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puff'd,
 Engenders the black toad and adder blue,
 The gilded newt and eyeless venom'd worm,
 With all th' abhorred births below crisp heaven
 Whereupon Hyperion's quick'ning fire doth shine:
 Yield him, who all the human sons do hate.
 From forth thy plenteous bosom, one poor root.
 Ensear thy fertile and conceitious womb;
 Let it no more bring out ingrateful man.
 Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves and bears;
 Teem with new monsters, whom thy upward face
 Hath to the marbled mansion all above
 Never presented.

(4.3.179-94)

Boaistuau, of course, described nature's destructive potential whereas Timon apostrophizes this malignant nature, lending life and horror to his speech by the vividly imagined ferocity. Since we are dealing with a commonplace here, we cannot claim for certain that Shakespeare had Boaistuau's passage in mind when he penned the speech; at any rate, the *Theatrum mundi* is the Renaissance source of the Timon story that anticipates most strongly the apocalyptic ring as well as the decay-of-nature substance of Timon's diatribes.

Barckley's *Discourse* repeats and reinforces many of Boaistuau's pessimistic themes and adds others. It introduces the Timon story at the beginning of the fifth of its six books, the book that deals with the felicity of this life, a felicity to be rejected in favor of the life to come, the subject of the last book. Timon is again the fiercest of the philosophers that impugn human misery and vice—the passage is almost literally from Boaistuau—and he becomes a solitary exile. As Pauls has noted, Barckley's Timon is considerably more sympathetic than that of the other sources—never once is he called a monster or a beast, whereas his friends are dubbed "furious wild beasts." The pessimism about man and society inherent in Barckley's use of the Timon anecdote pervades the whole book, which breathes the kind of mood and enlarges upon the kind of themes characteristic of Shakespeare's tragedy. As Pauls says, some of Barckley's sentences are almost Timon-like in their bitterness. For instance, Barckley uses animal imagery and the beast theme in a much more intense and systematic way than do Lucian and the old comedy, and the associations are quite those of Shakespeare's tragedy: vices such as flattery, hypocrisy, and usury are characterized by their beastliness. If any source can be invoked as inspiration for this theme in Shakespeare, it is the *Discourse*.

Another prominent theme of *Timon* that may have its origin in Barckley's book is the ironic treatment of honesty. It will be remembered that it is initiated by Apemantus's search for

an honest Athenian in order to knock out his brains (1.1.192). The joke, of course, rests on the ubiquitous story of Diogenes' search with the lantern for one honest Athenian. Barckley records this anecdote together with a similar one about an order of Marcus Aurelius to register all honest Romans; the censors found none living and ravaged the graves to come up with a suitable specimen. Barckley adds that there would be no better result in these present iniquitous times when "hardly a faithful friend or an honest man is anywhere to be found."²⁵ Shakespeare may have gotten the idea of making Apemantus imply that an honest Athenian is a dead Athenian from these two anecdotes. Barckley, in any case, pointed the way to apply the ironic honesty theme to the decline of friendship as does Timon. "My honest-natur'd friends," the misanthrope mocks the poet and the painter (5.1.85). Barckley's invoking of Diogenes' censure of the Greeks is in tune with the Renaissance Diogeniana on which Shakespeare drew not only for Apemantus's cynical philosophy but also for Timon's criticism of man and society.

Another strong theme of Barckley's likely to have had an effect on Shakespeare's conception of the Athenian milieu is that of mutability and fortune. Barckley's claim that all human activities except contemplative piety are useless is illustrated by anecdotes that prove the vitiating effect of fortune; many important historical personages are shown to have been ruined by fortune or to have ruined themselves in its pursuit. In this respect, Pauls notes that Barckley acclaims the resolution of the emperor Diocletian, who, on top of Fortune's wheel, rejected rule, honor, and glory and completely withdrew from public life—Timonesque one might call his decision. Pauls particularly notes that Diocletian, like Timon, refused the plea of his native city to come to its aid. When the Romans sent ambassadors to him in their distress and asked him to return to his throne, he denied their request and sent them back to Rome. None other of Shakespeare's sources has a similar analogue to Timon's rejection of the plea of the Athenian senators.

I may add that the *Discourse* is also the most likely source for Shakespeare's making "nothing" into a key word of his tragedy. Timon, who experiences the nothingness of his friends and harps on this theme at the mock banquet, becomes in the wood a preacher on the nothingness of all things. He says to the steward: "My long sickness / Of health and living now begins to mend, / And nothing brings me all things" (5.1.185-87). Now, in the pages preceding the Timon story in the *Discourse*, Barckley entones a veritable hymn to the nothingness of life and also backs it up by a paradox of health and disease resembling Timon's:

Knowest thou not that the life of man is nothing in respect of the life to come. . . . That which is temporal and comprehended within time and hath end seemeth nothing nor beareth any proportion to that which is without time, perpetual, and infinite. Much less the afflictions and troubles of this temporal life, in respect of the perpetuity of the joys of the life to come, beareth any proportion, but is to be accounted nothing. And who will call him a sickly man that in the whole course of his life hath never felt any sickness, but only a little short fit of an ague, but rather will call him a healthful man? Much less can the afflictions and troubles of this life be called infelicity because between the other is some proportion; between this life and the life to come, none at all.²⁶

Shakespeare did not use this or other source themes slavishly, from wherever he got them. Timon's words are phrased to express his utter nihilism. The "all things" death brings to Timon entail no hope of an afterlife; they voice merely his desire to be left alone by humanity.

Barckley, it appears, was of primary importance for the transmission of the moral and philosophical pessimism Shakespeare infused into his drama of ideas, a pessimism that drew on Socrates, Plato, Diogenes, skepticism, Stoicism, the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and whomever or whatever else was appropriate. To the degree that the *Discourse* can itself be put in a specific pessimistic tradition, it is the *vanitas* literature. The futility of all human endeavor, on which Barckley dwelled, was to point up the need to put aside all the useless strife for the pursuit of holiness, the only true felicity of man. With Ecclesiastes, this tradition said that all is vanity and that man smells of mortality.

The seminal book of this tradition was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim's *De vanitate artium et scientiarum* (1530), translated by James Sanford in 1569 (rpt. 1575). It was certainly one of Barckley's sources, as it was that of Thomas Nashe and many another Elizabethan and Jacobean satirist and moralist. Its influence lay in the comprehensiveness of its denunciation of man and his world: it belittled, satirized, or attacked every form of knowledge, every science, art, trade, and human endeavor except absorption in piety. It is hard to say whether Agrippa was serious or merely performed an exercise in paradoxical satire, but he certainly provided an encyclopedia of invective and condemnation for his readers. In all likelihood, not only Barckley but also Shakespeare knew this exploitable book, and I think that there are indications in *Timon* that he did.

Although individual parallels between Agrippa's treatise and Shakespeare's play that belong to the general moral and satirical tradition mean little as such, their number and scope are astonishing. Even a partial catalogue is impressive. For

instance, both Agrippa and Timon satirize the commercialism, lying, and counterfeiting of poets and painters, expose the lust and hypocrisy of priests, castigate courtiers for being more concerned with promising than performing, attack the evils of war and equate soldiers with thieves, call the physicians poisoners and slayers, scourge loudmouthed and greedy lawyers, and censure the willful and unjust administration of the laws.²⁷ The two passages that seem to me to point clearly to Shakespeare's borrowing come from Agrippa's exposure of sexual and societal disorder. The first is in Agrippa's attack on dancing, which parallels in content and general structure Apemantus's commentary on the dance after Timon's masque. Attacks on dancing, it is true, were plentiful in Shakespeare's time; the Puritans, in particular, saw it as a diabolic invitation to sin. But Agrippa's sally, much like Apemantus's commentary, makes the more unusual points that dancing is foolishness, madness, disorder, and vanity, and it does so in a similar arrangement:

Agrippa:

To music moreover belongeth the art of dancing, very acceptable to maidens and lovers, which they learn with great care . . . and do as they think very wisely and subtly the fondest thing of all other and little differing from madness, which, except it were tempered with the sound of instruments, and, as it is said, if vanity did not commend vanity, there should be no sight more ridiculous, no more out of order, than dancing.²⁸

Apemantus:

What a sweep of vanity comes this way.
They dance? They are madwomen.
Like madness is the glory of this life,
As this pomp shows to a little oil and root.
We make ourselves fools, to disport ourselves,
And spend our flatteries to drink those men
Upon whose age we void it up again
With poisonous spite and envy . . .
I should fear those that dance before me now
Would one day stamp upon me.

(1.2.128-40)

Here as elsewhere, Shakespeare brilliantly adapted what he took to his different purpose. Apemantus contrasts the vanity of dancing, symbolic of the ceremonies of man, with a touch of his cynical philosophy, "the little oil and root." The disorder of dancing becomes an allegory of the whole topsyturvy world of fortune seekers.

Finally, an anecdote of Agrippa's about the emperor Heliogabalus in the chapter "Of the Whorish Art" is reflected in Timon's treatment of the prostitutes Phrynia and Timandra. The story, it is true, was available elsewhere (for

instance, in Barckley); but Agrippa's is, as far as I know, the version closest to Shakespeare. Heliogabalus, Agrippa narrates, amused himself by treating prostitutes like soldiers:

Sometimes also he assembled together in the common place all the whores from the place called Circus, from the theater and amphitheater, from the exercise, and from all places and bairns, and there made unto them an oration as it were unto soldiers, calling them fellow soldiers, and disputed all the kinds of figures and pleasures, and after the oration he caused three ducats to be given each of them as if they had been soldiers.²⁹

Like Heliogabalus, Timon offers the prostitutes payment from the gold he finds and treats them as if they were members of an army:

Hold up, you sluts,
Your aprons mountant. You are not oathable,
Although I know you'll swear, terribly swear
Into strong shudders and to heavenly agues
Th' immortal gods that hear you. Spare your oaths:
I'll trust to your conditions. Be whores still;
And he whose pious breath seeks to convert you,
Be strong in whore, allure him, burn him up;
Let your close fire predominate his smoke,
And be no turncoats.

(4.3.136-45)

Timon's tone, of course, is grim rather than anecdotal like Agrippa's; instead of disputing "figures and pleasures" like Heliogabalus, he uses paramilitary terminology when he enrolls the prostitutes in his imaginary army of destruction and, by the fire image, suggests their potency for sexual contagion. But there can be little doubt that the anecdote is the source for this, the most devastating of Timon's misanthropic sallies.

With Agrippa we have come to the end of the sources as defined in this chapter, that is, works relevant to the spirit and tone of Shakespeare's play that make at least a reference to Timon. That of Agrippa is to Timon as a philosopher who reproves his colleagues for their stupidity and wickedness. This is no great contribution to the Timon repertoire, although—who knows?—it may have provided Shakespeare with an incentive for making Timon's drubbing of Apemantus the ideological climax of the play. However, the significance of Agrippa, like that of Boaistuau and Barckley, does not lie primarily in verbal and plot parallels but in the pointers he provided for Shakespeare's reshaping of the story into a pessimistic tragedy.