Timon Rediscovered: The Projected
Max Goschen Edition, 1914

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The precise history of the planned edition of Timon of Athens illustrated with the plates in the Timon portfolio will probably never be reconstructed. The firm intending to publish it, Evelyn Benmar, was, according to Douglas Goldring, ‘almost derelict’ when he was given the ‘honorary task of pulling it together’, probably in late 1912. He brought it round by publishing James Elroy Flecker’s Golden Journey to Samarkand and Ford Madox Hueffer’s Collected Poems. In early 1914 the firm was, he says, sold to ‘a wealthy young Jew of sporting proclivities whose father was prepared to set him up as a publisher’. It was during late 1912, while the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition was still in progress, that Lewis’s plates were put together as a portfolio and sold for 10/6 (just over 50p). Paul O’Keeffe reports that Lewis was annoyed to have the plates issued in this form, and complained that the quality of the first batches was poor. O’Keeffe also reports Goldring’s story that Marjorie Tripp, of Max Goschen (late Evelyn Benmar) ‘had the text printed off without the blocks being fitted in to the places designed for them, so these, much to Lewis’s justifiable wrath, had to be issued in a separate portfolio’, but is doubtful about it, since the portfolio was already planned; the edition was in his view probably abandoned for commercial reasons.¹

A document has now surfaced that clarifies things further and at the same time raises new questions. The Beinecke Library at Yale University posted the following announcement on the internet in 1999:

A WYNDHAM LEWIS UNICUM


In October-December 1912, Wyndham Lewis exhibited at the Grafton Galleries in London a series of drawings depicting various scenes from Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens, intended for an illustrated edition of the play to be published by Max Goschen to coincide with the show. Difficulties and delays intervened and the book never came out. The drawings were eventually published separately as a portfolio, which Goschen issued in a limited edition in December 1913 under the imprint “The Cube Press” (of which this is the sole occurrence): the portfolio was, in fact, Lewis’s first separate publication.

What was hitherto unknown is that a maquette of the book, with the printed text of the play and all the illustrations in place, had actually been printed. This unrecorded item, containing captions and notes in Lewis’s hand concerning the printing and placement of the illustrations, passed into the possession of Ezra Pound, who sold it to John Quinn in 1917. The front wrapper bears a presentation inscription from Pound to Quinn which states: “So far as I know this is the unique copy of the Timon text printed with the designs.”²

This announcement apparently went unremarked, and I came across it myself by chance, while trying to find out current prices of the portfolio for my review of the illustrated Timon produced by the LaNana Creek Press. I have now had a chance to look at a microfilm of the ‘unique copy’ and can make a preliminary report on it. It is dated 1914 and is published by Max Goschen, so it does postdate the issuing of the portfolio. As late as this, then, the company was still intending to produce the illustrated edition of Shakespeare’s text. Indeed, it looks as if the takeover of the firm enabled an abandoned plan to be revived, for the prospectus for the portfolio issued in
November 1913 says that the drawings were ‘originally intended to accompany a folio edition of Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens’, implying that the original plan had been abandoned.3

I do not know where the copy was in the period between Quinn’s death and its acquisition by Yale, but a few conjectures can be made about how it got to Pound and then to Quinn. Lewis signed a contract for a collection of his early writings, ‘Our Wild Body’, with Max Goschen on 12 June 1914. On 25 June 1916 he wrote to Pound asking him to ‘keep your eyes on that book of mine that Goschen took and paid for, & which was his (in MSS. still)’.4 Goldring explains that ‘the new proprietor enlisted and within less than a year had died of wounds .... The firm was wound up’.5 In May of 1917 Pound retrieved the manuscript of the book and in due course printed some of it in the Little Review. It is quite possible that he also retrieved the maquette copy of Timon, returned by Lewis some time in 1914 to the publisher, inscribed with instructions. Alternatively, since Max Goschen appears to have been non-operational soon after the outbreak of the war, Pound may have had the copy already as part of the material he held as Lewis’s potential executor in case of his death in action. By October 1917 there was no longer any prospect of publication, and the copy became an asset to realise for Lewis’s benefit.6 Quinn already had a copy of the portfolio itself, sent via Pound in 1915.7 In a letter to Quinn of 8 January 1919, Lewis explains that he had sold ‘Our Wild Body’ to Max Goschen, and that its publication should have preceded that of Tarr: ‘I sold it just before the War broke out, as I dare say you know, to Rafael [presumably the ‘wealthy young Jew’ Goldring referred to]. He has paid me, even, my advance on it. But he was killed, his business went bust, and everything, including my Timon portfolio, was scattered’.8

Turning to the book, the text of the play is beautifully printed (by the Arden Press, Letchworth) on watermarked paper — a rather unlikely choice for a page proof, leading one to suppose that, as far as the text is concerned, work was complete. A quick look through the microfilm confirms that Goldring’s unlikely story was in essence correct; no spaces were left on the pages for any of Lewis’s line-block title-page designs, and none of the other small designs he had produced as space-fillers were printed in spaces where they might have fitted. Since the text is printed continuously, without new pages for new acts, there would not have been much scope for this anyway. Instead, Lewis’s plates and blocks have obviously been inserted during the binding stage. The small decorations are at the back of the book, while the half-titles are usually inserted facing the page of text on which the act begins. Both Pound and the Beinecke, following him, are therefore slightly misleading about the copy: it is not ‘printed with the illustrations’ (they are bound in), and it is not the case that ‘all the illustrations are in place’. Pound’s inscription was no doubt intended to persuade Quinn of the value of the copy.

The portfolio version of the plates has designs for the front and back covers (M91 and M92). These are used on the covers of the edition of the illustrated text. The portfolio contains 16 sheets, seven of which are printed with what I’ve called ‘small decorations’, though some of these are more obviously simple space-fillers than others. M107, a sheet with two of these (in one of which a silhouetted hand is clearly visible), is not included in the book. Two other sheets (M103 and 101) have had their designs printed on one sheet: M101, the one that Michel calls Figure but does not reproduce, is printed at the top, with the dancing figures he calls Two Soldiers underneath — apparently without the colour infill used in the portfolio printing. Rather shockingly for those who like this image, Lewis has marked it for deletion. The image on the lower portion of M105 (a kind of combined mask and high-kicking nude dancer) is also marked for deletion, as is, possibly (Lewis’s marking is not clear), the little scene of fatal swordsmanship above it. It must always be borne in mind, however, that these omissions and deletions do not represent Lewis’s definitive intentions for the edition. Rather, they are the compromises he chose when faced with a printed text that left insufficient room for all the designs.
How the ‘maquette’ was put together, whether it was taken apart and rebound is impossible to judge from the microfilm. Some of Lewis’s instructions on the plates must have been made before they were bound in, however. For example, on Timon (M102, Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer fig. 66) he has written ‘? Facing ? title’, and the plate is in fact placed facing the half-title, as a sort of frontispiece on the left-hand side (verso) of the double-spread. ‘Print deeper’, he also writes on it. All the act half-title blocks are inscribed with placement notes by Lewis, so that they will appear as rectos (that is, on the right-hand side of the opened book) close to the actual beginnings of the acts; all are inserted as instructed. So these seem to have been bound in according to the inscribed instructions when the sheets and plates were assembled for binding. Other plates, however, have no placement instructions inscribed on them: the colour plates M93 (A Masque of Timon; WLP&W fig. 31), M98 (The Thébaïde; WLP&W fig. 55) and M100 (A Feast of Overmen; WLP&W fig. 54). Except for The Thébaïde, they are all inserted between gatherings of leaves, each gathering consisting of eight pages. The first of these plates is bound as a verso, and, if it is in the correct place (which it surely must be, as it is headed ‘Act I’, and it faces the beginning of the text (p. 1)), then it may be that Lewis was not happy with it as a verso; the previous blank recto is inscribed, ‘Pictures to face opposite way’ – a rather vague instruction that may precede or follow the current organisation of the volume. The next ‘picture’ is The Thébaïde, bound as a recto, and placed facing the opening of Act II (p. 20). There seem to be faint traces of an inscription, perhaps erased, at the bottom. A few pages later (Scene ii), the next ‘picture’, facing p. 24 as the recto, is Timon or Composition (M99, WLP&W fig. 53). It is inscribed ‘New line block to come. Facing 24’. This ‘picture’ is not a line block, so perhaps Lewis intended to replace it with a new drawing that could be made into a line block and inserted here. Finally, the last ‘picture’ (A Feast of Overmen) follows p. 56 (Act IV Scene iii) as a recto. It’s difficult to know what to make of this; The Thébaïde and A Feast of Overmen would be better substituted for each other, for Act IV Scene iii contains Timon’s confrontation with Alcibiades, while Act I (if not Act II) has a banquet scene. Could such a substitution be what Lewis meant by asking for the pictures to be ‘reversed’? Or perhaps at an earlier stage they were all, like A Masque of Timon, bound as versos. It remains puzzling why Lewis was apparently happy to let these pictures be placed without regard to their context in the play.

How does Lewis deal with the anomaly of there being two Act I title-pages and none for Act II? A Masque of Timon, as I have mentioned, is used as the opener for Act I. The line block design for Act I (M94) is inserted as a recto facing Act I Scene i, on p. 8. Lewis has written at the top, ‘block to be revised’ and beneath the dancer’s head, ‘This block to be revised’ (an inscription at the bottom instructs, ‘Facing 8’). Perhaps the revision would have turned it into an Act II half-title, but then it would not have been well-placed facing p. 8. The opening of Act II has no half-title, but, again as I have mentioned, The Thébaïde is placed where the half-title would be expected.

Finally, the smaller line block decorations. Opposite the frontispiece, under the half-title, ‘Timon of Athens’, Lewis sketches two triangles with the letter ‘C’ inscribed between them, meaning that the Two Soldiers shouting at each other (M104) should be printed here. (On the actual plate with the design, at the back of the book, he has inscribed ‘C’ and ‘under half title’.) The reader would then turn over the half-title page to find printed on the verso facing the full title-page, decoration ‘B’, which turns out to be the small abstract spacefiller found at the bottom of M106. In the empty space in the middle of the title-page itself, Lewis instructs: ‘insert decoration A’, which is the hemleted-head-cum-abstract-bird that occupies the upper half of M108. Lewis’s alphabet is going in reverse: he has started fitting in the designs on the title-page and then gone backwards towards the flyleaf. Sure enough, continuing the alphabetic sequence on the flyleaf, he writes: ‘fly leaf’ | ? D. E. | pp 1 & 2’. He then changed ‘2’ to ‘4’; but where he
meant them to be placed is not clear, as pages 1 and 4 are fully occupied by printed text. ‘D’ is the abstract, roughly rhomboid design on the upper half of M106, while ‘E’ is the profile head on the lower half of M108. The lettering that codes the images was obviously done on the pages before the actual decorations were inscribed with the codes, because there is no obvious ordering to the letters on the plates of decorations themselves. The only place where Lewis seems to have worked the other way round is at the close of the text: (the only other place in the book where he could hope to squeeze in a few more decorations). Shakespeare’s text finishes on p. 85, leaving a small space at the bottom of the page. Leaving this page unmarked, Lewis inscribed the mask/dancer design (M105), ‘bottom of page 85’, then apparently changed his mind, crossed out the inscription and wrote ‘delete’. He then wrote on M101 ‘bottom of page 85’. Perhaps he made this decision after he had decided where design ‘F’ should go, for he indicated this on the page itself, the recto facing the colophon of the Arden Press (printed on the unnumbered page following p. 85). It is inscribed with a large, loose copperplate lower case ‘f’. But there is no corresponding design marked ‘f’; perhaps it was on the missing sheet M107.9

The Beinecke Timon is, and remains, a tantalising find. It is what survives of a botched attempt to construct a viable illustrated edition, not a completed model of the book embodying Lewis’s full intentions for the project. Some of the information we might have hoped for from it (such as a list of the major illustrations, giving them secure titles, or the ‘captions’ promised in the Beinecke’s announcement) it does not supply. More is to be discovered from a physical examination of the folio, but on the microfilm there is enough to explain Lewis’s ‘justifiable wrath’.

With thanks to Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and particular thanks to Karen Nangle, Public Services Assistant, for her help with my questions.

NOTES


5 South Lodge, p. 62. Goldring gives no date for the liquidation.

6 Pound’s inscription is originally dated ‘1916’, with the 6 overwritten as a 7. The microfilm does not enable me to tell if the same ink is used (which would be the case with an immediate correction of a slip) or whether the alteration was indeed made a year later. The former seems the more likely.
7 See Lewis’s letter to Pound, dated by Materer to ‘before July 1915’, in which he says ‘I am sending you tomorrow a copy of Timon for Quinn’, Pound / Lewis, p. 13.

8 Lewis to Quinn, 8 January 1919, in Richard and Janis Londraville, ‘Two Men at War with Time: The Unpublished Correspondence of Wyndham Lewis and John Quinn’, English, Vol. 39, no. 164 (Summer 1990, p. 123. Lewis’s words suggest that he may not have known, or had forgotten, that the mock-up of the book had gone to Quinn.

9 The deleted sword fight has a slightly mysterious code next to it – what looks a little like an underlined, lower case ‘r’. I do not think this is a badly-written ‘f’, however.

Fig. 1. Wyndham Lewis, Design for Cart (c. 1921) James L. Gordon Collection