Timon of Athens Study Guide

Timon of Athens by William Shakespeare

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Contents

Introduction

The historical characters in *Timon of Athens* lived nearly 2,500 years ago. Almost four hundred years have passed since the play was written. Yet the issues it raises are timeless—applicable to every period in history when materialism and corruption overwhelm humane social values. In 1973, at a small theater in Paris, a production of *Timon* crossed cultural, historical, and racial boundaries. Timon was played as a golden-haired, northern European youth; at the first banquet, entertainers performed a Middle Eastern-inspired dance to Arabian music; Apemantus was played by a black actor, costumed in a way to suggest that he was a native of northern Africa. This production, directed by Peter Brook, underscored the universality of the play.

Timon of Athens depicts a society corrupted by greed. Many of its citizens are in debt to moneylenders. Conspicuous consumption—to use a twentieth- century term—leads Timon to bankruptcy. His natural inclination to entertain lavishly and dispense freely what he thinks is a limitless fortune leaves him at the mercy of his creditors. In the late twentieth century, personal indebtedness is at an all- time high. Persuaded by advertisers that happiness means new cars, new technologies, fashionable clothes, etcetera, many people charge purchases on credit cards and trust that they'll be able to pay for these things sometime in the future. As a result, an increasing number of people find themselves in bankruptcy court.

In modern society, materialism is criticized on several fronts, and basic values are asserted. But which values are impermanent and which ones endure? Timon imagines a society in which each person treats his assets as if they belonged to his friends as well as himself. This seems unrealistic. But what are the alternatives? When confronted with the truth, an idealist such as Timon may respond with bitterness and disillusion. On the other hand, a pragmatic approach to life may lead to Apemantus's attitude of empty cynicism. One can withdraw from society, rejecting its values, as Timon does; attempt to force it to conform to one's own views, as Alcibiades does; or take on the role of perpetual critic, like Apemantus.

When cynics such as Apemantus speak out, how do people generally respond? In the history of human society, truth-tellers have seldom been listened to. Their messages are unappealing. It's difficult to admit that we may be at fault—or that what we value has no intrinsic worth. Timon's refusal to listen to Apemantus and his steward is not so hard to understand.

Timon's generosity is problematical. On the one hand, he seems motivated by genuine openhandedness, a willingness to share his good fortune with everyone else—his servants as well as his friends. But his generosity is publicized; he demonstrates it in front of others, who cannot help but be aware of his gifts. If the highest level of charity is to give anonymously, to an unknown recipient, Timon falls short of the ideal. Is his generosity his servant Lucilus—true charity?

Timon expects a return of some kind for his bounty, and he is devastated when he doesn't receive it. To give without wanting or expecting something in return requires an extraordinary degree of unselfishness. What is our response when we give time, or money, or something else of value to others□perhaps some charitable institution□ and the result isn't what we had hoped it would be? What happens if the gift is used in ways we hadn't anticipated?

Finally, the play raises the question of how to respond when we are mistreated. Timon curses everyone who betrays him□and every other human being as well. There is no evidence that he under stands human frailties, or that he forgives the people who have wronged him. This rigidity alienates him from his fellow human beings and leaves him physically and emotionally separated from society. But is the biblical injunction to turn the other cheek appropriate when friends betray us? Timon appears to have no doubts about how to respond. The rest of us may not be so sure.

Plot Summary

Act I

Timon of Athens is set in ancient Greece. The first act takes place in Timon's palatial home. A poet, a painter, a jeweller, and a merchant enter a formal reception room in the house. Each of them has brought something they hope Timon will admire and want to purchase. Timon comes into the room, with several people crowding around him seeking his support or patronage. One of these is a messenger from Timon's friend Ventidius. When Timon hears that Ventidius has been thrown in jail because he can't repay a creditor, Timon quickly offers to pay the debt. An old man arrives, complaining that Timon's servant Lucilius is courting his daughter; Timon offers to put up as much money on behalf of Lucilius as the man means to bestow on his daughter, and the old Athenian agrees to the match. In the great banquet hall, Timon hosts a magnificent feast for his guests. During the course of the evening, they are entertained by a masque in which women dressed as mythical Amazons dance to the accompaniment of lutes. At the close of this lavish occasion, Timon gives one friend a precious jewel, another a valuable horse, as both his steward and his friend Apemantus try in vain to persuade him of the folly of his generosity.

Act II

On the following day, a money-lender notes how much Timon owes him and other usurers; he instructs his servant Caphis to go to Timon and demand repayment immediately. When Caphis arrives at Timon's house, he encounters Isidore and Varro□the servants of two other usurers. Timon appears, and the three servants insist that he pay off his debts to their masters. Timon draws the steward aside and asks for an explanation of his financial situation; the steward tells Timon that he has tried to inform him about his increasing indebtedness on many occasions, but Timon wouldn't listen. As the steward lays out in grim detail the extent of his master's financial ruin, Timon assures him there's nothing to worry about, for the friends to whom he's been so generous will undoubtedly come to his assistance. Timon sends the steward and three of his servants to seek money from these; friends.

Act III

Timon's servants appeal to three of his friends□Lucullus, Lucius, and Sempronius□but each of them declines to help. A crowd of servants sent by various Athenian usurers gathers at Timon's house. When Timon tries to pass through, they block his way and thrust their masters' bills at him, but they soon realize there's little hope of recovering payment and so they depart. Timon instructs his steward to invite all the friends who've turned him down to come to his house for another feast. The scene changes to a site where three senators are discussing a murder trial currently in progress. Alcibiades joins

them and begs them to show mercy toward the defendant, an old and dear friend of his, but they refuse. When he reminds them of the debt of gratitude they owe him for his service in their wars, the senators banish him from Athens. In the final scene of Act III, the friends whom Timon has invited to dine with him arrive at his house. Servants carry in covered dishes and set them at each man's place. When the dishes are uncovered, it's revealed that they contain nothing but warm water□which Timon hurls in their faces, along with curses and insults.

Act IV

Outside the walls of Athens, Timon delivers a scathing curse on the city and its inhabitants, and turns his back on it forever. At the place he selects for his exile□a cave near some woods and a barren seashore□Timon invokes nature to destroy mankind. As he digs for roots to eat, he discovers a hoard of gold. Alcibiades, accompanied by two prostitutes, unexpectedly encounters Timon. Learning that Alcibiades intends to make war on Athens, Timon urges him to destroy the city and wreak havoc on even its most innocent inhabitants. He offers his old friend gold to help pay the soldiers, and when the women see it, they beg him to give them gold, too. After Alcibiades and the women have left, Apemantus appears. He urges Timon to return to the city. Timon's response is a flood of verbal abuse. Some bandits, having heard rumors of Timon's new-found treasure, arrive to rob him□ but Timon confounds them by giving them more than they could ever hope to steal. Timon's next visitor is his steward, whose faithfulness demonstrates that the world holds at least one honest man. Timon drives him away.

Act V

The poet and painter seek out Timon. He sends them off with insults. The steward reappears, this time with two Athenian senators, who apologize profusely for their earlier treatment of Timon. They plead with him to persuade Alcibiades not to attack the city. Timon, however, says he doesn't care if every man, woman, and child in Athens is slaughtered. The senators are dejected, and they depart with the steward. One of Alcibiades's soldiers, sent in search of Timon, discovers his grave instead. Using wax to lift the inscription carved into Timon's tombstone, the soldier hurries back to Alcibiades. Outside the walls of Athens, Alcibiades listens to two senators plead with him to spare the city.

Alcibiades yields to their entreaties, promising to punish Timon's enemies and his own, but leave other citizens unharmed. The soldier arrives and announces that Timon is dead. Alcibiades reads aloud the epitaph the soldier has copied. Then he enters Athens, vowing to temper justice with mercy.

Characters

Alcibiades:

An Athenian general and statesman, he lived in the fifth century B.C. During the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) between Athens and Sparta, Alcibiades served as a commander of the Athenian army; later he switched his allegiance and led Spartan forces against Athens.

In *Timon of Athens,* Alcibiades is portrayed as a man of action. He is a rationalist, fully convinced of the coexistence of good and evil in the world. He is also pragmatic; his tactics are both efficient and effective. Furthermore, he is depicted as an honorable man who remains loyal to his friends. Finally, Alcibiades is a survivor, and he is responsible for restoring order to Athens at the close of the play.

Alcibiades is present at Timon's first banquet. When Timon suggests that Alcibiades would rather "be at a breakfast of enemies than a dinner of friends" (I.ii.76-77), Alcibiades says this would be true only if all the enemies were freshly slaughtered and their corpses still bleeding. Alcibiades's fiery nature is most evident in III.v, when he pleads with some senators to spare the life of a dear friend of his. He acknowledges that the man is technically guilty of murder; but he argues that the deed was committed at the height of passion and that the man was provoked to it by an insult to his honor. Passion and anger are qualities highly regarded in a soldier, Alcibiades continues, and, at some time in their lives, all men experience these emotions. He urges the senators to temper justice with mercy, but they refuse. Frustrated by their obstinacy, Alcibiades reminds them of the long years of military service he has given Athens. Stung by his remarks, the senators banish him forever. He accuses them of corrupting the Senate with their money-lending and their senile minds, and after they leave he explodes in rage. Gaining control of his emotions, he vows to turn his "spleen and fury" (III.v. 112) into calculated vengeance against Athens and its leaders.

In the course of raising a private army to attack Athens, Alcibiades unexpectedly encounters Timon in the wilderness. Timon's appearance has changed so much that Alcibiades fails to recognize him at first. Moved by the pitiable condition of his old friend, he offers Timon sympathy and consolation. Timon rejects these, but when he learns that Alcibiades means to attack Athens, he says there *is* some service he can do: show no mercy and slay every man, woman, and child in the city. Alcibiades accepts some of Timon's gold so he can pay his soldiers, but he declines to take his advice.

In the play's final scene, Alcibiades and his army approach Athens' city walls. Several senators plead with him to spare the city, Differing to come to terms with him in his quest for vengeance. Alcibiades accepts the offer, swearing that the only Athenians who will be killed are those who personally wronged either him or Timon. A soldier whom Alcibiades had sent to seek out Timon arrives with a copy of the epitaph engraved on

Timon's tomb. Alcibiades reads it aloud and then eulogizes his old friend, forgiving Timon's faults and emphasizing his nobility.

Alcibiades introduces the theme of mercy in III.v and raises it again at the conclusion of the play. He will avenge Timon and himself, but he means to spare those who took no part in betraying them. Despite Alcibiades's intentions to turn swords into plowshares and heal the wounds of political strife, it's questionable whether he will be able to reform Athens and rid it of corruption. Some commentators have noted ambiguities in his character, pointing to his sensuality and his eagerness to take up arms against his own country when his honor is offended.

Apemantus:

A deeply cynical man, he observes his fellow citizens with acute insight and never hesitates to speak the truth. On the other hand, he expounds his views rudely, with no attempt at grace or civility. His judgments of people□for example, the poet, the painter, and the Athenian lords□are all proven to be accurate. He tries to teach Timon that the Athenian lords are shallow, but his advice falls on deaf ears. Apemantus is depicted as vulgar, surly, and boorish; indeed, he is listed in the cast of characters as a *churlish* philosopher. Yet he holds a mirror up to others that faithfully reflects their natures.

In his first appearance, Apemantus declares that all men in Athens are scoundrels. This is the viewpoint Timon will adopt for himself after his friends have betrayed him. During the play's opening scene, Apemantus insults, in turn, the poet, the painter, and two Athenian lords. He takes particular aim at their deceitful flattery of Timon. Apemantus grudgingly joins the other guests at the banquet, complaining to Timon that they are all parasites. Before the meal begins, he offers a prayer to the gods, thanking them for making him a man who trusts no one. Throughout the dinner, he makes coarse and unflattering remarks, and he uses the masque as an opportunity to attack the thin veneer of manners that covers up rampant corruption. At the close of the banquet, when all the other guests have left, Apemantus warns Timon he is spending money on his false friends so lavishly that he'll soon be bankrupt. Timon dismisses his advice and refuses to listen to him.

Apemantus visits Timon in the wilderness and urges him to adopt another strategy than self-exile. He points out that while Timon is abasing himself in his cave, those who betrayed him are living in ease back in Athens. Apemantus recommends that Timon return to the city and take on the role of flatterer himself. He charges Timon with self-indulgence, saying that he has chosen exile out of vanity and false pride. He accuses him of excessive emotional ism, noting that Timon has swung from boundless generosity to contempt of all mankind. Their ex changes gradually descend from rational, well-articulated justifications of their respective positions to mere epithets: "Beast!" "Slave!" "Toad!" "Rogue, rogue, rogue!" (IV.iii.371-74).

Some commentators hold that Apemantus offers Timon a kind of redemption□a dispassionate, disinterested knowledge of the world. Others think he only makes

Timon's situation more unendurable. Perhaps Apemantus's cynicism is not formed on the basis of a lifetime's experience, but is rather an expression of his inherent crankiness. He is not a nobleman, and thus his criticism of people who are financially more successful than he is may be a case of sour grapes. Many commentators regard him as vain and egotistical, willfully proud of his ability to speak the truth in a way that offends all who hear him.

Bandits:

Having heard about Timon's discovery of a cache of gold, they connive to steal it. They present themselves to Timon as destitute soldiers, but he isn't fooled. Thrusting gold into their hands, Timon urges them to continue their life of crime□a suitable occupation in a world where "All that you meet are thieves" (IV.iii.446).

Caphis:

A servant who belongs to a money-lending senator, he is sent by his master to demand that Timon pay back the money he owes. Together with other usurers' servants, Caphis confronts Timon in II.ii. With this encounter, Timon begins to under stand how deeply in debt he is. Caphis and the other usurers' servants also trade jokes with Apemantus and the Fool; their crude humor focuses on vice and corruption in Athens.

Cupid:

Representing the god of love, he introduces the masque□an entertainment comprising instrumental music and dancing□during the banquet in I.ii.

Flaminius:

One of Timon's servants, he is sent to appeal to Lucullus on behalf of his master. Lucullus declines to help Timon and offers Flaminius a bribe if he will tell Timon he never saw Lucullus. Flaminius flings the coins in the man's face and unleashes a blistering denunciation of this treacherous friend.

Flavins:

See Steward. (The steward is almost always referred to by his title. Timon calls him Flavius only once, at I.ii. 157.)

Fool:

He is a jester whose employer is unnamed, though the Fool seems to imply that she (the Fool's employer) operates a house of prostitution. He appears in II.ii, in the company of Apemantus. They swap insults with a group of money-lenders' servants, and the Fool makes jokes about usurers, fools, and whore-masters.

Hortensius:

A usurer's servant, he appears at Timon's door in III.iv to demand repayment of a loan. Hortensius admits that he's ashamed to be doing this, because in the past his master benefitted from Timon's generosity.

Hostilius:

See Strangers

Isidore's Servant:

He appears in II.ii on behalf of his master, a money-lender, demanding that Timon pay back the money he has borrowed. With other usurers' servants, he insults Apemantus and the Fool when they arrive on the scene.

Jeweller:

In the play's first scene, he brings Timon a gemstone, in hopes that he'll buy it. The jeweller flatters Timon, telling him that the jewel's worth and beauty will be magnified if it's purchased and worn by such an eminent person.

Lords:

Several unnamed Athenian noblemen are guests at Timon's banquets. They are generally depicted as self-seeking parasites who fawn upon Timon, extol his virtues, and receive extravagant gifts from him. At the first banquet, several lords flatter Timon and remark on his lavish generosity. When Timon presents one lord with an expensive jewel and another with a fine horse, they fervently express their gratitude, swearing they will always hold him in the highest esteem. However, none of the lords comes to Timon's aid when he needs their help. At the second banquet, they apologize profusely for not sending Timon money when he asked for it, but their excuses ring hollow. Timor's prayer before the meal (III.vi.70-84) perplexes them. Even when he dumps basins of warm water over their heads and into their laps, they still seem bemused. Timon must be out of his mind, they say, for nothing else would explain his abrupt change of

behavior. They appear to be wholly unaware of□or perhaps they're unwilling to acknowledge□the effect of their violations of the bonds of friendship.

Lucilius:

One of Timon's servants, he provides an example of Timon's generous nature. An old Athenian comes to Timon's house in Li, complaining that Lucilius has been courting his daughter. When Timon offers to give his servant a handsome sum of money, the old man quickly withdraws his objections to the marriage of the two young people. Lucilius is properly grateful, promising Timon he will never forget the debt he owes him.

Lucius:

He is one of the noblemen who refuse to aid Timon when he appeals for their help. Lucius makes his first appearance in III.ii, talking with three other men who tell him they've heard that Timon is destitute. Lucius is skeptical of the rumors. When one of them says that Lucullus has denied Timon any assistance, Lucius appears shocked. Lucius acknowledges that he has been the recipient of Timon's generosity on several occasions, but he downplays the worth of the gifts: "money, plate, jewels, and such like trifles" (III.ii.21-22). Lucius declares that had Timon appealed to him rather than Lucullus, he would have found a true friend eager to serve him. At that moment, Servllius appears and offers him the chance to prove his words. Lucius lies, telling Servilius that while he'd like nothing better than to be able to come to the aid of his dear friend, all his money is tied up in investments and he has nothing left to give Timon. He sends Servilius off with false assurances of eternal good wishes for his noble and honorable friend Timon. Later, Lucius sends his own servant to the beleaguered Timon, demanding repayment of an old debt. Lucius may be one of the lords who attend Timon's first banquet, but he is not specified in that scene. At III.iv.Ill, Timon instructs his steward that Lucius is to be invited to the second, mock banquet.

Lucius's Servant:

He is sent by his master, allegedly one of Timon's closest friends, to recover money that Lucius has lent Timon. Lucius's servant's remarks at III.iv.21-13 indicate the mad spiral of debt Timon has accrued through generous gifts to his friends.

Lucullus:

He is one of Timon's false friends, a flatterer and an ungrateful recipient of Timon's generosity. When Timon's servant Flaminius arrives at his house, Lucullus's first thought is that he's bringing yet another gift from Timon. When Flaminius tells him why he's come, Lucullus pretends to treat him as an equal, a man of the world like himself. "This is no time to lend money," says Lucullus (III.i.41- 42), particularly when the potential borrower cannot provide as a pledge of repayment anything of greater value than

friendship. Lucullus tries to bribe Flaminius, offering him money if he'll report to Timon that he wasn't able to locate Lucullus. Flaminius throws the coins back in his face. Lucullus is one of the guests at the first banquet (I.ii). Timon gives instructions that he be invited to the second one, in Act III, so Lucullus may be one of the unnamed lords present on that occasion.

Masquers:

These are women who, costumed as mythical warriors, dance and play on lutes for the entertainment of Timon's guests at the banquet in I.ii.

Merchant:

He is one of four men, known only by their occupations, who appear at Timon's house in the play's opening scene. Unlike his companions, he never indicates what he has brought for Timon to purchase from him. In the few remarks allotted to him, the merchant flatters Timon and responds genially to the taunts of Apemantus.

Messengers:

There are three anonymous messengers in the play. One appears in Li, informing Timon that Ventidius is imprisoned and needs financial assistance. Another messenger appears briefly (I.i.241- 22) to announce the arrival of his master Alcibiades at Timon's house. In V.ii, a third messenger informs some senators that Alcibiades has gathered an impressive army to march on Athens; he also tells them that Alcibiades is appealing to Timon to come and witness his attack against the city.

Old Athenian:

An example of the avarice that has corrupted Athens, he complains to Timon that Lucilius□one of Timon's servants□has been courting his daughter. She is his sole heir, the old man says, and far above Lucilius in both virtue and fortune. Unimpressed by Lucilius's honesty and love for his daughter, he threatens to disinherit her if she marries without his consent. When Timon says he's willing to provide Lucilius with a sum equal to the daughter's inheritance, the old man quickly accepts the offer.

Page:

A young servant to an unnamed master, he appears briefly in II.ii. He carries letters addressed to Timon and Alcibiades, but since he is illiterate he asks Apemantus to read the inscriptions so he will know which letter to deliver to which man.

Painter:

With the poet, the jeweller, and the merchant, he appears at Timon's house seeking his patronage. The painter has completed a portrait of Timon that, in the opinion of the poet, is a flattering and vivid representation. In their discussion of esthetics in Li, the poet and painter reveal a decidedly mercenary view of art. In V.i, their obsession with money leads them to the place where Timon has gone into exile. Timon overhears them scheming about how to convince him to give them some of his gold. He promises to reward them handsomely if they rid him of some villainous men, and they quickly agree not understanding that he means themselves. Hurling a stone at the retreating painter's back and challenging him to change it into gold, Timon drives them both away.

Philotus:

As the servant of an Athenian money-lender, he joins others of his kind in hounding Timon for repayment of money loaned by their masters (III.iv).

Phrynia:

She and Timandra are Alcibiades' mistresses; they are with him when he encounters Timon in exile. At first Phrynia responds to Timon's insults with spirit: "Thy lips rot off (IV.iii.64). But when Timon offers gold to Alcibiades, the two women eagerly beg him to give them some, too. Though he calls them whores and sluts, and treats them contemptuously, they seem oblivious to his abuse, holding out their hands and swearing they'll "do anything for gold" (IV.iii.150).

Poet:

The poem he brings to Timon in Li foreshadows the action of the play and functions almost as a prologue. The poet describes it as an allegory showing the uncertainty of man's fate, through the tale of a once rich man who is deserted by his false friends when he loses all his money. The poet and his fellow artists criticize Timon's friends as mercenary and hypocritical, yet their own behavior is equally dishonorable. The poet and his friends put a price tag on everything that is beautiful and noble, literally ' setting the stage for the conduct of the Athenian lords and senators later in the play. In V.i, the poet and painter seek out Timon in the wilderness, having heard about his hoard of gold and hoping to get their hands on some of it. However, when he accuses them of coming to see him for that purpose, they stoutly deny it, saying their only intention was to do any service he might require of them. Timon rails at their hypocrisy and drives them away.

Sempronius:

He is one of the lords who refuses to help Timon. In III.iii, he complains to Timon's servant that he feels insulted to be the first friend Timon has appealed to. When the servant declares that three other men have already been asked and have refused to assist Timon, Sempronius abruptly reverses his argument, saying it was a mark of disrespect for Timon to leave him to the last. Sempronius points out that he was "the first man" (III.iii.16) ever to receive a gift from Timon and thus he should have been the first one Timon turned to. He claims that if Timon had done so, he would have given three times what was needed. It's likely□but not definitely stated□that Sempronius is one of the guests at the first banquet in I.ii. Timon specifically instructs that he be invited to the second one, and thus he may be one of the unnamed lords who attend that mock feast.

Senators:

Several unnamed Athenian senators appear throughout the play. They are portrayed as self -centered men, untrustworthy and hypocritical. Some of them lend money at exorbitant rates of interest, such as the senator Who, in II.i, sends his servant Caphis to demand that Timon repay a loan. This senator knows the extent of Timon's debts, and he hopes to get his money back before other usurers strip Timon of his remaining assets.

In III.v, Alcibiades appeals to three senators, asking for mercy in the case of a friend of his who has been charged with murder and is being tried by the Athenian Senate. His appeals are declined. The senators insist on upholding the letter of the law rather than its spirit. When Alcibiades reminds them of his many years of loyal service leading Athens' armies against her enemies, the senators banish him from Athens forever.

When Alcibiades gathers a force against them, some senators seek out Timon in the wilderness, beginning him to return to Athens and lead the defense of the city. They entreat Timon to forgive the mistreatment he suffered at their hands, and they offer him "heaps and sums of love and wealth" (V.i.152) to cover up, and make him forget, the wrongs inflicted on him. At first Timon pretends to be moved by their plight, then he says he doesn't care whether the city is sacked and destroyed. The senators' spirits rise, however, when Timon seems to change his mind. He promises to do some kindness for them, then he describes the nature of this "kindness": he says he'll delay cutting down a nearby tree until every Athenian who cares to come and hang himself on that tree has a chance to do so. In the play's final scene, a group of senators appears on the city walls. They plead with Alcibiades to show mercy toward Athens and its citizens. They tell him that the senators who earlier treated him so harshly are no longer alive. They reportedly died of humiliation, ashamed that they weren't clever or deceitful enough to have prevented Alcibiades from mounting an attack on the city. One senator invites Alcibiades to enter the city with his troops and kill one-tenth of its population, if that will satisfy his anger against Athens. Another proposes that he kill only those who have personally

offended him. Alcibiades agrees to enter peacefully and take his revenge only on those who have wronged him or Timon.

Servants:

Several unnamed servants appear throughout the play. Some are in the service of various unspecified noblemen and senators; their usual function is to announce someone's arrival. Others are usurers' servants; specified servants in this category include Caphis, Hortensius, Philotus, Titus, Isidore's Servant, Lucius's Servant, and Varro's Servants. Timon has three unnamed servants who gather with the steward in IV.ii, lamenting the downfall of their master and expressing their contempt of his false friends. Timon's Third Servant also appears in III.iii, appealing to Sempronius on behalf of Timon; when Sempronius turns him down, the Third Servant comments heatedly on the wickedness of Timon's false friends. See also Flaminius, Lucilius, and Servilius□other servants of Timon.

Servilius:

One of Timon's servants, he is sent to ask Lucius if he will lend Timon some money. When Lucius declines to help, Servilius goes away meekly. Later, in III.iv, Servilius tries to persuade the usurers' servants to leave and come back later, for Timon is presently too agitated to listen to their demands.

Soldier:

Sent by Alcibiades to solicit Timon's presence when the army attacks Athens, he stumbles upon Timon's grave. Part of the tombstone epitaph is written in a language the soldier doesn't understand, so he makes an imprint of the epitaph with hot wax and carries it back to Alcibiades.

Steward:

The steward is depicted as a model of honesty and loyalty. He manages Timon's household, super vises the other servants, and keeps track of Timon's finances: The steward provides a unique perspective on the play's central character through his expressed belief in Timon's capacity for goodness and nobility of spirit. Despite his best efforts, he is unable to prevent Timon's downfall.

In I.ii, the steward tries to stop Timon from showering gifts on his friends. When Timon is besieged by his creditors' servants in II.ii, he accuses the steward of not keeping him informed about the state of his finances. The steward tells him that he's tried to do so on many occasions but Timon wouldn't listen to him. Timon is astounded to learn that he is virtually bankrupt, all his vast estate either sold or forfeited to pay off debts. This is the result of extravagant generosity, the steward reminds Timon□ who begs him to cease

his sermonizing. When Timon orders the steward to go and ask the senators to lend him more money, the steward replies that he's already appealed to them, but they were unwilling to help. Urging the steward not to be downhearted, Timon sends him to Ventidius instead.

When Timon's friends have all deserted him and he leaves Athens in a rage, the steward remains loyal and compassionate. In IV.ii, he generously distributes the last of his own money among Timon's servants and offers a sympathetic view of what has happened: "Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart, / Undone by goodness" (IV.ii.37-38). The steward visits Timon in the wilderness, offering him understanding and kindness. Timon is moved to declare him the world's only honest man, but then he becomes suspicious that the steward□like the visitors who have come before him□is offering his services because he expects to be richly rewarded. The steward says that he is motivated only by love and his sense of duty. Timon gives him some gold, commanding him to leave and henceforth despise all men. The steward begs to be allowed to "stay and comfort" his master (IV.iii.534), but when Timon insists, he goes away. The steward's final appearance in the play is in V.i, when he leads two Athenian senators to Timon's cave so they can attempt to persuade him to return to the city. It's clear to the steward that Timon's hatred cannot be changed, and he begs the senators to "Trouble him no further" (V.i.213).

Faithful and understanding to the end, the steward is incorruptible. He acts solely in Timon's interest, never his own. When Timon wrongly accuses him of mismanagement, even when he curses him, the steward remains stoical. He provides evidence of Timon's noble nature and helps demonstrate that his master was far more fortunate in his servants than in his friends.

On one occasion, Timon addresses his steward as Flavius (I.ii. 157). Although the First Folio text uses the speech-prefix "Steward)" throughout, some modern editions insert "Flavius" instead.

Strangers:

These are three men□one of them designated as Hostilius□who do not know Timon personally but are interested in him as an eminent public figure. They pass on rumors of Timon's financial ruin to Lucius in III.ii and observe his response to Timon's servant Servilius. After Lucius and the servant have left, they comment on Lucius's hypocrisy and the treachery he has displayed toward his generous benefactor. One stranger remarks on Timon's "noble mind" and "illustrious virtue" (III.ii.80); such praise from a man with no personal stake in Timon's fate is an indication of the reputation Timon enjoyed in Athens before his downfall.

Timandra:

She .and Phrynia are Alcibiades' mistresses; they are with him when he unexpectedly meets Timon in the wilderness. When Timon tells Timandra he hopes she will continue

her career as a prostitute □and thus continue infecting young men with venereal diseases□she tells him to go hang himself. However, when she and Phrynia realize that Timon has a hoard of gold, they grovel and abase themselves, saying they'll gladly hear more of his advice as long as it's accompanied by more money.

Timon:

Historically, Timon the Misanthrope lived in the fifth century B.C. According to Greek historians, he withdrew from the world and lived in solitude after he discovered his friends were deceitful. In classical literature, he is the standard symbol for misanthropy□hatred or distrust of all mankind.

In *Timon of Athens,* the principal character's background is a mystery. Of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Timon is the most alone. He has no wife or child, parents or siblings. In the first half of the play he appears to be a private citizen, yet there are suggestions later□in V.i, when the senators appeal to him to lead the defense of Athens against Alcibiades□that Timon may be a military commander or political statesman. It's not clear if he is a young man or middle-aged. There is no explanation of the source of his wealth, whether it was earned or inherited.

Timon seems to be the most extravagant man in Athens. The poet, the painter, the jeweller, and the merchant all attest to his generous patronage; not only has he purchased their poems, paintings and gems, it would appear that he has bought them at prices far beyond their real value. When Timon learns that his friend Ventidius is in debtors' prison, he immediately offers to "pay the debt, and free him" (I.i.104). Timon endows his servant Lucullus with money to make him eligible for marriage and bestows lavish gifts on his friends, while entertaining them luxuriously. When Ventidius, released from prison, offers to pay back the money, Timon refuses. He insists that he "gave it freely" (I.ii.10) and expects nothing in return. Later, during the banquet scene, Timon says that it gives him great pleasure to share his wealth with his friends, for "We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends?" (I.ii. 101-3). Timon weeps for joy as he describes a circle of friends who regard each other as brothers and believe that whatever one individual possesses is the joint property of all.

Timon's idealistic vision and his seemingly boundless generosity can be looked at in several ways. Perhaps they are evidence of a noble, high -minded nature. They may also be signs of innocence or naivete. Some commentators see stubbornness and pride in Timon's refusal to listen to the warnings of his steward and Apemantus. Others think he is reckless; they emphasize Timon's irresponsible use of his fortune. Most agree that he is foolish to believe his friends' declarations of love and esteem.

Timon is shocked when he learns that he has spent all his fortune. He sends appeals to various friends, serenely confident that they'll help him out of his financial straits. He is stunned when they refuse. His astonishment may be an indication of his unworldliness, or it may suggest that he lacks basic common sense. Timon's disillusionment brings a

complete reversal in his attitude: from pursuing his role as the most benevolent man in Athens, he becomes a misanthrope.

The first sign of his excessive hatred occurs in the prayer he offers up before the mock banquet. He begins with a plea for the reformation of society, moves to despair when he contemplates the idea that men are capable of reform, and closes with a wish for the destruction of humanity. Instead of the lavish feast Timon's guests expected, they find nothing but warm water when the dishes in front of them are uncovered. Timon hurls a flood of abuse at their heads "detested parasites . . . wolves . . . fools of fortune" (III.vi.94-96)along with the water in the basins. From this moment until his death, only the dark side of Timon's soul is evident.

In self-imposed exile, his bitterness and desolation are apparent. He repeatedly curses mankind in general and each of the persons, in particular, who present themselves to him near his cave in the wilderness. While digging for roots to eat, he discovers a hoard of gold, which he uses to humiliate his visitors. He expresses a wish to see Alcibiades damnedbut only after he has carried out the destruction of Athens. He taunts Alcibiades's mistresses and plays on their greed. He calls Apemantus a slave and a dog, saying that he isn't "clean enough to spit upon" (IV.iii.359). Timon throws a stone at Apemantus's head, vowing that he values the stone more than Apemantus's life. He makes fools of the bandits who try to trick him, sending them off to "rob one another" and "cut throats" (IV.iii.445). When his faithful steward appears and offers to stay with him, Timon scorns the offer, refusing to be comforted or consoled. He seems unwilling to admit that there is "one honest man" in the world (IV.iii.497), but eventually he does so. Timon offers the senators who appeal to him for help a nearby olive tree on which, he says, Athenians are welcome to come and hang themselves.

Timon's own death is unexplained. He is never seen again after he is visited by the Athenian senators in V.i. During that encounter, he says he has been composing his epitaphwhich somehow becomes etched into his gravestone and is discovered by one of Alcibiades's soldiers. Some commentators have suggested that Timon kills himself, but others deny there is any evidence to support the idea of suicide. On at least one occasion Timon expresses a longing for the emptiness of death and nothingness: he alludes to his body resting in a grave that is daily washed over by the sea (V.i.215- 18). Perhaps his sojourn in the wilderness leads to healing and redemption. Or it may be that he dies with his heart still full of hatred.

It's debatable whether Timon's hatred is justified. Certainly he was terribly wronged by people he trusted and on whose friendship he relied. But to hate and denounce everyone because some men have proved false generally indicates a lack of judgment or discrimination. Perhaps his compassion for othersas attested to by the steward, Timon's servants, and Alcibiadesmakes him too vulnerable, unable to react to disappointment in any other way. He seems to have no ability to endure misfortune or modify his perspective on life on the basis of his experiences. He can only swing wildly from one extremean idealistic vision of human fellowshipto the othercontempt for all mankind.

Titus:

A usurer's servant, he is one of several men in III.iv who crowd around the door of Timon's house, waiting in vain to receive the money Timon owes their masters.

Varro's Servants:

They are sent by their master, an Athenian money-lender, to demand that Timon repay a loan. In II.ii, one of Varro's servants appears on his behalf; in Ill.iv, two of Varro's servants hound Timon.

Ventidius:

One of Timon's friends and a recipient of his generosity, Ventidius turns his back on Timon when he has an opportunity to return the favor. In the beginning of the play, Ventidius is imprisoned because he cannot pay a debt, and he sends a messenger to Timon asking for help. Timon immediately declares his willingness to "pay the debt, and free him" (Li. 103). Ventidius comes to the banquet at Timon's house in I.ii, bringing news that his father has died, and thus he has come into his inheritance. He thanks Timon for getting him out of prison and offers to repay the money Timon put up for him; Timon refuses, assuring Ventidius that it was a gift, not a loan. When Timon realizes the extent of his own debts, he sends his steward to Ventidius, confident that the man who gained his freedom through Timon's generosity will aid him now. However, it is reported in III.iii that Ventidius has been as false as Timon's other friends. Ventidius may be one of the unnamed lords who attend Timon's second banquet.

Further Study

Charney, Maurice. *"Timon of Athens."* In *All of Shakespeare,* 309-18. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

From a book written specifically for students, this chapter on *Timon* covers several aspects of the play and emphasizes its satiric elements. In addition to an extended evaluation of Timon as a less than tragic figure, Charney comments on the character of the steward and discusses at length the dramatic function of the poet and the painter, whom he regards as satirical figures.

Farley-Hills, David. "Anger's Privilege: *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear."* In *Shakespeare and the Rival Playwrights, 1600-1606,* 166-206. London: Routledge, 1990.

Farley-Hills views *Timon of Athens* as a satire on mankind's obsession with wealth and materialism. In this kind of drama, he asserts, each character has a symbolic role rather than an individual personality. It is Farley-Hills's opinion that "Of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Timon is the least open to psychological interpretation."

Handelman, Susan. *"Timon of Athens:* The Rage of Disillusion." *American Imago* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 45-68.

Handelman considers various implications of the limited role of women in *Timon of Athens.* "There is no feminine representative of goodness and constancy" as in other Shakespearean tragedies, she points out; the only women in the play are the prostitutes who accompany Alcibiades and the performers in the masque. Handelman also evaluates Timon, describing him as self-absorbed and psychologically incapable of accepting loss.

Knights, L. C. *"Timon of Athens."* In *The Morality of Art,* edited by D. W. Jefferson, 1-17. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

Knights focuses on Timon as a man with no genuine means of upholding the egotistical, idealized view he has of himself. Timon has set himself above others through lavish generosity, Knights asserts, and when the artificial props or supports of high self-esteem are rudely withdrawn, Timon is left with nothing. Knights concludes that not only does Timon fail to gain self-knowledge, he never considers the possibility that he contributed to his downfall.

Mellamphy, Ninian. "Wormwood in the Wood Outside Athens: *Timon* and the Problem for the Audience." In *"Bad" Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Can on,* edited by Maurice Charney, 166-75. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988.

Mellamphy focuses on audience response to a 1983 Canadian production of *Timon.* The Timon in this production was a naive idealist, brought down by his own

stubbornness and pride. Alcibiades was played as a pragmatist who is able to compromise, as Timon cannot.

Nuttall, A.D. "Timon Says Grace: The Parodic Eucharist." In *Timon of Athens,* 113-35. Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Nuttall looks closely at the nature of Timon's generosity. He asserts that while Timon gives freely and expects nothing in return, his shock when he realizes his friends have taken him at his weird represents an innocence that "is indeed a kind of stupidity." Additionally, Nuttall provides an extended comparison between the prayers before meals made by Apemantus (I.ii.62-71) and Timon (III.vi.70-84).

Oliver, H. J. Introduction to *Timon of Athens,* by William Shakespeare, xiii-lii. London: Methuen, 1959.

Oliver provides lengthy discussions of Timon, Apemantus, Alcibiades, and the steward. In his view, Timon is an essentially noble man, but prone to misjudgments and exaggerated emotions, and lacking the "depth or profundity" that would qualify him as a great tragic hero. Oliver also offers extended commentary on whether another dramatist collaborated with Shakespeare in writing *Timon of Athens* and whether the play was left unfinished.

Pasco, Richard. "Timon of Athens." In *Players of Shakespeare,* edited by Philip Brockbank, 129-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

A British actor with wide experience in Shakespearean roles, Pasco treats the character of Timon from his perspective of playing the part in a 1980 Royal Shakespeare Company production. Among the problems Pasco encountered were how to justify the ferocity of Timon's hatred of mankind and how to prevent Act IV, scene iii from degenerating into "one long shouting match between Timon and his visitors." Pasco insists that Timon grows and matures as a character and that he passes beyond misanthropy to a quiet acceptance of death.

Walker, Lewis. *"Timon of Athens* and the Morality Tradition." *Shakespeare Studies* XII (1979): 159-77.

Walker looks at *Timon of Athens* in terms of medieval English morality plays, which featured allegorical rather than naturalistic characters. From Walker's perspective, Timon and Apemantus bear a strong resemblance to symbolic figures in these earlier plays. Timon's progress through a sinful world to eventual repentance, Walker asserts, reflects similar journeys by such allegorical figures as Mankind and Everyman.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
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- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
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- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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