



Timon of Athens

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Places Discussed

Timon's house. Large, richly appointed abode in Athens in which Timon's wealth and good nature win him many false friends and hangers-on, as his vast hall becomes the site of a procession of characters who prey upon his generosity. Loud music, masques, great banquets, and Timon's bestowal of lavish gifts on guests are customary. William Shakespeare's purpose here is to reveal through the setting and ceremonious or formal modes of conduct how the prodigal and ostentatious Timon is exploited. The hall itself is important for the play's second banquet scene, in which Timon somberly parodies religion in his bitter misanthropy by serving lukewarm water and stones to his fellow senators.

Cave. Place near the seashore where Timon lives after rejecting Athens. The senate (a pure fiction on the part of Shakespeare who clearly was thinking of Rome), Lucullus's home, and Sempronius's house are minor settings in short and relatively minor scenes; they take a secondary position to the cave where Timon is alone. Timon's first great soliloquy comes as he looks back at the walls of Athens and ferociously condemns the city and its inhabitants to total ruin.

The surrounding woods are within an otherwise barren coast that is filled with strange noises, wild beasts, and birds of prey. The extreme harshness of this setting accords with the mental and emotional state of Timon, whose character is revealed by misfortune. Starved and ragged, he has to dig for edible roots to survive. However, within the cave he discovers gold that he gives away as his sign of abnegation. His end comes when he disappears into the cave; however, Shakespeare does not reveal whether his death is by suicide or natural causes.

Bibliography:

Ellis-Fermor, Una. "Timon of Athens: An Unfinished Play." *The Review of English Studies* 18, no. 71 (July, 1942): 270-283. Discusses the controversy over the authorship of the play. Concludes that it is likely Shakespeare's work alone and that it is an unfinished play.

Knight, G. Wilson. "The Pilgrimage of Hate: An Essay on Timon of Athens." In *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. Rev. ed. New York: Methuen, 1949. Interprets Timon as a noble figure, abused by a harsh world. Sees the play as a great tragedy.

Nowottny, Winifred M. T. "Acts IV and V of *Timon of Athens*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Autumn, 1959): 493-497. Interprets the play in a religious context. Sees the substitution of secular myths for Christian ones in the play.

Nuttall, A. D. *Timon of Athens*. Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. Provides a stage history, an account of the critical reception to the play, and a sustained analysis.

Soellner, Rolf. *Timon of Athens*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979. Critical analysis with reference to dramatic and cultural contexts. Discusses the merits of the play.

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