

Timon of Athens

SYNOPSIS

The Life of Timon of Athens

(a collaboration between Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton)

Timon, a rich Athenian, is well-known for his generosity. When the play opens, people are gathering outside his house to give him flattering presents or ask him to help them. They are all saying how good and generous he is, which is proved when he appears and pays a friend's debts to free him from prison and gives money to a servant to allow him to marry. Only the cynical philosopher Apemantus is unsure whether all Timon's friends are really sincere.

The young general Alcibiades is warmly welcomed by Timon, who invites him and other friends to a banquet, where more expensive presents are given. However, Timon's steward Flavius realizes — as his master does not — that Timon's money is running out. The people Timon owes money to start to ask for payment, so one by one Timon asks his friends to help. All of them refuse. Timon invites his friends to a second banquet, where he gives them water to drink and stones to eat.

Meanwhile Alcibiades has asked the Senate not to execute one of his soldiers, who has committed a murder. They angrily banish him from Athens. Outside the town he meets Timon, who has gone to live as a hermit outside Athens, complaining about human nature. One day when Timon is digging for roots he finds gold. He gives some of it to Alcibiades, who needs money to pay the army he has raised to attack Athens and for his two whores, Timandra and Phrynia. Timon also gives some to a group of bandits, and offers some to his steward Flavius.

When the people in Athens hear about this, more false friends come out to flatter him, but Timon drives them away, and refuses to listen to the senators who want him to help them against Alcibiades. Alcibiades wins his war against the Athenian senators, at which point the news reaches the city that Timon is dead.

Media:

DVD:

Timon of Athens (BBC TV Shakespeare 1981) dir. Jonathan Miller, Timon: Jonathan Pryce

CD Audio:

Timon of Athens (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]