



## The Representation of Morality and Its Consequences in Shakespeare's Timon of Athens

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**Abstract.** *Literary works are not only created for entertainment, but also to describe human life, which is full of values and moral issues. William Shakespeare's play 'Timon of Athens', which shows how a person is tested when betrayed by wealth, power, and friendship. This study aims to examine how morality is depicted in the play using Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of 'master morality' and 'slave morality'. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method by analysing excerpts from the dialogue in the play "Timon of Athens" that demonstrate moral values. The results show that this play mostly depicts slave morality (65%), as Timon transforms from a kind and proud figure into someone filled with hatred and resentment after being betrayed. Meanwhile, master morality (35%) appears at the beginning of the story when he is still strong, confident, and generous. According to Nietzsche, master morality reflects strength, pride, independence, and the ability to create one's own values, while slave morality emerges from weakness, suffering, and resentment as a reaction to disappointment or oppression. Overall, Timon of Athens illustrates how life changes and deep betrayal can cause a shift from the confidence and generosity of master morality to the bitterness and hatred found in slave morality.*

**Keywords:** *Friedrich Nietzsche; Master Morality; Morality; Slave Morality; Timon of Athens.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In general, literary works are human experiences, feelings, and thoughts expressed in written form or orally in a unique and beautiful style of language that serves to stir the hearts of literature lovers. Alex Clark (2025), states literature doesn't just reflect society; it shapes the emotional architecture of how we live in it. Syamsul (2015), states Literature is written material such as poetry, prose, drama and essays, mainly work of imagination distinguished by excellence in style and expression and issues of widespread or enduring interest. As a culture, literary works are never static; literature will continue to evolve with the times and be influenced by the economic, social, political, and cultural pressures in which it is born. Therefore, literary works from a particular era can be seen as a reflection of human civilisation at that time, as well as human imaginative thinking from the realities of life. For example, contemporary literature, which developed in the early 20th century to the present, seeks to transcend the conditions of its time by absorbing the complexities of society, technological advances, and the dynamics of social change. In addition, literature itself appears in various genres, such as poetry, prose, and drama. Each genre has its own distinctive form in conveying deep values and meanings, conflicts, or ambitions, and is used as a bridge connecting individual experiences with the realities of life.

Drama is one type of literature whereby it tells or conveys a story through actions and dialogue carried out by an audience, either on or online. The use of the word drama itself is taken from the Greek language 'draomai,' where it simply means 'to do' or 'perform.' Drama studies the human conflicts and feelings and is for entertainment and inciting thought. According to Elam (2021), drama represents human behavior and emotions through the interplay of dialogue and action, allowing audiences to witness social realities and moral dilemmas in a performative form. Meanwhile, Luo (2024), states drama is a method that involve event shoe or conflict through dialogue and act to purpose expression and language learning. Based on those perspectives, it can be established that drama is one piece of literature that comes from the human thoughts and creativity and manifested through the form of performance on the stage. Character, dialogue, setting, plot, theme, conflict, and moral message are the principal elements employed within the drama and together form an intriguing story. Apart from that, there are other types of drama, i.e., the tragedies that arouse issues of sorrow; the comedies where it portrays humor and happiness; the tragicomedy where it has serious and humorous. aspects; overreacts feelings too much; and the farces where it employs absurdity and body humor.

Morality is frequently characterized as a set of principles and criteria of human behavior that determine whether an act is right or wrong. Rosalina (2023) mentions that morality acts as a framework for people to distinguish between right and wrong actions. The word morality comes from the Latin expressions 'more' and 'mores', which mean good behavior, character, and appropriate conduct. It emphasizes human actions and the behavior of individuals. Each contributes to a person's moral behavior. In other words, ethics is not just a set of rules but a reflection of how people can recognize moral values in life. In his (1887) work "On The Genealogy of Morality," Friederich Nietzsche differentiates between two forms of pure morality: Master Morality, which comes from the individual and promotes personal strength and pride. The second idea is Slave Morality, characterized by values arising from feelings of suffering, oppression, and betrayal. Master Morality can be seen as originating from a person's own strength and desire. Meanwhile, Slave Morality signifies a responsive ethical stance, originating from those who perceive themselves as wronged or harmed and aim to take revenge.

William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* is a play rich in social, philosophical, and ethical criticism, centered on the life of Timon, a wealthy Athenian nobleman renowned for his generosity. According too Hershnow (2022), *Timon of Athens* imagery money as a power that reverse original values. He frequently throws lavish parties, gives out expensive gifts, and squanders his wealth to gain praise and appear generous. However, his excessive generosity,

unbalanced by wise management of his wealth and blinded by friendships rooted in material possessions, ultimately leads to his downfall. When his fortune disappears, Timon finds that his supposedly loyal friends have abandoned and betrayed him, plunging him into deep disappointment. This personal downfall transforms him from a respected nobleman into a recluse, someone who despises humanity and withdraws into isolation, filled with disgust for the world. Arum (2022), how that values formed or tested as circumstances change. Thus, Shakespeare depicts not only an individual tragedy but also a broader critique of human greed, the fragile relationships built on wealth, and the dangers of a consumerist lifestyle. Through *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare depicts how a person's morals are tested when wealth, friendship, and power collide in uncertain situations. Therefore, viewing this play through Nietzsche's perspective on masterslave morality is important, as it can help us understand how traits such as pride, generosity, envy, and hatred within Timon can influence the way humans behave and act. In this sense, Shakespeare's work remains a timeless reflection on human morality and the impact of misguided values.

The morals contained in Shakespeare's play *Timon of Athens* are not mere decoration in the script, but rather profound meanings about human behavior, revealing the greatness and depravity inherent in human nature. Friedrich Nietzsche (1887) distinguished morality into two ideal types: Master Morality, which is based on self-satisfaction and pride, and Slave Morality, which is based on resentment resulting from the pain of betrayal and injury. In *Timon of Athens*, these two types of morality can be found very clearly, both explicitly and implicitly, in the main character himself, whose fall from a generous nobleman to a manhater illustrates slave morality, as Timon harbors resentment and hatred toward those who were once very kind to him but who have now, having lost all their wealth, disappeared from his life. One of the dialogues in Act I, Scene 2 depicts the peak of Timon's generosity. However, Shakespeare inserts an ironic fact, namely that Timon's good deeds are actually fragile and ultimately pave the way for his destruction, a condition interpreted by experts as psychological misanthropy and moral downfall in line with research from Metzger (2023) and Jowett (2024).

The following is an example of dialogue from the play *Timon of Athens*, Act 1, Scene 2

Ventidius : “Then, as in grateful virtue I am bound  
To your free heart, I do return those talents,  
Doubled with thanks and service,  
from whose help I derived liberty.”

Timon : “ O, by no means, Honest Ventidius;  
you mistake my love: I gave it freely ever;  
and there's none Can truly say he gives,  
if hereceives...”

Ventidius : “A noble spirit!”

Timon : “Nay, my lords, Ceremony was but devised at  
first To set a gloss on faint deeds...”

The conversation between Timon and Ventidius reveals the moral character of Timon at the height of his wealth and generosity. This scene depicts Timon as a noble and generous man who takes pride in giving sincerely without expecting anything in return. When Ventidius offers to repay him, Timon refuses, emphasising that true generosity does not require reciprocity: “I gave it freely ever” This exemplifies Master Morality. However, this moment also marks Timon's downfall, as his unrestrained generosity blinds him to human nature. From Friedrich Nietzsche's perspective on morality, Timon's behaviour reflects what Nietzsche calls ‘master morality,’ in which values such as humility, selflessness, and compassion are idealised. Timon's pride in squandering his wealth becomes his weakness: his kindness does not come from strength, but from dependence on others' recognition of his kindness.

There have been many previous studies discussing Nietzsche’s theory of morality from different perspectives. Honda (2020), his article about “Differentiating Nietzsche's moralities: Individual strength versus reactive resentment” examines the distinction between master and slave morality, showing how master morality is rooted in individual strength and pride, while slave morality emerges from feelings of resentment and weakness. Waqar (2021), his article “Ressentiment and the rise of reactive virtues: An analysis of envy, hatred, and social morality in Nietzsche” expands this by analysing Nietzsche’s idea of resentment, arguing that reactive emotions such as envy and hatred give rise to values like humility and compassion, which dominate social morality. Wang (2022), his article about “Critique of the herd: Conformity, individuality, and the necessity of value revaluation” focuses on Nietzsche’s critique of the herd mentality, explaining how conformity suppresses individuality and creativity, and why a revaluation of values is necessary for human flourishing. Evans (2023), his article about “The destructive consequences of slave morality: Limiting vitality and the denial of life” highlights the destructive consequences of slave morality, stressing how it limits vitality and produces a morality that denies life rather than affirms it. Meanwhile, Kamaralli (2024), her article about “Beyond traditional ethics: The Übermensch and the creation of new values in modern contexts” provides a contemporary interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought by connecting the concept of the “Übermensch” with modern contexts, suggesting that the creation of new values beyond traditional morality remains essential in addressing ethical challenges today. Meredith (2020), and his article “The Radical Goals of

Slave Morality in Nietzsche's on the Genealogy of Morality" explaining Nietzsche's theory as a political review and Shafiq (2020), "Theme of Betrayal: A Study in Selected Plays by William Shakespeare" explaining various works by Shakespeare but not specifically one play. Timon of Athens is a play that demonstrates how our compassion must align with our rationality. This play has profound meaning, unlike previous studies on Timon of Athens, which have primarily focused on Timon's character, with some also touching on his withdrawal to a remote location to escape society. However, no research has focused on the play's morality. Focusing our research on the morality in Timon of Athens reveals that the play's moral, often dismissed as mere decoration to prevent narrative lacunae, actually has a more complex meaning upon closer examination.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Friedrich Nietzsche distinguished between two types of morality: master morality and slave morality (1887). Master morality defines "good" as courage, strength, and pride, while "evil" is simply the opposite of those qualities. Conversely, slave morality developed from the weak and those who felt betrayed through neglect and isolation, inverting values so that humility, compassion, and obedience are considered good, while strength and domination are seen as evil. Master morality arises from the strong, who see goodness in strength, courage, and nobility, while weakness is simply seen as ordinary. In contrast, slave morality develops from the weak and oppressed, who elevate humility, patience, and meekness as virtues. Nietzsche's moral framework illustrates that the journey highlights the broader human conflict between upholding values and giving in to hatred, a theme also emphasized by Stewart-Kroecker (2024). This perspective is widely reexamined in contemporary studies; for example, Gemes (2024) asserts that "Nietzsche knew none of these were literally slaves. He calls it a slave revolt because the propagators of that revolt preached what he takes to be slavish values, including humility, compassion, obedience, and lack of egoism." This shows that the term "slave" in Nietzsche's theory is metaphorical and emphasizes a life-constraining value orientation. Here is an example of the master and slave morality theory that will be used in another drama for a brief analysis:

### **Master Morality**

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Master Morality is a way of thinking that arises from strong and confident individuals who create their own values. For them, what is considered good is strength, courage, and pride, while weakness and submission are seen as bad. People with master morality do not depend on external rules or judgments; instead, they live according

to their own will and capabilities. They view life as an opportunity to express their power and to create values that reflect human greatness.

As example in the drama *Antigone* Act I

Creon : “No ruler should give way to a woman”; we must be stronger than they, for this is our law.”

Antigone : “ Your law is not above the law of the gods; justice eternal cannot be silenced by decree.”

Creon : “strength and authority define what is right; the weak complain, but power preserves the state.”

Antigone : “then call me weak, yet I will honor the dead; your pride may rule the living, but no

In context, Creon's statement “No ruler should give way to a woman” shows his view that power and strength are the main measures of all matters. In the play *Antigone*, Creon believes that as king, he must be in complete control and must not submit to anyone, especially women like Antigone, because, according to him, that would mean weakness. This view is in line with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of Master Morality, which is the view that the strong, brave, and powerful are considered ‘good,’ while the weak and submissive are considered “bad”. Creon embodies the type of person with master morality: he believes that strength and authority determine truth. However, Antigone opposes him with the belief that God's law and justice are higher than human law. From this, it can be seen that their conflict is not only about law, but also about the values of power and pride versus morality and humanity.

### **Slave Morality**

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, “slave morality” arises from people who feel oppressed or powerless. For them, virtues such as humility, compassion, patience, and obedience are considered good, while power, pride, and courage are often viewed as bad. People with this morality usually follow existing rules or values such as religious teachings or social norms because they do not create their own values. Slave morality makes weakness and suffering appear to be virtues, as if being weak and obedient are signs of being righteous and moral.

As example in drama *Julius Caesar* Act I, Scene II

Cassius : “ why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world like a colossus, and we pretty men walk under his huge legs and peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves.”

Brutus : “That you do love me, I am nothing jealous; What you would work me to, I have some aim: How I have thought

of this and of these times, I shall recount hereafter; for  
this present, I would not, so with love I might entreat you,  
Be any further moved.”

Cassius: “That you do love me, I am nothing jealous; What you  
would work me to, I have some aim.”

Brutus : “Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius, That you  
would have me seek into myself For that which is not in  
me?”

In context, Cassius' statement, “Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world like a colossus, and we petty men walk under his huge legs and peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves,” shows his envy and hatred of Caesar's power. Cassius feels that he and others are small and insignificant under the shadow of Caesar's power, giving rise to a desire to resist and retaliate. This attitude reflects Friedrich Nietzsche's “Slave Morality” in which the weak judge strength and power as something “evil” and consider resistance against the strong as something “good.” Meanwhile, Brutus' cautious attitude shows an inner conflict between loyalty and doubt. He hesitates to act because he feels guilty and afraid of making mistakes. This dialogue between Cassius and Brutus illustrates how envy and hatred of power can turn into moral justification for rebellion, which is a key feature of slave morality.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze and understand the representation of morality in William Shakespeare's play, *Timon of Athens*, thru Friederich's Theory of Morality. This approach was chosen because this research focuses on understanding or explaining how morality is depicted in *Timon of Athens*, allowing readers to assess and learn from this play. Qualitative research requires close engagement with empirical data and dynamic interaction between theory and evidence to generate new knowledge that is contextually meaningful. Aspers & Corte (2021). The primary data in this study were taken from the text of the play script, specifically the monologs and dialogs between characters that reflect the moral values of slaves and masters. The monologs and dialogs in the play script were analyzed to identify the morality contained within them. Next, it will be categorized based on Friederich's (1887) theory of morality, which distinguishes two forms of pure morality. The first is Master morality, which is based on strength and the desire to maintain power from destruction. This morality judges actions based on their ability to strengthen life and power, and values virtues such as courage, glory, and goodness that arise from a strong position. The second is slave

morality, which emerges from conditions of oppression and seeks to explain and preserve those conditions through values such as humility, gentleness, and perseverance. Data collection techniques were carried out through a review of previous research, which involved understanding and identifying parts of the text relevant to the research problem. Thus, the data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method to find representations of morality in the work. By using this methodology, this research is expected to provide an understanding of the representation of morality in the play *Timon of Athens* and its relevance to human values.

#### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

##### Results

The morality in the play *Timon of Athens* shows a major change in the way of thinking and attitude of the main character, Timon. Shakespeare portrays morality not as a fixed rule, but as an inner conflict between pride and disappointment, which aligns with Friedrich Nietzsche's view of two types of morality: master morality and slave morality. At the beginning of the story, Timon is portrayed as generous and self-confident. He believes that selfless giving is a form of true kindness. However, when his wealth is depleted and his friends abandon him, Timon's attitude changes drastically. He becomes hateful and loses his trust in humanity. This change demonstrates how life's circumstances can transform someone from a generous person to a vengeful one. Shakespeare shows how easily a person's moral values can collapse when faced with devotion and loss. This play does not present a purely good or evil character, but rather humans trapped in moral dilemmas influenced by wealth and self-validation. In this way, *Timon of Athens* becomes a reflection of the human struggle between goodness and hatred, in accordance with Nietzsche's idea of morality. The following section analyzes *Timon of Athens* using Nietzsche's two divisions of Morality. This reveals how these theoretical aspects are embedded in the play's text and character interactions.

**Table 1.** Kind of Morality Nietzsche.

Morality Nietzsche Type	Number	Percentage
Master Morality	7	35%
Slave Morality	13	65%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

##### Discussions

##### *Master Morality*

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Master Morality comes from people who are strong, confident, and able to decide what is right for themselves. They believe that being brave, powerful, and proud is good, while being weak or submissive is not. People with this kind of

morality don't rely on others to tell them what to do they live by their own strength and choices. They see life as a chance to show their character and create values that highlight the best of being human.

As in the example below, taken from a scene in the play *Timon of Athens* Act I, Scene II

Apemantus : "O, they eat lords; so they come by great bellies."

Timon : "That's a lascivious apprehension."

Apemantus : "So thou apprehendest it: take it for thy labour."

Timon : "How dost thou like this jewel, Apemantus?"

In this scene, Timon and Apemantus engage in a brief debate that shows how differently they view wealth and morality. Apemantus mocks the rich by saying that the nobles have big bellies, implying that those in power are greedy and spoiled. Timon responds calmly, "That's a lascivious apprehension" showing that he is not offended and maintains his dignity. His calm and confident response reflects Nietzsche's idea of Master Morality, where true strength comes from self-control and inner independence, not from anger or revenge. When Timon then asks, he speaks with quiet confidence, showing that he will not let ridicule define his worth. Through this brief conversation, Shakespeare portrays Timon as a man of self-belief who creates his own understanding of what is good.

As in the another example below, taken from a scene in the play *Timon of Athens* Act I, Scene II

Timon : "O, Apemantus, you are welcome."

Apemantus : "No; / You shall not make me welcome: I come  
to have thee thrust me out of doors."

Timon : "Fie, thou'rt a churl; a fool so great to be."

Apemantus : "Would thou hadst honesty in that fault to seem a  
fool."

Nietzsche's Master Morality is evident in Timon's actions and the way he gives meaning to things. In this dialogue, Timon welcomes Apemantus not out of obligation, but because that's who he is, he feels himself to be a noble figure, and goodness comes naturally from within. For a "Master," in Nietzsche's view, goodness is not a rule, but an expression of self-power. When Timon calls Apemantus "a fool so great to be" he is demonstrating the right of a "Master" to judge and establish values based on his own perspective. In essence, this dialogue demonstrates the conflict between a strong figure who gives positive values and a weak figure who can only reject and judge negatively.

### ***Slave Morality***

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Slave Morality stems from people who feel weak or controlled by others. They view humility, kindness, patience, and obedience as virtues, while being strong, arrogant, or brave is often considered vices. People with this mindset often follow established rules and values, such as religion or social customs, rather than creating their own. This kind of morality makes weakness and suffering seem like passivity and obedience are virtues.

As in the example below, taken from a scene in the play *Timon of Athens* Act IV, Scene III

Timon :“ I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind. The earth’s a thief, that feeds and breeds by a composture stolen from general excrement: each thing’s a thief; The laws, your curb and whip, in their rough power Have uncheck’d theft. Love not mankind.”

Apemantus:“ I love none.”

Timon :“ Nor I; I detest all.”

Apemantus :“ How long have you been misanthrope?”

In this scene, Timon and Apemantus have a bitter conversation that shows how deeply Timon has changed after losing everything. When Timon says, “I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind,” it reveals that his disappointment and betrayal have turned into complete hatred toward people. Apemantus answers but his words come from a cynical view of life, not from pain. Timon’s anger, however, is full of resentment, he blames everyone and everything for his suffering. This moment reflects Nietzsche’s idea of Slave Morality, where values come from weakness, anger, and revenge instead of strength and independence. Timon no longer creates his own sense of right and wrong; he only reacts to the hurt caused by others. Through this exchange, Shakespeare shows how Timon becomes trapped by his own bitterness, turning into someone whose morals are shaped by pain rather than power.

As in the another example below, taken from a scene in the play *Timon of Athens* Act I, Scene I

Poet: “Good day, sir.”

Painter: “I am glad y’are well.”

Poet: “I have not seen you long: how goes the world?”

Painter: “It wears, sir, as it grows.”

The dialogue between the Poet and the Painter, in which the Painter states, "It wears, sir, as it grows," provides another example of Friedrich Nietzsche's Slave Morality. This

morality is a repressed feeling of resentment that arises in individuals who feel weak, powerless, or oppressed by forces above them. The Painter here does not demonstrate a strong and courageous spirit to shape his reality, as does an individual with the Master Morality who creates value and considers himself "good" because of his power. Instead, the Painter takes a passive and reactive stance, saying that growth only brings wear and tear. This is a form of inability to participate in creating greatness or overcoming the world's difficulties. This is a hallmark of Slave Morality, which defines "goodness" by rejecting that which is powerful.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Timon of Athens* shows that morality in this play is dominated by slave morality at 65%, while master morality accounts for around 35%, as shown in the pie chart. This proportion illustrates that most of Timon's character journey is influenced by values that arise from suffering, disappointment, and hatred after he loses his wealth and trust in the people around him. At the beginning of the story, Timon displays characteristics of master morality, namely generosity, selfconfidence, and pride in his own goodness. However, after experiencing betrayal and bankruptcy, Timon's moral outlook changes completely. He then displays characteristics of slave morality, where his actions are driven by hurt feelings and revenge. The dominance of 65% slave morality illustrates that Timon's tragedy is not only about material loss but also about moral decline due to dependence on the recognition of others. Meanwhile, the 35% master morality shows the remnants of the strength and pride that defined him at the beginning of the story, but which were ultimately defeated by disappointment and hatred. Overall, the diagram confirms that *Timon of Athens* shows that human morality can change from a strong 'master' to a 'slave' of hatred and suffering.

## FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so further research is needed on the topic of Morality Nietzsche in *Timon of Athens* in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers.

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