

Theatre [+ Add to myFT](#)

A Timon for our times in New York

Kathryn Hunter excels in this modern-dress staging at the Polonsky Shakespeare Center

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Share](#)
- [Save](#)



Generous to a fault: Kathryn Hunter (aloft) in 'Timon of Athens' © Henry Grossman

Max McGuinness YESTERDAY



A troubled democracy dominated by a wealthy elite; venal artists sucking up to rich patrons; and life-long friendships that dissolve as soon as the money runs out.

You don't have to squint too hard to spot contemporary parallels in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (probably co-authored with Thomas Middleton). Simon Godwin has duly turned this problem play about the downfall of a spendthrift Athenian noble into a resonant parable of greed and inequality in our time. The British director has also shaken up the gender politics of the play, whose original version includes only a few minor female roles, by casting Kathryn Hunter, a veteran of theatrical gender-reversal, as the eponymous protagonist.

His modern-dress staging, first performed in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2018, begins in an atmosphere of tacky gold-hued opulence as Hunter's "Lady Timon" (the only holdover from the original cast) distributes favours to various hangers-on in advance of a lavish banquet. Only Arnie Burton's grungy philosopher Apemantus stands apart and chides the heroine for indulging the flattery of knaves and fools. Timon's hubris is further suggested by Michael Bruce's jazzy-yet-melancholic score, which has the flavour of Greek rebetika music.

Nemesis soon emerges in the shape of Timon's creditors, led by Liam Craig's stolidly imposing Demetrius, whereupon Timon attempts to get by with a little help from her fair-weather friends. In a deftly abridged sequence that highlights the virtues of Godwin's streamlined staging, each rebuffs her pleas for money. As the palette of Soutra Gilmour's versatile design shifts ominously to white and red, the now-destitute Timon repays their miserliness with a final banquet consisting of bowls of steaming blood before retreating to live as a hermit in the wilderness.

Having cut a Norma Desmond-like figure in her delusional pomp, Timon acquires an air of spiteful wisdom after the interval, which attests to Hunter's impressive range as a performer. She now curses the meretricious society inside the city walls and eggs on Elia Monte-Brown's banished soldier Alcibiades to lead a popular revolt. But no one triumphs here, and a bit of light farce towards the end seems to emphasise the essential absurdity of Timon's story.

★★★★☆

To February 9, [tfana.org](https://www.ft.com/tfana)

Follow the topics in this article

Theatre [+ Add to myFT](#)

Max McGuinness [+ Add to myFT](#)

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2020. All rights reserved.

[Share this article](#)

[Reuse this content](#)

Support

- [View Site Tips](#)
- [Help Centre](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [myFT Tour](#)
- [Careers](#)

Legal & Privacy

- [Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Cookies](#)
- [Copyright](#)
- [Slavery Statement & Policies](#)

Services

- [FT Live](#)
- [Share News Tips Securely](#)
- [Individual Subscriptions](#)
- [Group Subscriptions](#)
- [Republishing](#)
- [Contracts & Tenders](#)

Tools

- [Executive Job Search](#)
- [Advertise with the FT](#)
- [Follow the FT on Twitter](#)
- [FT Transact](#)
- [Secondary Schools](#)
- [Portfolio](#)
- [Today's Newspaper \(ePaper\)](#)
- [Alerts Hub](#)
- [MBA Rankings](#)
- [Enterprise Tools](#)
- [News feed](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Currency Converter](#)

[More from the FT Group >](#)