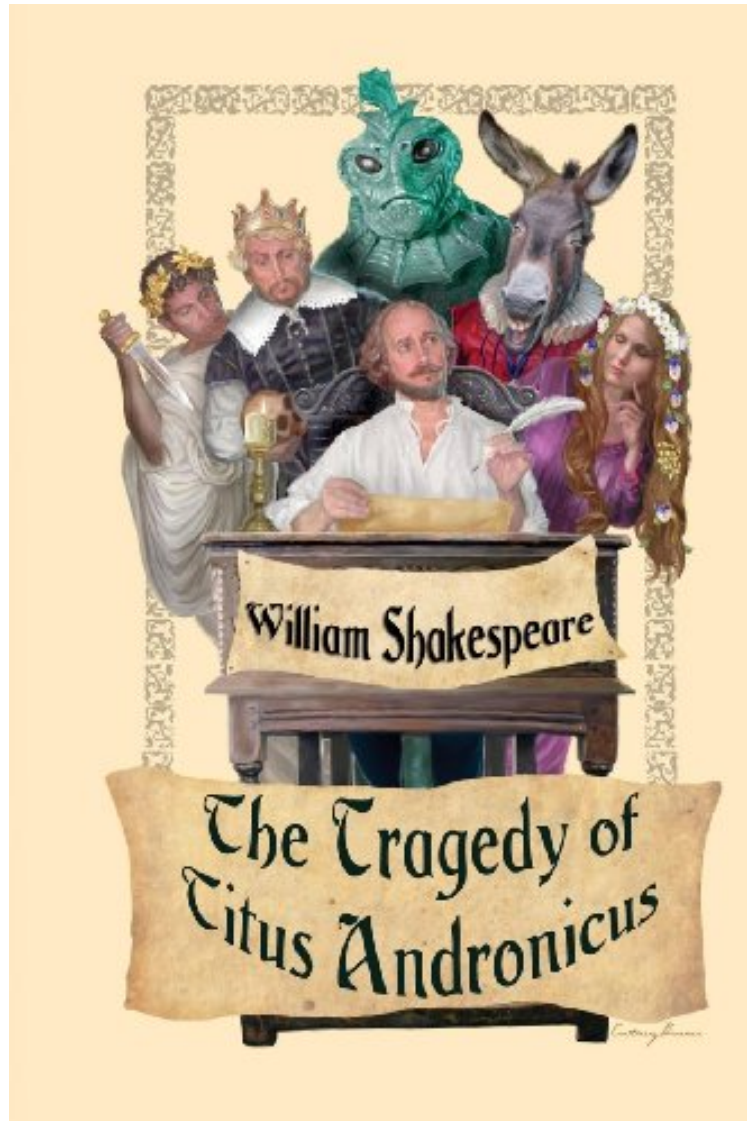


# The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus

*William Shakespeare*

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**William Shakespeare : The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus:

Blood and Revenge-- Titus Andronicus is by far Shakespeare's most violent play. Set in the later days of the Roman empire it follows a fictional succession to the throne. The play follows Titus, a great Roman general, who is thrown into one bad situation after another. Much blood flows and a cycle of revenge ensues and tragedy abounds. Let not

your sorrow die, though I am dead. Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things As willingly as one would kill a fly;  
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

Even as the New Kittredge Shakespeare series glances back to George Lyman Kittredge's student editions of the plays, it is very much of our current moment: the slim editions are targeted largely at high school and first-year college students who are more versed in visual than in print culture. Not only are the texts of the plays accompanied by photographs or stills from various stage and cinema performances: the editorial contributions are performance-oriented, offering surveys of contemporary film interpretations, essays on the plays as performance pieces, and an annotated filmography. Traditional editorial issues (competing versions of the text, cruxes, editorial emendation history) are for the most part excluded; the editions focus instead on clarifying the text with an eye to performing it. There is no disputing the pedagogic usefulness of the New Kittredge Shakespeare's performance-oriented approach. At times, however, it can run the risk of treating textual issues as impediments, rather than partners, to issues of performance. This is particularly the case with a textually vexed play such as *Pericles: Prince of Tyre*. In the introduction to the latter, Jeffrey Kahan notes the frequent unintelligibility of the play as originally published: "the chances of a reconstructed text matching what Shakespeare actually wrote are about 'nil'" (p. xiii) But his solution — to use a "traditional text" rather than one corrected as are the Oxford and Norton *Pericles* — obscures how this "traditional text," including its act and scene division, is itself a palimpsest produced through three centuries of editorial intervention. Nevertheless, the series does a service to its target audience with its emphasis on performance and dramaturgy. Kahan's own essay about his experiences as dramaturge for a college production of *Pericles* is very good indeed, particularly on the play's inability to purge the trace of incestuous desire that *Pericles* first encounters in Antioch. Other plays' cinematic histories: Annalisa Castaldo's edition of *Henry V* contrasts Laurence Olivier's and Branagh's film productions; Samuel Crowl's and James Wells's edition of (respectively) *I and 2 Henry IV* concentrate on Welle's *Chimes at Midnight* and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*; Patricia Lennox's edition of *As You Like It* offers an overview of four Hollywood and British film adaptations; and John R. Ford's edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides a spirited survey of the play's rich film history. The differences between, and comparative merits of, various editorial series are suggested by the three editions of *The Taming of the Shrew* published this year. Laury Magnus's New Kittredge Shakespeare edition is, like the other New Kittredge volumes, a workable text for high school and first year college students interested in film and theater. The introduction elaborates on one theme — Elizabethan constructions of gender — and offers a very broad performance history, focusing on Sam Taylor's and Zeffirelli's film versions as well as adaptations such as *Kiss Me Kate* and *Ten Things I Hate About You* (accompanied by a still of ten heartthrobs Heath Ledger and Julia Stiles). The volume is determined to eradicate any confusion that a first time reader of the play might experience: the *dramatis personae* page explains that "Bianca Minola" is "younger daughter to Baptista, wooed by Lucentio-in-disguise (as Cambio) and then wife to him, also wooed by the elderly Gremio and Hortensio-in-disguise (as Licio)" (p.1). Other editorial notes, based on Kittredge's own, are confined mostly to explaining individual words and phrases: additional footnotes discuss interpretive choices made by film and stage productions. Throughout, the editorial emphasis is on the play less as text than as performance piece, culminating in fifteen largely performance-oriented "study questions" on topics such as disguise, misogyny, and violence. *Studies in English Literature, Tudor and Stuart Drama, Volume 51, Spring 2011, Number 2, pages 497-499.*