

## Titus Andronicus: *Hero or villain?*

- Though Titus is apparently the play's protagonist, the audience is unsure of whether or not to embrace him or to run away from him as far as possible.
- There is no clear cut answer as to whether or not Titus is a well-intentioned man who unwittingly brought about the destruction of everyone and everything he loved or an outright villain who received his just comeuppance.
- Is he a victim or a villain? Is he both? Does his death make the Roman world any safer as did those of Tamora and Aaron?

### Titus Andronicus: *Who is he?*

- A general, father, brother, and uncle. A living hero. A Stoic of the old school, Titus unsentimentally considered his children to be as subject to his authority as were the soldiers placed under his command by the emperor and Senate.
- Being a commander, he formulated strategy, decided when and how his soldiers should fight, when, if necessary, to execute them for treason or cowardice. Literally, Titus saw no difference between his family and *his* army.
- Believed that honor (both personal and familial) was maintained through service, sacrifice, and absolute, unquestioned devotion to Rome. He upheld the family tradition of military service and sacrificed home and hearth for what he considered to be the greater good (though he would not have considered it a sacrifice).
- However, in Rome's greatest hour of need, he *refused* to become its emperor and restore onto her peace: *for the first time in his life, he abrogated a duty (which was his to assume) to someone else*—and gave it to who turned out to have been the wrong man, thereby intensifying and extending Rome's suffering and instigating the ruin of his own family.
- Despite decades of combat subjugating *distant* nations to the Roman Empire, Titus *abandoned her* when a civil war broke out at home, in its very capital.

## **Titus and his children: *Patria potestas***

According to codified Roman law, custom, and tradition, children conceived and born in lawful matrimony to a male citizen of Rome who acted as the head of his own household (*pater familias*) were subject their entire lives to his *patria potestas*. A father's sons and daughters, as well as any grandchildren descended along the male line, were subject from the moment of their birth to the moment of their death to his authority and power (even after they married). To him they owed everything; their lives were for him to give or to take away.

- As did his fellow Romans, Titus considered his children to be an extension of himself, rather than as individuals in their own right: of the 26 children he fathered—25 sons and 1 daughter—all but 4 of his sons fought for Rome (probably at his insistence or urging) and perished in battle; their only compensation was a prodigious tomb for the repose of their bones.
- He believed that the family unit was held together by the unwavering loyalty and obedience of children to the will of their father: no questions, discussions, negotiations, or justifications—just obedience.
- He believed a father's ties to his children were not only based upon blood but through their strict adherence to his principles and values. The moment one of his children diverged was the moment he or she had ceased to be a child of his body.

## **Titus' virtues caused his downfall**

- With respect to duty, honor, and country Titus was a stoic of the old school; uncompromising, rigid, inflexible. He embodied traditions, values, ideals deemed antiquated by the younger generation. He was also self-righteous. Ultimately, his downfall was brought about by his inflexibility, his tenacious adherence to the past, and a failure to recognize the “common humanity” that unites *all* men: he bestowed the throne not to the better of two feuding brothers but to the oldest, and sacrificed an innocent teenager out of adherence to superstition (when mercy would have become him and cemented two nations in peace).

- Considered no personal sacrifice too great when his or his family's honor was imperiled; he avenged himself against all who besmirched/sullied it. He killed (murdered) his son Mutius because he supported Lavinia's engagement with Bassianus, thwarting her marriage with the new emperor, Saturninus (hardly could there have been a more providential sign of royal favor than to become the emperor's father-in-law) and he killed (murdered) Lavinia because though her rape and dismemberment were none of her doing he believed that she should have killed *herself* (rather than live and be a constant reminder to her father of the shame done upon the family).