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978-1-107-61539-7 - The Merchant of Venice  
Edited by Rob Smith  
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# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



Edited by Rob Smith  
Series editors: Richard Andrews and Vicki Wienand  
Founding editor: Rex Gibson

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# Introduction

This *The Merchant of Venice* is part of the **Cambridge School Shakespeare** series. Like every other play in the series, it has been specially prepared to help all students in schools and colleges.

The **Cambridge School Shakespeare** *The Merchant of Venice* aims to be different. It invites you to lift the words from the page and to bring the play to life in your classroom, hall or drama studio. Through enjoyable and focused activities, you will increase your understanding of the play. Actors have created their different interpretations of the play over the centuries. Similarly, you are invited to make up your own mind about *The Merchant of Venice*, rather than having someone else's interpretation handed down to you.

**Cambridge School Shakespeare** does not offer you a cut-down or simplified version of the play. This is Shakespeare's language, filled with imaginative possibilities. You will find on every left-hand page: a summary of the action, an explanation of unfamiliar words, and a choice of activities on Shakespeare's stagecraft, characters, themes and language.

Between each act and in the pages at the end of the play, you will find notes, illustrations and activities. These will help to encourage reflection after every act, and give you insights into the background and context of the play as a whole.

This edition will be of value to you whether you are studying for an examination, reading for pleasure or thinking of putting on the play to entertain others. You can work on the activities on your own or in groups. Many of the activities suggest a particular group size, but don't be afraid to make up larger or smaller groups to suit your own purposes. Please don't think you have to do every activity: choose those that will help you most.

Although you are invited to treat *The Merchant of Venice* as a play, you don't need special dramatic or theatrical skills to do the activities. By choosing your activities, and by exploring and experimenting, you can make your own interpretations of Shakespeare's language, characters and stories.

Whatever you do, remember that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, watched and enjoyed.

## Rex Gibson

Founding editor

This new edition contains more photographs, more diversity and more supporting material than previous editions, whilst remaining true to Rex's original vision. Specifically, it contains more activities and commentary on stagecraft and writing about Shakespeare, to reflect contemporary interest. The glossary has been enlarged too. Finally, this edition aims to reflect the best teaching and learning possible, and to represent not only Shakespeare through the ages, but also the relevance and excitement of Shakespeare today.

## Richard Andrews and Vicki Wienand

Series editors

This edition of *The Merchant of Venice* uses the text of the play established by Elizabeth Story Donno in **The New Cambridge Shakespeare**.

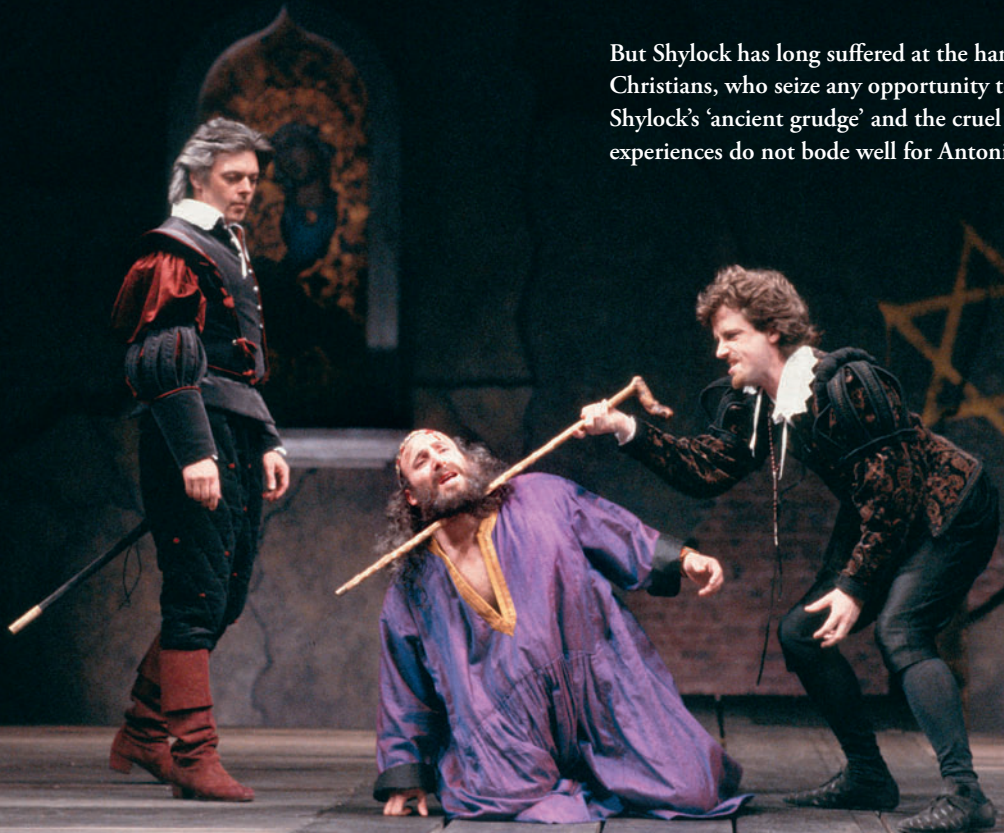
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The Christian Antonio (right), the Merchant of Venice, arranges to borrow money from the Jew Shylock (centre). This will enable Antonio's friend Bassanio (left) to travel to Belmont and try to win the hand of the beautiful heiress Portia. Antonio agrees to include Shylock's forfeit (his 'merry sport') in their agreement ('bond'): if Antonio cannot repay the loan, he will lose a pound of his flesh.



But Shylock has long suffered at the hands of the Christians, who seize any opportunity to torment him. Shylock's 'ancient grudge' and the cruel treatment he experiences do not bode well for Antonio.



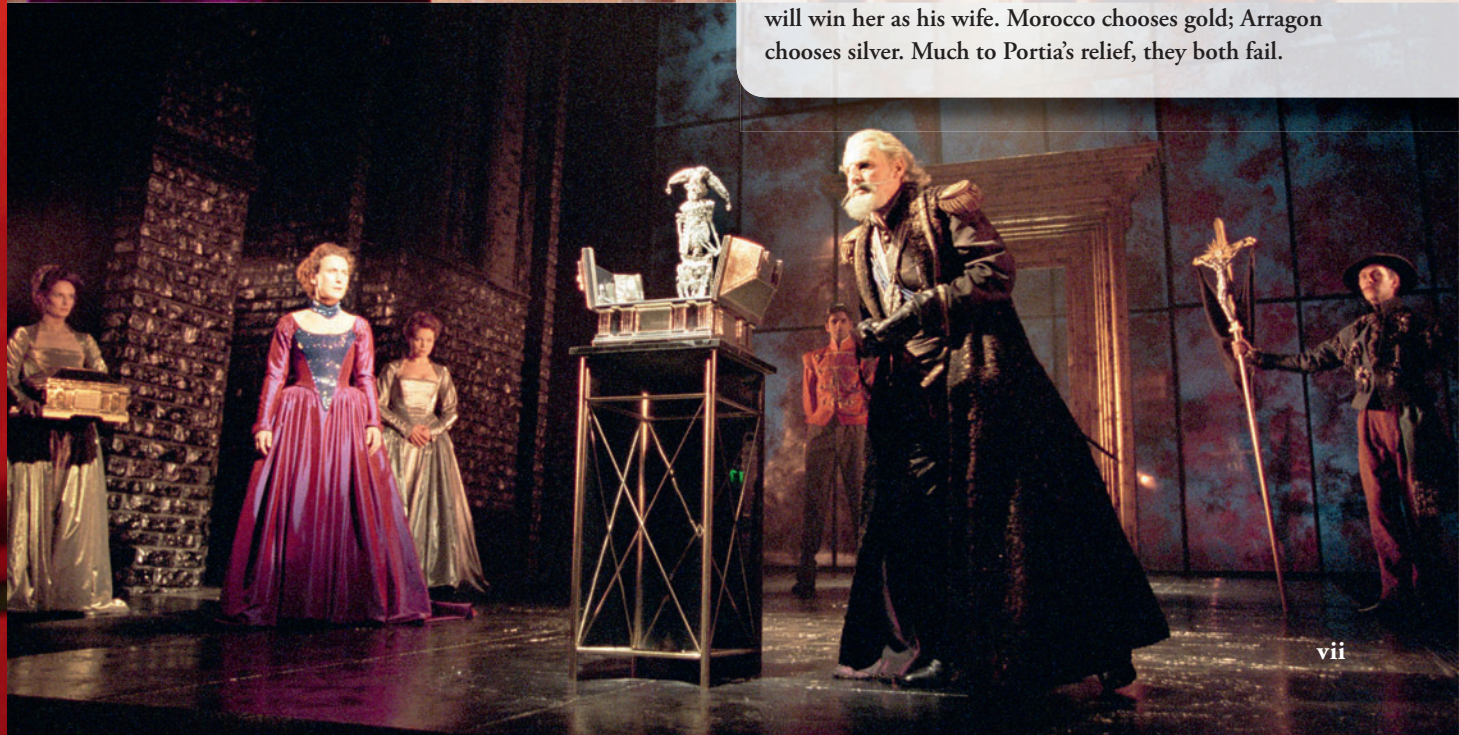
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Portia (left), the wealthy mistress of Belmont, explains to her maid, Nerissa, the restrictions placed upon her by her dead father's will – 'the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father'. (Note his portrait on the wall in the background.) She can only marry the man who solves the riddle set by her father about three caskets, each one made of gold, silver or lead.






Two of Portia's suitors (the Prince of Morocco, top, and the Prince of Arragon, below) attempt to solve the riddle. Whoever opens the casket containing Portia's portrait will win her as his wife. Morocco chooses gold; Arragon chooses silver. Much to Portia's relief, they both fail.




'Our house is hell'. Jessica is Shylock's only child and she finds life at home with her father very difficult. (Shakespeare does not show or tell what has happened to her mother.) Jessica has fallen in love with a Christian, Lorenzo, and plans to elope with him. She is relieved to escape from her home but her betrayal of her father, and her stealing of some of his wealth, send him into a grief-stricken rage.





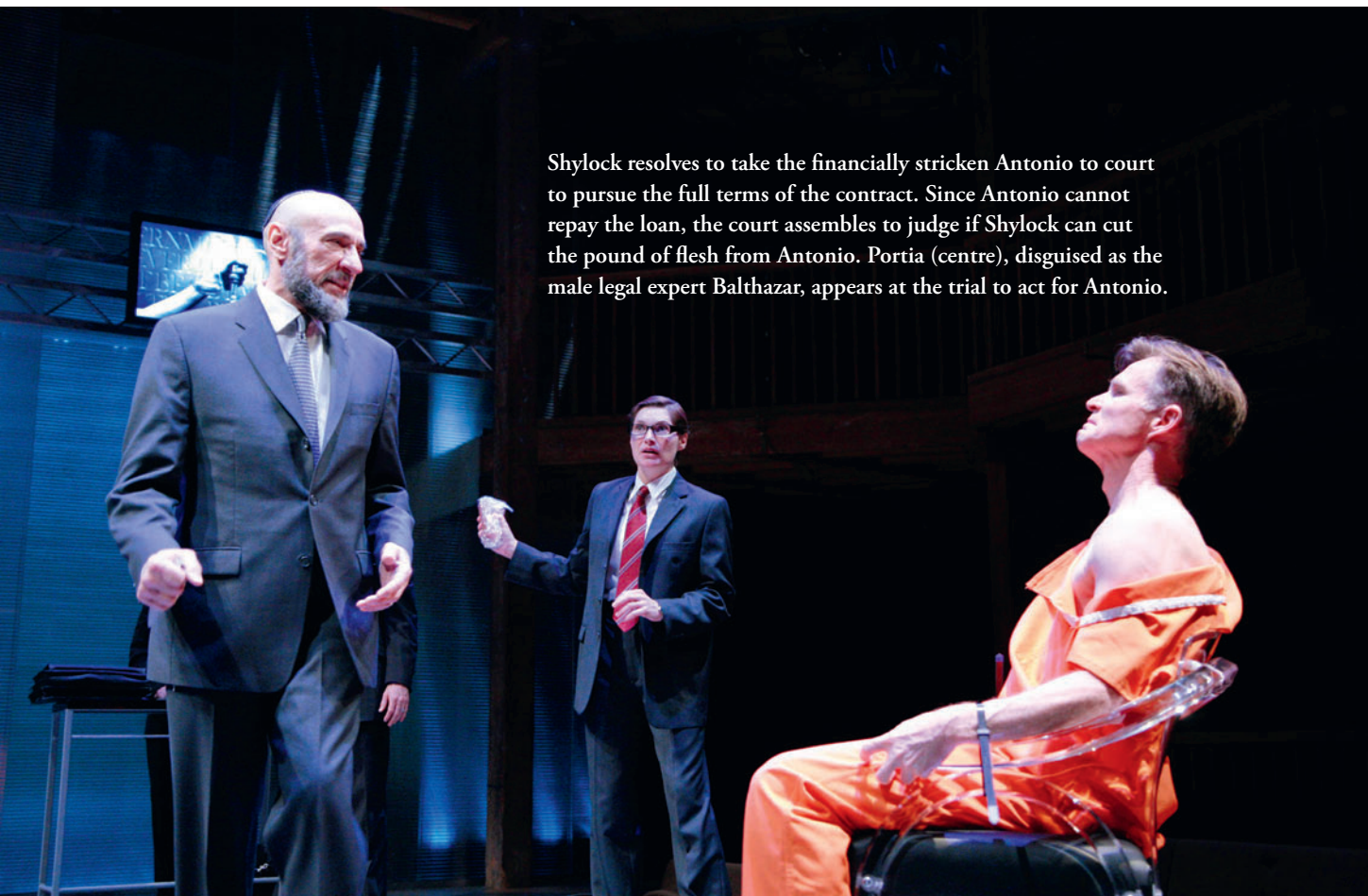


'Hath not a Jew eyes?' Shylock, bitter over the loss of his daughter and his hostile treatment by the Christians, tries to rationalise his feelings. He stresses the common humanity of all men, but then pledges to follow a course of action taught to him by the Christians – revenge! Antonio's fragile finances put him within Shylock's reach as he decides to enforce his 'bond', and pursue his 'pound of flesh'.



◀ Bassanio has travelled to Belmont. Wary of the deceptive appearance of gold and silver, he correctly chooses the lead casket and claims his reward – Portia: 'Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted.' The couple are happy and look forward to their wedding.

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Shylock resolves to take the financially stricken Antonio to court to pursue the full terms of the contract. Since Antonio cannot repay the loan, the court assembles to judge if Shylock can cut the pound of flesh from Antonio. Portia (centre), disguised as the male legal expert Balthazar, appears at the trial to act for Antonio.



Portia (right, in this distinctive all-male production) pleads for Shylock to show mercy: 'The quality of mercy is not strained ...'



▲ ‘You must prepare your bosom for his knife.’ Shylock is triumphant, anticipating the shedding of Antonio’s blood and the gaining of his much-desired revenge.

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◀ ‘Tarry a little ...’  
 At the last moment, Portia reveals a loophole in the contract that releases Antonio from the threat of death. In addition, Shylock has half his wealth confiscated and must convert to Christianity or forfeit his life. He leaves the court a broken man.

▼ The final act moves back to Belmont to focus on reconciliation and harmony. Lorenzo and Jessica (right) are joined by Bassanio and Portia (centre), and Nerissa and her recently acquired husband, Gratiano (left). Antonio (foreground), alone and isolated, reflects on the events of the play.

