



## Resource Packet



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# Merchant of Venice Plot Breakdown

## **Act I, Scene 1**

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, shares with his friends Salerio and Solanio that he feels sad but does not know why. His friends suggest that he is worried about his ships, which are at sea and full of valuable goods. Antonio rejects this. Salerio and Solanio leave when another friend, Bassanio, arrives. Bassanio admits to Antonio that he has run out of his own money and is in need of resources so that he can go to Belmont and woo Portia, an heiress. Antonio commits to helping Bassanio. All his own wealth is tied up in his ships though, and so he offers to let Bassanio use his credit.

## **Act I, Scene 2**

In Belmont, the heiress Portia and her waiting woman Nerissa discuss the lottery devised by Portia's father before his death to determine her husband. Any suitor wishing to marry Portia must pick one of three caskets. One is made of lead, one of silver and one of gold. If the suitor chooses the casket that holds a portrait of Portia, then they win her hand in marriage. Portia and Nerissa discuss the men who have recently visited on this quest and Portia dismisses them all as unappealing, until Nerissa reminds her of when she once met a Venetian who both ladies agree is the most deserving.

## **Act I, Scene 3**

Back in Venice, Bassanio meets Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, from whom he asks for a loan of 3,000 ducats for three months. In return, Antonio shall be bound to repay the loan. In an aside to the audience, Shylock admits that he hates Antonio for numerous reasons. When Antonio arrives, Shylock reminds him of how badly he's been treated by Antonio in the past, although he does agree to lend Antonio the money. However, if Antonio does not repay him by the appointed day, then Shylock will cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio doesn't want his friend to agree to this, although Antonio is confident that his ships will have returned by then and so he'll be able to repay Shylock. Antonio agrees to to Shylock's offer.

## **Act II, Scene 1**

The prince of Morocco arrives in Belmont to try to win Portia's hand

## **Act II, Scene 2**

The servant Launcelot debates whether to stay with his current master, Shylock, or leave, eventually opting to leave. He is stopped by the arrival of Old Gobbo, his blind father, who asks Launcelot for directions towards Shylock's house. Launcelot plays a trick on his father by pretending to be someone else, giving Gobbo the wrong directions and pretending that Launcelot is dead. Bassanio then enters and both Launcelot and Old Gobbo ask if Launcelot can serve Bassanio instead of Shylock. Bassanio has already agreed to this previously, but he confirms it. Bassanio then agrees to let his friend Gratiano come to Belmont on the condition that he tames his usually wild and rude behavior.

## **Act II, Scene 3**

Shylock's daughter, Jessica, says goodbye to Launcelot and instructs him to give a note to Bassanio's friend, Lorenzo.

## **Act II, Scene 4**

Lorenzo, in the midst of planning with his friends to take Jessica away while disguised as masquerade ball attendees, gets Jessica's letter from Launcelot. It says she will be disguised as a page.

## **Act II, Scene 5**

Shylock informs Jessica that he is going out for supper, and tells her to look after things. Launcelot tells them that a masquerade will be taking place that night.

## **Act II, Scene 6**

Lorenzo, accompanied by Gratiano and friends, rescues Jessica, who brings with her a chest full of money. Antonio arrives and tells Gratiano that he must sail to Belmont with Bassanio tonight.

## **Act II, Scene 7**

The prince of Morocco chooses from the three chests. He makes the wrong choice and leaves Belmont.

## **Act II, Scene 8**

Salerio and Solanio discuss how Shylock discovered Jessica missing and went in search of her and Lorenzo. As they describe it, he was just as angry to lose the money that Jessica took with her. They worry about Antonio, as there is rumor that a Venetian ship had sank in the English Channel.

## **Act II, Scene 9**

Another suitor fails the test to win Portia's hand. Bassanio arrives in Belmont.

## **Act III, Scene 1**

Salerio and Solanio report that Antonio's ship has indeed crashed. They encounter Shylock, still angry about Jessica and intending to call in Antonio's bond. Later, Shylock learns from his friend Tubal that Jessica took a precious ring with her.

## **Act III, Scene 2**

Bassanio guesses the correct chest. Portia gives him a treasured ring. They make plans to marry, as do Gratiano and Nerissa. Lorenzo and Jessica arrive with Salerio, who has a letter from Antonio to Bassanio. Antonio is resigned to his fate but asks that Bassanio come to see him. Portia offers to pay off the debt. And so Bassanio goes to try to rescue his friend.

## **Act III, Scene 3**

Antonio begs Shylock to reconsider but he will not.

## **Act III, Scene 4**

Portia leaves Lorenzo and Jessica in charge of her estate. She and Nerissa will go to Venice disguised as men to ensure that Antonio is saved.

## **Act III, Scene 5**

Launcelot teases Jessica about her faith until Lorenzo interrupts them and accuses Launcelot of impregnating a woman himself.

## **Act IV, Scene 1**

The Duke of Venice has sent for a doctor, Bellario, to judge the case of Antonio and Shylock. Nerissa, disguised as a clerk, arrives and gives a letter to the Duke saying that Bellario is too sick to come, but that he is sending another doctor, Balthazar. Portia arrives, disguised as Balthazar. She delivers a speech on how mercy cannot be forced before stating that there is no power which will be able to override Shylock's bond. Shylock prepares to extract the flesh. At the last moment, Portia reveals that if Shylock sheds any of Antonio's blood, or if he takes more than a pound, he is subject to penalty, including loss of his wealth or death. Shylock tries to instead get his money but, because his actions against Antonio represent a mortal threat, the Duke strips him of his wealth. Half goes to the state. Half goes to Antonio, who insists it instead go to Lorenzo and Jessica after Shylock's death. Shylock must also convert to Christianity. After, the disguised Portia insists Bassanio give her the ring as a token of gratitude. Bassanio initially refuses but is persuaded.

## **Act IV, Scene 2**

Gratiano delivers the ring to the disguised Portia. Nerissa also sets out to get her ring from Gratiano.

## **Act V, Scene 1**

Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont, followed soon by Bassanio and Gratiano, with Antonio. It is discovered that both Gratiano and Bassanio gave their rings away. Both Portia and Nerissa pretend to be angry before revealing that Portia was the doctor and Nerissa was the clerk at the trial. Portia also gives Antonio a letter which tells him that three of his ships have made it safely into the harbor. Nerissa shares the news that Jessica and Lorenzo will receive Shylock's wealth when he dies, and the play concludes with the group happy and rich.

## History of the play's writing

*The Merchant of Venice* is believed to have been written between 1596 and 1598. The play was mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598's *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury*, which includes a listing of Shakespeare's early works, and it was entered into the Register of the Stationers' Company to obtain a copyright on July 22, 1598, under the title *The Marchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Jewe of Venyce*. James Roberts, the London printer and publisher who entered the title, was allowed to enter the play under the restriction that any printing had to be authorized by the Lord Chamberlain. Roberts' rights to the play were transferred to another publisher, Thomas Heyes, on October 28, 1600. Heyes published the first quarto before the end of the year.

The play was next printed in 1619, as part of William Jaggard's so-called "False Folio". Later, Thomas Heyes' son and heir, Laurence Heyes, asked for and was granted a confirmation of his right to the play, on July 8, 1619. Lawrence published the third quarto edition of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1637, to be sold at his shop in Fleetbridge. The copyright was later transferred from Bridget Hayes and Jane Graisbury to William Leake on October 17, 1657. Leake published the fourth quarto edition in 1652.

The 1600 edition is generally regarded as being accurate and reliable. It is the basis of the text published in the 1623 First Folio, which adds a number of stage directions, mainly musical cues.

## Influences

### ***Il Pecorone (The Simpleton)***

This collection of short stories was written in the 14th c. and published in 1558. It undoubtedly served as inspiration for *Merchant*. The test of the suitors at Belmont, the Venetian merchant's rescue from the "pound of flesh" penalty by his friend's new wife disguised as a lawyer, and her demand for the betrothal ring in payment are all elements present here.

The anonymous Florentine writer of *Il Pecorone* also anticipated Shakespeare's ambivalence toward Venice as the model of a rich but potentially unstable mercantile society. Throughout the turbulent 14th century, Venetian-Florentine relations were stable, with the two cities sharing a commitment to republican government. Because of this, Venice was a city where young Florentine merchants typically completed their training, serving in the foreign branch of a Florentine firm. But in 1387, employees of several Florentine companies resident in Venice lost all their cash in high-stakes gambling. They stayed in the game by issuing letters of credit drawing on their home offices, and their eventual losses had a devastating impact on the Florentine business community.

This bankruptcy in Venice has several analogies in *Il Pecorone*. The Bassanio character, Gianetto, is Florentine rather than Venetian, and the third son of a rich merchant. The father bequeaths his wealth to his two elder sons and gives Gianetto only letters of introduction to his Venetian friend, Ansaldo. Ansaldo lavishes presents on Gianetto, and sets him up in Venetian society. Eventually, pressed to his financial limits, Ansaldo raises money by borrowing from a Jew of Mestre, a mainland suburb, and the story continues much as in Shakespeare.

### ***Gesta Romanorum***

The particular details of the test of the suitors is thought to have come from this collection of stories, written sometime in the 13th or 14th centuries. The title translates to *Deeds of the Romans*. Its authorship is unknown. In one story, a princess correctly chooses between gold, silver, and lead caskets to win the son of an emperor.

### ***Zelauto: The Fountaine of Fame by Anthony Munday***

In this 1580 novel, Zelauto meets a hermit, Astraepho, while traveling. They fight and Zelauto is forced to beg for his life. This is granted but Zelauto must entertain Astraepho with stories from his travels. One of his stories takes place in Verona, Italy. In it, Strabino falls in love with Cornelia, but her father has already promised her to Truculento, an old money lender. The story is notable because the money lender secures his loans on the pain of the recipient losing his right eye if defaulting. The verdict of the court is that Truculento can inflict his punishment but only if he can remove the eye without spilling a drop of blood.

### ***The Jew of Malta, by Christopher Marlowe***

The titular character, Barabas, finds his wealth under threat. The Turks have demanded a financial tribute from the Maltese people, and the governor plans to extort this money from the island's Jews. When Barabas objects, the Christians launch racist abuse against him. They confiscate his goods and convert his house into a nunnery. Barabas turns to revenge. He arranges the death of Lodowick, his daughter Abigail's Christian lover, and then poisons Abigail herself. But finally he destroys himself in his own trap, dying in a boiling cauldron as the Christians deny him mercy. The play was probably written in 1589-1590, and many believe Shakespeare's play was meant as a more sympathetic response.

### ***The Orator, by Alexandre Le Sylvain***

A collection of rhetorical and oratorical set pieces designed to teach the reader "rhetoricke to inforce a good cause, and art to impugn an ill." Sylvain's collection contains a certain oration "of a Jew, who would for his debt have a pound of the flesh of a Christian".



## Roots in commedia dell'arte

At roughly the same time that Shakespeare was writing *Merchant of Venice*, the improvisational style of performance known as *commedia dell'arte* was coming to prominence in Italy. Shakespeare was undoubtedly influenced by commedia dell'arte and by the styles and genres that preceded it. Most notably, he would come to utilize the stock characters of comedian dell'arte and their trademark behavior.

A prime example of this in the characterizations of Lorenzo and Jessica, who strongly resemble the **Innamorati** of commedia dell'arte.



Innamorati translates to “lovers,” and this was the chief characteristic of the two. They are in love with one another, and, though they are ridiculous and over the top about everything, they are completely sincere in their emotions. It is their romance which traditionally provides the basis for conflict in a commedia performance. These obstacles stemmed from varied causes. For instance, the financial or personal interests of a lover's parent may have prevented the lovers' relationship from progressing. The pair always involves other commedia characters, such as Zanni characters, to try to figure out how they can be together. This is necessary, because due to their conceited stupidity, and lack of experience with the all of the mysteries of love, and the sensations and emotions that come with it, they cannot figure it out on their own.

Very often the innamorati are the son and daughter of two more stock characters: **Pantalone** and the Doctor. There is an emphasis in commedia on the ineptitude of the old, usually personified in these father figures, and the complications they provide. Pantalone's character is generally an old merchant, often wealthy and esteemed, at other times completely ruined. His mask typically highlighted his physical characteristics, including a



hooked nose and prominent eyebrows. A possible, though unlikely, origin for the name is the term "piantaleoni", a name used for the Venetian merchants who opened their stalls in conquered lands and symbolically "planted" the Lion of St Mark to extend the power of the city of Venice through trade. The character Pantalone is an old merchant, so it does give some credence to this theory. Pantalone is the metaphorical representation of money. While the social standing of merchants may have changed through many centuries, the intent for Pantalone was to ensure that he had the status that allowed him to meddle in the affairs of others.

**Zanni** is a character type of commedia dell'arte best known as an astute servant and a trickster. The name Zanni is a variant of the name Gianni and was common in the Lombard-Venetian countryside which provided most of the servants to the wealthy nobles and merchants of Venice. In Italian it is specifically a name of someone whose identity is not of any importance. It is one of the oldest characters in commedia dell'arte but over the course of time became subdivided into a number of similar characters with more specific traits. These included Arlecchino (a light-hearted, nimble, and astute servant, often acting to thwart the plans of his master) and Pulcinella, who is described by Pierre Louis Duchartre as being "a dull and coarse bumpkin."





Throughout the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, traveling "foreigners," made ubiquitous appearances in Commedia dell'arte. The individual "foreigner" is often indistinguishable as one or another type of Levantine or Middle Eastern character - most commonly an Arab, Armenian, Jew or Turk. This grouping suggests that the characters were interchangeable in the minds of the audience, functioning as Mediterranean merchants, lower-rung political intermediaries, exotic elements in the performance, and sometimes, threatening alien forces. In addition to the Middle Eastern characters mentioned — Levantine (Arab and Jew), Armenian, Turks — this broad group of "foreign" characters also included Greeks and Gypsies.

Even a cursory look at Flaminio Scala's well known book of scenarios, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, compiled and published in 1611, reveals several recurrences of these "foreign" characters in the comic scenarios as well as in the operatic and tragic works that together make up the fifty pieces included. In some ways, the foreign types resemble the stock character of Capitano, who represented the foreign soldier, often a Spaniard, German or Swiss, and reflected the audience's apprehension for "alien" mercenary armies invading and occupying their land. On stage, this feared foreigner was transformed by comic refraction into a coward whose name, often Capitano Spavento (Captain Fear), ironically indicated a less than brave habit of running at the first sign of danger.

In the recent anthology, *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater*, editor Robert Henke makes the interesting observation, supported by commentary from the theatre scholar Siro Ferrone, that the Commedia dell'Arte troupe actors themselves functioned as "foreigners" when they traveled from one region to another within the Italian peninsula.

And on the fractiously divided Italian peninsula of the Sixteenth century, transregionality was tantamount to transnationality. Itinerant actors crossing from one duchy or republic or state into another were considered to be 'foreigners'; they required a letter from a ducal secretary or the like as a passport, and were subject to the same kinds of control and surveillance that other 'foreigners' were. Siro Ferrone has argued that the location of the Baldracca theater in Florence on the second floor of a customs house is not accidental, and provided in fact a perfect theatrical venue for these habitual crossers of boundaries.

This observation suggests interesting implications regarding shared dilemmas and possible collaborations that may have ensued amongst the figurative and actual foreigners on and off stage within the Italian peninsula,

## Influence of New Comedy

Commedia dell'arte was, in turn, influenced by the New Comedy period of classical Greek theatre. During this time, writers like Menander centered their work on the travails of more average citizens than that of the older eras. Plots focused around more earthly matters, like love and romance, became popular. This style was later, further developed by the Roman playwrights Terence and Plautus,

One of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, *The Comedy of Errors*, takes from the plots of two plays by Plautus: the *Menaechmi*, and the *Amphitruo*, and there were also resemblances in staging and theatricality. For instance, the ancient Roman stage representing a street with three doors is often replicated in Shakespeare. This is the case in *Merchant* when Jessica opens the casement to her lover and then steals away with him.

As a comedy, *Merchant* follows a classical model — “a beginning in troubles and a resolution in joy”. The play even features a traditional deus ex machine, when Portia informs Antonio that his ships have indeed come into port and so his wealth is saved. But it was also the first of several attempts to introduce more powerful characters, more complex problems of conduct, more realistic representation, and a more serious vision of life into a traditionally light genre.

Plautus' *Aulularia* (*The Pot of Gold*) is considered a possible, direct inspiration for *The Merchant of Venice*. It featured theatre's original miser, and was widely reprinted in the earlier sixteenth century.



Theatre mask found near the Dipylon Gate. This could be the "ruler slave", a character of the New Comedy. 2nd-century BC.

Plautus' miser, Euclio, and Shylock are both isolated from their community, but the consequence of this behavior is rendered especially pathetic in the introduction of Jessica as a significant character.

Another parallel exists in the handling of the servants. We get our first glimpse of Shylock's household through the eyes of a resentful servant, Launcelot, planning to run away. Similarly, the audience first hears of Euclio's stinginess and meanness through his servant Staphyla.



# Shakespeare in Italy

## **Belmont**

Belmont is a fictional location. Shakespeare took the name from *// Pecorone*. In that story, the character Gianetto travels a long distance from Venice to see the Lady of Belmont.

The original Belmont in the story was a port on the Adriatic coast. To simplify things for his play, Shakespeare indicates that Belmont is much closer to Venice, and he takes great pains to precisely locate the city. He indicates, for example, that Portia's home is on a riverbank — in the scene with Lorenzo and Jessica outside the great house in the evening, gazing at the water, when Lorenzo exclaims: “How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!”



*Villa Foscari*

And in the third act, Portia plans to go to Venice with Nerissa, and then to return straightaway to Belmont. She tells Nerissa to “haste away, for we must measure twenty miles today.” So the roundtrip is twenty miles, or ten miles to Venice and ten miles back to Belmont.

Now the author inserts another clue. To conceal her true plan, Portia tells Lorenzo and Jessica a fake story about where they're going: “There is a monastery two miles off,” she says, and “there we will abide” until the trial in Venice is concluded.

So now we know Belmont is on the bank of a river, ten miles from Venice and two miles from a monastery. And it so happens that there was, and still is, a famous grand mansion on the bank of the River Brenta – the Villa Foscari-Malcontenta, the country residence of the illustrious Foscari family in Venice, exactly ten miles from Venice and precisely two miles from the monastery Ca' delle Monache, the Nun's House. These clues serve to identify Belmont as the architectural masterpiece Villa Foscari, designed by Andrea Palladio and constructed by 1560.

## **The Venetian masquerades**

Masquerades were initially associated with Carnival, the period of time just before Lent that has historically been a time of ritualized social topsyturvydom. Roles were reversed and a general laxity regarding commonly accepted values and social structures was the norm.

When the Renaissance swept across Europe and society became in many ways more formalized, the masquerade ball became an increasingly popular fixture. The masquerade ball, as opposed to the initial masquerade, was not restricted to Carnival time, thus allowing the populace greater freedom to go outside the norm of their daily lives. Masquerade balls provided the social freedom and equality that the newly emerging individualist of the Renaissance wished for through the virtue of its participants being, at least in theory, anonymous. Masquerade balls, through their social leveling, can be seen as a furtive step towards the revolutionary ideals that would characterize the late 18th and early to mid-19th centuries.

As with most popular forms of entertainment, the masquerade ball came to be seen by the more prudish parts of society as something that encouraged dangerous behaviors, especially among the younger generation. Without distinct markers like dress, how were the “better” citizens to be distinguished from their inferiors? “[H]ow from another woman/Do you [a] strumpet masqu'd distinguish?” English author Henry Fielding asked in his 1720s poem “The Masquerade.”

Several countries banned masquerades due to the danger they seemed to pose to society. Venice found that criminal activity went up dramatically when its citizens were allowed to hide their identities, and banned the wearing of masks outside Carnival and at formal banquets.







## Notable Productions

The first recorded performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was at court on Shrove Sunday, February 10, 1605, and must have been enjoyed, as it was performed again two days later. It remains uncertain whether Shakespeare chose Will Kemp, the leading comic actor in the group, or Richard Burbage, the renowned serious actor, to play the role of Shylock.

In more recent years, *The Merchant of Venice* has been adapted in myriad ways; set at various times in our past and in locations across the globe.

In 1970 Jonathan Miller directed Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre in a production set in the late 19th century. Olivier's Shylock appeared initially in the dark frock coat of a late-Victorian businessman and only later, under the enormous stress of his daughter's betrayal, did he take out a prayer shawl and wrap it around his shaking body. At the end of the play Jessica is kept apart from the happy couples, as she gravely paced the stage to the sound of the Kaddish.

In 1994, Peter Sellars set his production in the contemporary technological sophistication of California's Venice Beach. Banks of TV monitors showed footage of the Los Angeles race riots during the trial scene as the black Shylock demanded justice from the white Duke of Venice.



Launcelot, as played by Elvis impersonator Jamie Beamish, in a 2011 Royal Shakespeare Company production set in Las Vegas



Jacob Adler as Shylock

In 1999 Henry Goodman won great praise for his performance as Shylock in Trevor Nunn's production at the National Theatre, set in a Venice which resembled 1930s Berlin. The review from Robert Butler's *The Independent* says:

He enters in black hat and overcoat, silver-topped cane and briefcase. A bright-eyed, bearded businessman in his fifties, Goodman has warmth and humour, which shifts, quickly and plausibly, to other extremes. He's utterly convincing: funny, frightening and heart-rending...When Goodman hits on the idea of a pound of flesh serving as a bond, he laughs and laughs...When he lectures his daughter about shutting the windows during the carnival, we see a widower and single parent losing control and slapping his teenage daughter. After Jessica has run away, Goodman returns to their home, knocks, finds no answer, pushes the door open and goes in. It's another powerful exit that isn't in the text

Produced by The Public Theater and starring Al Pacino, the 2010 production directed by Daniel Sullivan was set on a stock market trading floor. Sullivan inserted a whole new scene, Shylock's baptism, between the ring exchange and return to Belmont. It revealed an ultimately defiant Shylock, but also forecast the rise of Nazism as the Jew stalks past thugs and soldiers cast in giant brownshirt-like shadows against the back wall.



## Notable Productions - Nazi Germany

When German intellectuals discovered Shakespeare in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, they found much to learn, and came to adore, imitate and even mythologize the Bard. German intellectuals saw in Shakespeare a fraternal spirit who would help them in their efforts to free themselves from the stifling corset of French classicism. To these writers, the Bard was not only a natural, original genius; he also had an affinity with the new national character. Indeed, while other European cultures also adopted Shakespeare into their classic cultural, Germans naturalized the Bard, firmly integrating him into their own culture. Since his discovery, the German Shakespeare has been created and re-created to serve all political formations on German soil, including the Third Reich.

By the time the National Socialists began to co-ordinate German schools, interest in Shakespeare had already gone beyond his aesthetic excellence. Teachers had appreciated his educative potential and venerated his works for what they had to say about patriotism. This was a tradition which the new ideology could take up, radicalize for its own purposes and rephrase in its own jargon. "School must conquer Shakespeare for our contemporary look on life," declared the German scholar Walter Hübner in 1934. "Conquest" is an appropriate term for the process by which the Third Reich turned Shakespeare into its contemporary — a valuable member of a community whose prescribed outlook on life was to be *völkisch*: that is, revolving around ideas of race, blood, and heredity.

Within a framework that posited a firm connection between race and art — indeed, Hitler had proclaimed the Aryan as the "Prometheus of mankind" — an English writer was a blood relative and not a foreigner, and a closer inspection of the British soul could thus help to prepare the ground for the renaissance of the German people. "The literature of the English people," wrote Kurt Schrey, a leading Nazi pedagogue, "who are akin to us in race, makes us aware of our own possibilities, virtues and flaws, our own dangers, high aims and neglects." Shakespeare's role in the liberation of the German national character is reflected in the new school curricula of 1937-8, which demanded that Shakespeare be studied under the heading "The Self-liberation of the German Spirit". Students were encouraged to study Shakespeare's portrayal of the French, and discover, as one professor put it: "an alien race, whose typical, Celtic-Western characteristics — vanity, hubris and presumptuousness — are diametrically opposed to those of the Germanic English'." Taken together, such insights would culminate in the understanding that the English Renaissance and the era of Hitler's new Germany were comparable as periods of transition and liberation.

The Nazi regime also included a *Reichsdramaturgie*, an office that was part of Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda. The *Reichsdramaturg*, Rainer Schlösser, was their chief theatre censor and assessed the stage worthiness of plays according to Nazi criteria. Great effort went into making *The Merchant of Venice* suitable for Nazi productions. The biggest problem to be overcome was the relationship and eventual marriage between Jessica and Lorenzo. Under Nazi race laws, a union between a Jew and Christian would have constituted a crime and could not have been shown on stage. In 1939, the Reichsdramaturgie, therefore, came up with an adapted and censored version of the play in which Jessica is turned into Shylock's foster child and all references to her Jewishness are cut. Furthermore, all passages were deleted which could throw a positive light on Shylock or evoke sympathy for his situation, such as his famous monologue from act 3, scene 1.

Nazi member Lothar Müthel directed a notoriously anti-Semitic staging of the play in 1943 at Vienna's Burgtheater. The play was commissioned in order to celebrate the deportation of all Jews. Shylock was played by leading German actor Werner Krauss as a hyperexaggerated Anti-Semitic caricature. In a newspaper account of the play, Müthel describes the



From the notorious 1943 production, directed by Lothar Müthel

grotesqueness of Krauss's performance: "With a crash and a weird train of shadows, something revoltingly alien and startlingly repulsive crawled across the stage... The pale pink face, surrounded by bright red hair and beard, with its unsteady, cunning little eyes; the greasy caftan with the yellow prayer shawl slung round; the splay-footed, shuffling walk; the foot stamping with rage; the claw-like gestures with the hands; the voice, now bawling, now muttering--all add up to a pathological image of the East European Jewish type, expressing all its inner and outer uncleanness..."



## Notable Shylocks

### **Thomas Doggett**

The comedian played Shylock in George Granville's 1701 adaptation, retitled *The Jew of Venice*. His performance emphasized absurd miserliness, in a characterization more akin to the commedia dell'arte's Pantalone.

### **Charles Macklin**

This comic approach became entrenched until 1741, when Charles Macklin restored much of Shakespeare's text in his acting version. On opening night, his ferocious Shylock astonished and terrified all beholders, causing young men in the packed benches to faint with fright.

### **Edmund Kean**

In his portrayal, Kean donned a black beard instead of the traditional comic red beard and wig worn by villainous Jewish characters in the medieval Mystery plays. His Shylock could still terrify but this portrayal never let the audience forget what had brought him to this pass. Before anything else, this man was a wronged father and a deeply feeling human being.

### **Henry Irving**

Irving played the Venetian moneylender as a resolute gentleman, obliged to defend himself against Christian malice. While on a cruise in Tunis, he had been inspired by a Jewish merchant who struck him with the "lofty air of a king" which quickly changed to hair-tearing rage in a quarrel about money. In 1879, Irving wrote that the play showed how "the worst passions of human nature are nurtured by undeserved persecution."

He adapted Shakespeare's play to draw out this tragic meaning, omitting some of the most anti-Semitic lines and adding a poignant scene after Jessica's elopement, showing Shylock returning across a desolate stage, to find his house deserted.



### **Jacob Adler**

Adler was a Jewish actor and star of Yiddish theater in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He would play the role of Shylock on more than one occasion, including on Broadway in 1903 in a production in which he spoke his lines in Yiddish while the rest of the cast spoke English. He saw in Shylock "a patriarch, a higher being. A certain grandeur, the triumph of long patience, intellect, and character has been imparted to him by his teachers: suffering and tradition."

Adler redefined Shakespeare's problematical Jew in two pivotal scenes. The first was in the discovery that Jessica, had eloped with a Christian. In the Irving production, Shylock knocked at the door of his house three times, each time a little louder, with increasing desperation as the curtain came down. Irving's contemporary Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree played the same scene more explicitly, pacing across the stage, crying out in sorrow and covering his head with ashes.

Adler took it a step further. He opened the front door with an immense key and entered silently. After an almost unbearable pause, he spoke his daughter's name. Silence. He spoke it again, the voice hopelessly booming out "Jessicaaaaaa!" and echoing in a vast and empty room. He came out, bowed down with sorrow, to settle on a bench, his voice quavering with a barely audible Yiddish lament. As the curtain fell, he slowly tore his garment—a sign of mourning for the child who has left the faith and whom he must now regard as dead.

In the trial scene, the court's verdict goes against Shylock: he must forsake his gold and convert to Christianity. His enemy Gratiano sneers, "In christening shalt thou have two godfathers. Had I been judge, thou shouldst have had ten more, to bring thee to the gallows, not the font." In all the other productions, Gratiano pushed Shylock to the ground where he sat, whimpering and defeated, the old Hebrew in extremis, victim of his own avarice. In the Adler version, Shylock was also forced to earth, but after a few moments he rose up. From his garment he brushed off the dirt of the floor and, symbolically, the filth of bias. With an air of moral superiority and innate dignity, he made his exit. "Weighty and proud his walk," the star recalled, "calm and conclusive his speech, a man of rich personal and national experience, a man who sees life through the glasses of eternity. So I played him, so I had joy in him, and so I portrayed him."

# The Venetian Republic

## Law and Order

By the time of Shakespeare, The Great Council - the chief political body of the Venetian Republic - had begun to delegate its powers increasingly to smaller subgroups — a Senate of 120 or more members, over which presided the Doge, and a Privy Council of six. This *Serenissima Signoria*, existed to share and limit the ducal authority. The protection of the state was in the hands of the famous *Consiglio de Diece*, known as The Ten.

In 1539, *Il Supremo Terribile Tribunale* took over especially the punishment of treason. It was a committee of three, one seated in the center, dressed in red and appointed by the Doge's *Consiglio Minore*, and two in black appointed by The Ten. In Shakespeare's time, this committee and The Ten were the real rulers of Venice, spying on one another and acting with great ceremony and secrecy.

The trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* presents the Doge as presiding over a court, partly civil and partly criminal, though it is unclear what court or body is conducting this trial. It manages its affairs with neither the secrecy nor the ceremony of The Ten, and throughout the scene, he is never called "Doge," or addressed with his proper title of "Serenity," but rather as "your Grace" as if he were an English duke. The Doge's attitude is openly prejudiced but he is not entirely above the law and so Portia's arguments are used to save Antonio. At the end, he pardons Shylock — a power that the real Doge definitely did not have.

Certainly, Shakespeare's procedure would have been impossible in contemporary Venice, where the Doge had long since lost all separate judicial functions. The playwright evidently conceives of a civil case as coming before the Duke, much as Borachio's in *Much Ado* came before the Prince; and it is settled in almost as offhand a manner. Even today, the English monarch still has in theory such princely powers, as implied in the expression "the Court of the King's Bench." In Venice, however, civil matters should have come through the lower courts; the Doge might have attended as a colleague of the presiding judge, but he certainly would not have made decisions, as he does in Shakespeare.

Possibly, Shakespeare thought of so important a trial as taking place before the Ten or the Privy Council but, in the first place, they would hardly exercise jurisdiction over civil litigation — the case is nothing more than a suit to recover a debt. The latter part of the trial really turns into a criminal process against Shylock for having plotted the death of a Venetian. Such a matter would normally come by before the *Quarantia al criminal*. In short, Shakespeare did not understand the place of the Doge in either the judicial or political system of Venice.

## Lending and Monetary system

Usury is the practice of taking interest in loans. Traditionally, the Catholic Church forbade Christians to lend money to other Christians at interest, basing its prohibition on the Vulgate's translation of Luke 6:35:

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

This situation made it difficult for people to raise capital, and since the need for capital was persistent, many Christians were open to finding ways to work around the prohibition. One solution was to allow non-Catholics to practice moneylending. Along these lines, many princes throughout Europe adopted the habit of playing host to Jewish communities so that the local Jews could practice moneylending to the benefit of local industry without the threat of papal excommunication hanging over them.

Venice was one of the first major Italian cities to allow Christian residents to borrow money from Jews, and its precocity underscored the dependence. Jewish moneylending, unlike its Christian counterpart, could not be disguised as an act of Christian charity. It was a business deal, one that reminded everyone of Venice's commercial bonds to foreign communities both abroad and even living within its own territory.

In *The Speculation of Usurie*, published during the year Shakespeare's play may first have been performed, Thomas Bell identifies another source of outrage regarding usury: "Now, now is nothing more frequent with the rich men of this world, than to writhe about the neckes of their poore neighbours, and to impouerish them with the filthie lucre of Usurie." Behind this fear lay the transition to capitalism: the rise of banking; the increasing need for credit in industrial enterprises; and the growing threat of indebtedness.

## Slavery and Servitude in the Venetian Republic

By the 8th century, Venice had established for itself a thriving slave trade, buying in Italy, among other places, and selling to the Moors in Northern Africa. When the sale of Christians to Muslims was banned following the *pactum Lotharii*, the Venetians began to sell Slavs and other Eastern European non-Christian slaves in greater numbers. Caravans of slaves traveled from Eastern Europe, through Alpine passes in Austria, to reach Venice. Surviving records valued female slaves at a *tremissa* (about 1.5 grams of gold or roughly 1/3 of a dinar) and male slaves, who were more numerous, at a *saiga* (which is much less).

## The decline of Venice and the rise of England in the late 16th century

Situated on the coast of the Adriatic Sea in northeast Italy, Venice was a key city in the development of trade routes from the east to Europe during the Middle Ages. Venice was originally a part of the Byzantine Empire and remained closely tied to them for centuries. At some point in the first decades of the eighth century, the people of the Byzantine province of Venice elected their first leader, Ursus, who was confirmed by Constantinople, becoming the first historical Doge of Venice.

It was not until the 9th century though that Venice started to become a major maritime power unto itself, profiting from trading rights along the Adriatic coast granted by the Byzantines, and becoming increasingly independent from the Empire. Venice was a commercial republic; one in which peace was able to exist through a mutual interest in commerce. It was this interest that led Professor Paul Cantor to describe the typical Venetian at this time as “sitting in church but thinking about his merchandise.”

In the 12th century, the republic built a large national shipyard known as the Venetian Arsenal where Venice developed methods of mass-producing warships. At the peak of its efficiency in the early 16th century, the Arsenal employed some 16,000 people who apparently were able to produce nearly one ship each day, and could fit out, arm, and provision a newly built galley with standardized parts on a production-line basis not seen again until the Industrial Revolution.

After the Sacking of Constantinople in 1204, during which the Venetians helped to lay siege to the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the nascent republic gained a great deal of territory in the Aegean Sea, amounting to three-eighths of the former empire.

In the early 15th century, the Venetians also expanded their possessions in North Italy, and assumed the definitive control of the Dalmatian coast. By 1410, Venice had a navy of some 3,300 ships (manned by 36,000 men) and had taken over such important cities as Verona and Padua.

However, outside observers and even some self-critical Venetians felt that the city's openness to strangers, its subjection to the vagaries of the sea trade, and its failure to balance commercial risks with the cultivation of an allegedly more stable agricultural and manufacturing economy on the mainland were leading to disaster. In addition, the Republic would fight costly and distracting battles for control of land both with the Ottoman Empire and with rival powers in Italy throughout the 15th and 16th centuries.

So, by the 16th century, Venice was in the process of being overtaken commercially, primarily by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. As Maffio Michiel, the governor of the Venetian trading colony of Zante in the Peloponnesus, complained to the Doge and Senate at the time:

The English are becoming absolute masters of these waters....They are utterly supplanting your subjects in the carrying trade, weakening your customs and ruining the merchant service, as your Excellencies must be well aware. The English are not satisfied with having absorbed Venetian trade in the West entirely, but are devoting themselves to a similar object in the Levant. They trade in their own ships to the ports of Alexandria, Alexandretta, and Smyrna and other Turkish cities in Asia Minor, and in the Archipelago, where our ships only used to trade, to the great benefit of the State and of private individuals.

Meanwhile Italy had long held a fascination for English writers. Scholars have explained this interest in Italy on moral, political, and religious grounds, such as fascination with the region's Catholicism, the allegedly looser sexual mores of its major cities, the republicanism of Venice, and the despotism of Milan and Naples.

And the English now enjoyed all the advantages once monopolized by the Venetian Republic: access to lucrative markets, state-of-the-art seamanship, a reputation for quality merchandise, and, best of all, a favorable political position with the Mediterranean world.

But any celebration of England's rising place in the European economy carried a melancholy counterpoint: assuming Venice's mantle as a great trading power could also mean assuming its vulnerability to fiscal and moral decay.

In all its ambiguities, Shakespeare's play captures that uncertainty as observers around Europe contemplated Venice's illustrious past, its troubled present, its uncertain future, and the implications of its history for other nations increasingly invested in maritime commerce. *The Merchant of Venice* thus feels like a fantasy embedded in an overarching representation of leaden reality.

Shakespeare counters it by portraying a city whose laws and customs ultimately resist the threat posed by figures like Shylock. Shakespeare's Venice is a cohesive community, with customs and legal traditions that encourage trade and bolster the city's distinctive national identity.



## Elizabethan era England

### **The war between Protestants and Catholics**

When Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558 her people were divided by religion. Since the reign of Henry VIII, Elizabeth's father, religion had been a point of conflict. Henry is best known for his six marriages, and for his efforts to have his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled in order to marry Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's eventual mother. His disagreement with Pope Clement VII about such an annulment led Henry to initiate the English Reformation, separating the Church of England from papal authority. The Buggery Act of 1533, the country's first sodomy law, which was enacted during Henry's reign, might be seen as a similar demonstration of political power, moving the matter from ecclesiastical courts to civil ones.

Catholics did not recognize the marriage to Boleyn and so did not see Elizabeth as a rightful queen. They believed that Henry had been lawfully married to Catherine of Aragon when Elizabeth had been born. When Catherine's daughter, and Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary, came to the throne in 1553 following the death of her brother Edward VI, she had made Roman Catholicism the official religion of the country, strenuously working to reverse her father's efforts at reformation.

Upon her half-sister's death in 1558, Elizabeth succeeded to the throne and reversed course again. One of her first actions as queen was the establishment of an English Protestant church. She enacted legislation known as the Religious Settlement of 1559 which included the Act of Supremacy, confirming Elizabeth as the Church of England's Supreme Governor. The Act of Uniformity re-introduced the Book of Common Prayer, the Church of England's prayer book, first published in 1549. As long as the people recognized Elizabeth's authority over the Church and at least followed the new prayer book, all would be well.

However, for a variety of reasons, Elizabeth's efforts were unsuccessful. Chief among them was Mary, Queen of Scots. As a great-granddaughter of Henry VII, Mary had once claimed Elizabeth's throne as her own and was considered the legitimate sovereign of England by many English Catholics. In 1567, she had been forced to abdicate the Scottish throne and sought safety in England. Perceiving Mary as a threat, Elizabeth had her confined in various castles and manor houses in the interior of England.

Religious tensions continued through the latter part of the 16th century. In 1570 the Pope produced a Papal Bull of Excommunication that said that Elizabeth was excommunicated from the Catholic Church, and he ordered Catholics not to obey her. At the same time, from the mid 1570s, newly trained Catholic priests began arriving in England, and, from 1580 onwards,

the Pope sent Jesuit priests to aid them. In 1571, new Treason Acts were passed which made it an offense to deny Elizabeth was the Queen of England. In 1581 Parliament passed a new law against Catholics. Those who tried to encourage people to become Catholic could be accused of treason. In 1584 William of Orange, the leader of the Dutch Protestants was murdered by a Catholic. Parliament responded by passing the Bond of Association. This stated that if Elizabeth was murdered, Parliament would make sure that the murderers were punished along with anyone who had benefitted from Elizabeth's death. On May 5, 1593, a poem was affixed to the Stranger Church on Broad Street in London, threatening violence against the congregations of the Dutch Protestant Church and the neighboring French Protestant Church.

Meanwhile, after eighteen and a half years in captivity, Mary was found guilty of plotting to assassinate Elizabeth in 1586 in the so-called Babington Plot. The long-term goal of the plot was the invasion of England by the Spanish forces of King Philip II and the Catholic League in France, leading to the restoration of the old religion. Mary was beheaded the following year.

Complicating matters between Spain and England were commercial disputes. The activities of English sailors, begun by Sir John Hawkins in 1562, gained the tacit support of Elizabeth, even though the Spanish government complained that Hawkins's trade with their colonies in the West Indies constituted smuggling. In September 1568, a slaving expedition led by Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake was surprised by the Spanish, and several ships were captured or sunk at the Battle of San Juan de Ulúa near Veracruz in New Spain. This engagement soured Anglo-Spanish relations and in the following year the English detained several treasure ships sent by the Spanish to supply their army in the Netherlands. Drake and Hawkins intensified their privateering as a way to break the Spanish monopoly on Atlantic trade. Between 1577 and 1580. Spanish colonial ports were plundered and a number of ships were captured including the treasure galleon Nuestra Señora de la Concepción. When news of his exploits reached Europe, Elizabeth's relations with Philip continued to deteriorate.

The Anglo-Spanish War broke out in 1585, following the seizure of English merchant ships in Spanish harbors. In response, The Queen ordered Sir Francis Drake to lead an expedition to attack the Spanish New World in a kind of preemptive strike. Drake sailed in October to the West Indies, and in January 1586 captured and sacked Santo Domingo. The following month they did the same at Cartagena de Indias and in May sailed north to raid St. Augustine in Florida. Thomas Cavendish meanwhile set out with three ships in July 1586 to raid Spanish settlements in South America. Cavendish raided three Spanish settlements and captured or burned thirteen ships. Among these was a rich 600 ton treasure galleon Santa Ana the biggest treasure haul that ever fell in English hands.

## Elizabethan era England

### War with Ireland

At the height of the Anglo-Spanish War the Spanish landed 3,500 troops in the south of Ireland to assist the Ulster rebel leader Hugh O'Neill, during the Nine Years' War. The Nine Years' War, fought 1594 and 1603 and sometimes called Tyrone's Rebellion, was waged between an Irish alliance—led mainly by Hugh O'Neill of Tyrone and Hugh Roe O'Donnell of Tyrconnell—against English rule in Ireland, and was a response to the ongoing Tudor conquest of Ireland. This conquest included the establishment of the English Pale, a strip of land, centered in Dublin, that stretched from Dundalk in Louth to Dalkey in Dublin, and became the base of English rule in Ireland. The war was fought in all parts of the country, but mainly in the northern province of Ulster. From 1591, Irish leaders had been in contact with Philip II of Spain, appealing for military aid against their common enemy and citing also their shared Catholicism. With the aid of Spain, O'Neill could arm and feed over 8,000 men, unprecedented for a Gaelic lord, and leaving him well prepared to resist English incursions into Ulster. While English forces were containing the



Elizabeth addressing Parliament, 1601

rebels in Ireland at great cost in men, general suffering, and finance, the Spanish attempted two further armadas, in 1596 and 1597: but both were unsuccessful. Philip II died in 1598, and his successor Philip III continued the war but with less enthusiasm.

In 1601, the Spanish sent a final armada north, intending to land troops in Ireland to assist the rebels. The Spanish entered the town of Kinsale with 3,000 troops and were immediately besieged by the English. Irish allies eventually arrived to surround the besieging force but the lack of communication led to an English victory. The besieged Spanish surrendered and returned home, while the Irish rebels hung on, finally surrendering in 1603, just after Elizabeth died.

### Elizabeth's expulsion of African people

During the Elizabethan period, the employment of Africans became increasingly common in England. They served in wealthy households as footmen or musicians, and the queen herself retained a black maidservant. But during the 1590s, Elizabeth issued a series of proclamations ordering the expulsion of Black people from her realm. In 1596, a letter was sent to the mayors of London and other cities, arranging for a German merchant named Caspar van Senden to transport the "many Blackamoors" (and sell them). This was in exchange for 89 English prisoners whom Van Senden had helped to release from Spanish and Portuguese jails.

Elizabeth's orders are unique, for they articulate a race-based cultural barrier of a sort England had not seen since the expulsion of the Jews in the 13th c. To be sure, Elizabeth's efforts extended only across the short period between 1596 and 1601 and did little to diminish the size of that population. Black people remained in England, and by the middle of the 18th c., they comprised somewhere between one and three percent of the London populace.

### Usury in England

As we previously discussed, usury was forbidden by the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, given the need for debt in a capitalistic society, many engaged in the practice while finding ways around civic and ecclesiastical courts.

In England, the legality of usury paralleled the country's swings between Catholicism and Protestantism in its varying forms. Henry VIII's Parliament of 1545 enacted a statute permitting interest payments up to 10%. At the time, the philosopher John Calvin argued that when Christ said "lend hoping for nothing in return," He meant that we should help the poor freely. Following the rule of equity, we should judge people by their circumstances, not by legal definitions. One could lend at interest to business people who would make a profit using the money. To the working poor one could lend without interest, but expect the loan to be repaid. To the impoverished one should give without expecting repayment.

Martin Luther, on the other hand, was a vehement opponent of charging interest on a loan and so, during Edward VI's reign, a strenuously Protestant Parliament reversed the 1545 statute. In 1571, Elizabeth reinstated her father's law, even keeping the same name of the statute. Her justification was that the repeal of the statute was impossible to enforce, and people were still lending money anyway.



## Elizabethan era England

### England's attitude towards Jews

Jewish people had only been in England since the Norman Conquest, invited to settle there by William the Conqueror. From the late eleventh century onwards, the Jewish community quickly became an essential part of the English economy. Jews were permitted to loan money at interest, something Christians were forbidden from doing. Jewish settlements in important towns such as London, Norwich and Lincoln prospered. England's Jews were skilled individuals, who worked as doctors, goldsmiths and poets. But lending money was their primary source of income, and Jewish people were fundamental to the working of the English economy. Jewish lenders provided loans for many of the most important figures at the royal court (for the purchase of castles, payment of dues to the king, etc). They were also exploited by kings, who were often in dire need of money.

But from the middle of the twelfth century, there was growing antisemitism in England and across Europe. In part, this was fueled by the 'blood libel': fabricated allegations that Jews abducted and murdered Christian children for magical rituals. The official stance of the Church slowly shifted from tolerance of Jews to increasing hostility. Anti-Jewish feeling was also linked to the crusades, which began in 1096. Christians trying to reclaim the holy land increasingly saw Jews as "Christ-killers". There were outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in 1189 and 1190, at the death of Henry II and when the crown's power was weakest. Mob violence led to attacks on the Jewish community in London, and the massacre of the Jewish community in York.

Kings, especially Henry III (1216-72), tried to extract large sums of money from the Jewish community as taxes and forced "gifts". In order to pay these sums, Jewish lenders often sold on the debts owed to them by Christians, and the new owners of the debt pressured the debtors to pay up. As English knights became increasingly indebted, Jewish lenders got the blame. In Parliament, from the 1260s onwards, local representatives demanded measures be taken to curb Jewish lending. It is likely that these changes contributed to several thousand Jews deciding to leave England.

By 1275, Edward I decreed that Jews could no longer loan money for a living and would have to convert to being merchants, laborers or owning farmland. This statute also confirmed long-standing rules for Jews, e.g. requiring Jews to wear badges (in the shape of stone tablets) to identify them. By 1290, Edward was under pressure: having run up large debts waging war abroad, he needed to negotiate a financial settlement. But Parliament's permission was needed before a tax would be raised. One thing Edward was willing to barter was the remaining Jewish population. In return for an **Edict of Expulsion**, Parliament granted Edward a tax of £116,000 – the largest single tax of the Middle Ages.



### The case of Roderigo Lopes

The infamous case of Roderigo Lopes was thought to have provided some inspiration for Shakespeare. Lopes was born into a family of Jewish origin in Portugal around 1517. His father was physician to King John III of Portugal, and Lopes was baptized and raised in the Catholic faith as a converso. Amid the Portuguese Inquisition, Lopes was alleged to be a marrano—one of Jewish descent who professed the Christian faith, but secretly adhered to the Judaism of his ancestors—and was compelled to leave Portugal. He settled in England in 1559, anglicizing his first name as "Roger", and successfully resumed his practice as a doctor in London. He joined the Church of England, and in 1581 he was made physician-in-chief to Queen Elizabeth I.

In 1593, Lopes was accused by Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, of conspiring to poison and kill the queen. Revelations regarding Lopes' secret correspondence with Spanish officials did not help his case, particularly when it emerged that he had given the Spanish information about the English court and apparently donated money to a secret synagogue in Antwerp. Lopes was executed in 1594.



## Elizabethan era England

### Blood libel

Blood libel or ritual murder libel is an antisemitic hoax accusing Jews of murdering Christian children in order to use their blood as part of religious rituals. Many attribute the origins of this false belief to Apion's story of King Antiochus, and the king's discovery of this practice. Historically, blood libel claims have often been made in order to account for the otherwise unexplained deaths of children.

In the first distinct case of blood libel against Jews in the Middle Ages, that of Norwich in 1144, it was alleged that the Jews had "bought a Christian child before Easter and tortured him with all the tortures wherewith our Lord was tortured, and on Long Friday hanged him on a rood in hatred of our Lord." The boy's hagiographer, Thomas of Monmouth, falsely claimed that every year there is an international council of Jews at which they choose the country in which a child will be killed during Easter, because of a Jewish prophecy that states that the annual killing of a Christian child will ensure that the Jews will be restored to the Holy Land. Monmouth claimed that in 1144, England was chosen, and the leaders of the Jewish community delegated the Jews of Norwich to perform the killing.

The motif of torture and murder of Christian children in imitation of Jesus' Passion persisted with slight variations throughout the following centuries. In the case of Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln, 1255, an element taken directly from Apion's libel was interwoven into the Passion motif. The chronicler Matthew Paris relates, "that the Child was first fattened for ten days with white bread and milk and then ... almost all the Jews of England were invited to the crucifixion." And on the eve of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, there was the blood-libel case of The Holy Child of La Guardia (1490–91). There, Conversos were made to confess under torture that, with the knowledge of the chief rabbi of the Jews, they had assembled at the time of Passover in a cave, and crucified a child.

By the 15th century, the motif was commonplace throughout western and central Europe. It often gave rise to legends around miracles performed by the alleged victims of the blood libels. In 1475, a 2-year old boy named Simon disappeared from the city of Trent in Italy around the time of Easter. His father alleged that he had been kidnapped and murdered by the local Jewish community in order to make matzah for Passover. The entire Jewish community was arrested and forced to confess under torture before they were sentenced to death and burned at the stake. After hundreds of miracles were ascribed to Simon of Trent, a religious cult spread across Italy, Germany, and Austria in his name and he was granted sainthood in the 16th century (subsequently removed by the pope in 1965).

Martin Luther, German theologian and key figure in the Protestant Reformation, lent even further credence to the blood libel charge by accepting the Jewish use of Christian blood as fact in his *On the Jews and their Lies* (published in 1543)



The Prioress' Tale, by Edward Coley Burne-Jones

"The Prioress' Tale" is one of *The Canterbury Tales* and includes a notable instance of blood libel. The story begins with an invocation to the Virgin Mary, then sets the scene in Asia, where a community of Jews live in a Christian city. A seven-year-old school-boy, son of a widow, is brought up to revere The Virgin Mary. He teaches himself to sing the first verse of the popular medieval hymn *Alma Redemptoris Mater* ("Nurturing Mother of the Redeemer"); although he does not understand the words, an older classmate tells him it is about Mary, the mother of Jesus. He begins to sing it every day as he walks through the local Jewish ghetto to school.

Satan incites some Jews to murder the child and throw his body into a public cesspit. His mother searches for him and eventually finds his body,

which miraculously begins to sing the "Alma Redemptoris". The Christians call in the city magistrate, who has the Jews drawn by wild horses and then hanged. The boy continues to sing throughout his own Requiem Mass until the local abbot asks him how he is able to do so. He replies that although his throat is cut, Mary appeared to him and laid a grain on his tongue, saying he could keep singing until it was removed and she would come for him. The abbot removes the grain and the boy finally becomes silent and dies. The story ends with a reference to Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln.

Chaucer himself could not have known Jews in England, since they had been expelled a hundred years before his poem was written, though he may have visited some Jewish quarters on his travels to Italy in 1372–73. Elsewhere, in his *Tale of Sir Thopas* and in *The Hous of Fame* (c. 1380), he speaks of Jews with a degree of respect.

## Controversy of the play

"One would have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare's grand, equivocal comedy *The Merchant of Venice* is nevertheless a profoundly anti-semitic work..."

-Harold Bloom

Shakespeare's play has been seen by some as a continuation of the anti-semitism of this era in English history, and Shylock has become a term of disapproval, a link in the history of anti-Jewish stereotype, just as Shylock's "pound of flesh" has become a metaphor for cruel and relentless greed.

Shakespeare knew well the stereotype of the Jew as a nefarious, bloodthirsty monster, found in old English ballads like those of Hugh of Lincoln, in which Jews kidnap an eight-year-old child, nourish him, try him, torture him, and then crucify him. Shakespeare undoubtedly knew Chaucer's tale in which the prioress says:

Our first foe, the serpent satanus  
That hath in the Jewish heart, his waspes nest

One interpretation of the play's structure is that Shakespeare meant to contrast the mercy of the main Christian characters with the Old Testament vengefulness of a Jew, who lacks the religious grace to comprehend mercy. Similarly, it is possible that Shakespeare meant Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity to be a happy ending for the character, as, to a Christian audience, it saves his soul and allows him to enter Heaven.

Defenders of Shakespeare, such as Stephen Byk in *Vindicating Shakespeare*, would assert that, despite the audience's fundamental affinity with this decision, Shylock's abject humiliation would have, "at least partly, pierced the wall of their prejudice." Gratiano's observation at the very end of the play that "dawn – that traditional symbol of renewal – is two hours away," and the absence of celebratory dancing, Byk claims, are a signal that the characters "and all Elizabethan society" remain "puzzled and uncomfortable with what they have experienced".

Nevertheless, Shylock does begrudge his servant food, does miss his ducats more than, or a least as much as, his daughter, does go to a party only to have the satisfaction of devouring someone else's food, and does use religious piety as a blind for cruel impulse. He is also repeatedly referred to as "a kind of devil," "the devil himself," "the very devil incarnate," "the devil in the likeness of a Jew" and a "cruel devil." At other times, he is a "damned, execrable dog" and an "inhuman wretch." It has been argued that the Viennese in *Measure for Measure*, the monster Richard III, or Edmund in

*King Lear*, are far worse specimens than Shylock; yet no one takes them to be typical of Christians, Viennese, or Englishmen; nor are Viennese or Englishmen sensitive about these characteristics. But nowhere are the disgusting character traits so associated with a national identity as are Shylock's with his Jewishness. Throughout the play, Shylock is mostly referred to as simply "the Jew," with repulsive adjectives sometimes added on: "dog Jew" or "currish Jew."

Another example of the depiction of Shylock as inferior is in his relationship to music. To the English, music was a way to connect the human on earth to God. Yet, Shakespeare portrays Shylock as a man who not only cannot appreciate music, but whom it actually appears to pain. As Shylock leaves Jessica at home to go to a feast at the home of Bassanio, he urges her to close the windows against the music of the masquers in the street. And once Jessica is in Portia's Belmont as Lorenzo's now converted wife, she herself appears ambivalent about music.

A somewhat extreme position is that the play continues to get staged only because of hatred for the Jews, and that it could be used to verify a false history of the Jews full of blood, treason, falsehood, deceit, and greed.

Greed, in particular, was tied to Shylock's role as a usurer, and so some might say that the conflict between Shylock and Antonio is not so much a matter of religion but rather of mercantile ideals, as Shylock declares in an aside at the entrance of Antonio:

I hate him for he is a Christian:  
But more, for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.

The audience is amply informed that Shylock hates Antonio because the latter has called him "usurer," and spat upon him, and "thwarted" his "bargains" and Antonio openly glories in having cast such slurs. Upon the Rialto he has railed at Shylock, not for religion, but for usury — as Shylock puts it, "all for use of that which is mine owne." Race and religion, then, are not the main theme of the play. Rather, it is conflicting economic ideals.

*The Merchant of Venice* offers a number of specific parallels to the anti-usury sentiments of late 16th century England, most notably in its contrasts between usury and assistance to the poor, and between usurers and merchants. Miles Mosse, for example, laments that "lending upon *vsurie* is growne so common and usuall among men, as that free lending to the needie is utterly overthrowne."

By this time, the Jewish moneylenders were also finding their livelihood

newly threatened in Venice, this time by Christian institutions known as *monti di pietà*. These institutions gave poor people access to loans with reasonable interest rates, using funds from charitable donors as capital.

Again and again, in Shakespeare, the allusion to usury recurs, and commonly with a fling at its un-Christian ethics and its bitter consequences. It is "forbidden"; and the usurer is a simile of shame; the citizens in *Coriolanus* are outraged that the senators pass "edicts for usury to support usurers"; and *Timon* is full of attacks upon the system as undermining the Christian virtues and the state. There is abundant evidence that Shakespeare feared the motive of material gain so important in the rapidly expanding development of capitalism, lest it subvert the values of loyalty for its own sake, friendship, custom-forged and time-honored allegiances, all based on the structure of medieval feudalism.

Some would argue then that Shakespeare's aim was not to attack Jews but to attack the greed and materialism of the Christians all about him. Shakespeare gives many examples. When Jessica is in the very act of stealing her father's money, the so-called Christian, Gratiano, says admiringly that she is a Gentile and not a Jew. Bassanio's quest for Portia sounds in his own mouth more like a hunt for fortune than a journey for love. His sentences of "love" are full of words designating material values, such as "gold", "golden fleece", "fortune", "value", "worth", and "thrift" (in the sense of material gain). Even Launcelot parodies this Christian concern for gain when he complains that too many Jewish converts to Christianity would raise the price of pork. Shakespeare makes the audience uncomfortable with its hypocritical stereotypes which allow it so easily to project its own guilt for greed onto the Jew. Underlying glittering Venice and fabulous Belmont is the increasingly universal passion for gain.

This message is enforced by the three-caskets motif, seemingly so far removed from the other issues of the drama. For its purpose is to reject the aim of gain-seeking (more than you deserve, the golden casket), and rigorous justice (just what you deserve, the silver casket) and instead to embrace the unconditional giving of the leaden casket.

"The most striking tribute we pay [Shakespeare] today is in continuing to produce *The Merchant of Venice*. Each production is, really, an act of faith, made in the face of the evidence. Every time anyone decides to mount the play he is saying, in effect, that Shakespeare cannot possibly have meant what he seems to mean, that the humane and penetrating intelligence we have come to know so well in the thirty-six other plays could never have been capable of the unthinking, unfeeling anti-Semitism that poisons the portrait of Shylock."

Walter Kerr

## Depictions of Moroccans

Portia's stigmatization of Morocco frames and thereby comments upon the Venetians' stigmatizations of Shylock, each instance affected in the language of "darkness" and "devils." Portia maligns Morocco's black skin in I.ii. before he actually appears on stage for himself in II.i., the object preempted by the interpretation, fact by meaning, as always occurs with stigma. Whether obtuse or malicious, Portia speaks as though the meaning of stigma comes from the aberrant body itself, not from her interpretation of that body. Her interpretation divides aesthetics into polarized categories of "the good" (saintly conditions, white complexions) and "the bad" (devilish conditions, black complexions), and then she acts as though one good signifies another (as though whiteness signifies saintliness), and one bad another (as though blackness signifies the demonic).

In terms of the dramatic structure and timing of *Merchant*, this prejudiced pronouncement of the coming of Morocco, who does not actually appear for some time, is really a flourish of sorts for Shylock's first entrance in the scene that comes between the announcement and the appearance of Morocco. In this scene, Shylock rails against the anti-Semitism in Venice until the scene shifts back to Belmont, where Morocco's very first words are a defense of his skin color. Both Morocco and Shylock defend their identities from their very first appearances, and their subsequent actions show some of the effects of being stigmatized.

In the first casket scene, Morocco chooses the gold casket on the basis of the very aesthetic Portia applied to him earlier, the aesthetic of similitude: the gold casket must contain the picture of Portia, he reasons, because the things we deem good — beauty and virtue — must go together. Morocco has internalized the idea that external appearances signify internal qualities.

In a similar vein, the remainder of *The Merchant of Venice* shows Shylock increasingly comports his character to the caricature of a villainous Jew that the Venetians have saddled on him since before the play even began. Now, Morocco's gold casket actually contains a skull and a grade-school lesson not to assume that things are as they appear on the outside: "Gilded tombs do worms enfold." After this admonition, Portia's overt racism ("Let all of his complexion choose me so," she says as Morocco exits) casts a particularly bad light on her, the same bad light that shines on Solanio and Salerio in a later scene when they echo Portia's treatment of Morocco while stigmatizing Shylock as demonic and dark, seeing him and saying, "The devil ... comes in the likeness of a Jew," hearing him lament his lost daughter and laughing, "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory."



## Merchant of Venice glossary

**I.1.27:** Salerio's reference to his ship "The Andrew" is thought to be an allusion to the Spanish ship St. Andrew, captured by the English at Cádiz in 1596. The economic losses caused during the sacking of Cádiz were numerous: the city was burned, as was the fleet, in what was one of the principal English victories in the course of the Anglo-Spanish War

**I.1.50 Janus:** the two-headed Roman god of beginnings and transitions and the animistic spirit of doorways and archways

**I.1.55 Nestor:** the eldest leader of the Greeks during the Trojan War.

**I.1.77:** a reference to the "all the world's a stage" line from *As You Like It*

**I.1.166-172:** Here, Shakespeare references both a different Portia (the daughter of the Roman senator Cato and a future character in his play *Julius Caesar*) as well as Jason and his expedition to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece.

**I.2.53:** the weeping philosopher refers to **Heraclitus of Ephesus**, who wept at people's consuming desire for riches.

**I.2.116 Sibylla:** a prophetess in Roman mythology. Apollo granted her as many years of life as there were sand grains she held in her hand.

**I.3.72:** The story of Jacob and Laban:



*Jacob fleeing from Laban*

When Jacob and Laban entered into an agreement, it was decided that Jacob would receive lambs born with spots or stripes as his wages. Being the cleverer one, Jacob, during the breeding season, arranged the wooden rods in such a way that the shadows of the rods should fall on the sheep. He did this because he was of the opinion that newborns look like whatever their mother sees during mating. Consequently, most of the lambs were born spotted or striped, and thus, they became Jacob's property. Thus, by referring to himself as Jacob, Shylock thinks he can outsmart Antonia in business.

**II.1.26 Sultan Solyman:** Also known as Suleiman the Magnificent, Solyman was the tenth and longest-reigning Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 until his death in 1566. Under his administration, the caliphate ruled over at least 25 million people. Solyman personally led armies in conquering the Christian strongholds of Belgrade and Rhodes as well as most of Hungary. He annexed much of the Middle East and large areas of North Africa as far west as Algeria. Under his rule, the Ottoman fleet dominated the seas from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and through the Persian Gulf, providing stiff competition to the Venetian republic.

**II. 5. 44 "that fool of Hagar's offspring":** Shylock is referring to Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, maid to Abraham's wife Sarah. Shylock implies that the Christians are descendants of Ishmael, or "Hagar's offspring" – that is, from a different group than the Israelites who primarily view themselves as descendants of Isaac, Abraham's child with Sarah.

**II. 7. 41 Hyrcanian deserts:** Hyrcania is a historical region composed of the land south-east of the Caspian Sea in modern-day Iran and Turkmenistan, bound in the south by the Alborz mountain range and the Kopet Dag in the east.

**III. 1. 4 Goodwins:** Goodwin Sands is a 10-mile-long sandbank at the southern end of the North Sea, off the coast of Kent, England. Lying enroute between London, the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, the Sands lie in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, as well as one of the most dangerous. More than 2,000 ships are believed to have been wrecked upon the sandbanks.

**III. 2. 55 Alcides:** This is another name for the divine hero Hercules. The passage references his rescue of Hesione, daughter of the King of Troy, which Alcides performed not for love but for the horses offered as a reward.

**III. 2. 86:** The liver was thought to be the seat of courage; therefore, a coward would have a white, bloodless liver.

**III. 4. 50: Padua** was renowned by then as a center for legal studies in Italy. The University of Padua was founded in 1222 and was one of the two most important universities for law (the other being in Bologna) By the 16th century, they were not only teaching canon law but criminal and civil law as well.

**III. 5. 18 Scylla & Charybdis:** Scylla and Charybdis were mythical sea monsters. Greek mythology sited them on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and Calabria, on the Italian mainland. They are first mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* with Scylla described as a beautiful nymph who gets turned into a monster. Meanwhile, three times a day, Charybdis swallowed a huge amount of water, before belching it back out again, creating large whirlpools capable of dragging a ship underwater. The idiom "between Scylla and Charybdis" has come to mean being forced to choose between two similarly dangerous situations.



**IV. 1. 223 Daniel:** In the story of Susanna and the Elders, the young woman Susanna bathes in her garden. Two elders spy on her. When she makes her way back to her house, they accost her, demanding she have sex with them. When she refuses, they have her arrested, claiming that the reason she sent her maids away was to be alone as she was having sex with a young man under a tree. She refuses to be blackmailed and is arrested and about to be put to death for adultery when the young judge Daniel interrupts the proceedings, shouting that the elders should be questioned to prevent the death of an innocent. After being separated, the two men are cross-examined about details of what they saw but disagree about the tree under which Susanna supposedly met her lover. The elders' lie is plain to all the observers. The false accusers are put to death, and virtue triumphs. Here, Shylock seems to be making the comparison because the judge (Portia in disguise) looks so young. Later, Gratiano will make the same comparison, but apparently because Daniel (as Portia does to Shylock) turns the tables on the accusers.

**IV. 1. 296 Barrabas:** According to the New Testament, Barabbas was a thief and the prisoner chosen by the crowd in Jerusalem, over Jesus Christ, to be pardoned and released by Pontius Pilate as part of a Passover custom. Historians argue that this narrative cannot be considered historically accurate, but that it is probable that a prisoner referred to as Barabbas (bar abba, "son of the father") was indeed freed around the period Jesus was crucified and this gave birth to the story.

**V. 1. 4-13: Troilus & Cressida / Pyramus & Thisbe / Dido & Aeneas / Medea & Jason:** These characters come from some of the most famous and tragic love stories in antiquity. In Western European medieval and Renaissance versions of the legend, **Troilus** is the youngest of Priam's five legitimate sons by Hecuba, and a leader in the Trojan War. Troilus falls in love with Cressida, whose father has defected to the Greeks. **Cressida** pledges her love to Troilus but she soon switches her affections to the Greek hero Diomedes when sent to her father in a hostage exchange. Troilus was regarded as a paragon of the faithful courtly lover and also of the virtuous pagan knight. As the children of rival families who fall in love with one another and who ultimately die by suicide, **Pyramus and Thisbe** undoubtedly influenced Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Jessica here references the moment Thisbe arrives for a planned rendezvous with Pyramus only to encounter a lion. Pyramus will later come to believe that the lion has killed Thisbe. The **Dido and Aeneas** myth also ends with suicide. According to the Greeks, Dido, Queen of Carthage, kills herself after the Trojan hero Aeneas is forced to leave her and fulfill his destiny by continuing on to Rome. In the story of **Medea and Jason**, Jason's father Aeson, was imprisoned by his half-brother Pelias. It was Pelias who sent Jason after the Golden Fleece and it was during that time that Aeson committed suicide. In some versions of the story, upon Jason's return, he asked his wife Medea to bring Aeson back from the dead, which she did, as a younger man.



*Aeneas and Dido*

**V. 1. 87 Erebus:** One of the primordial deities in Greek mythology, born out of the primeval void, Chaos. Erebus was the personification of the deep darkness and shadows. His dark mists encircled the world and filled the deep hollows of the earth. In the evening, Erebus' wife Nyx drew Erebus' darkness across the sky, bringing night, and his daughter Hemera scattered it at dawn, bringing day. The first obscured Aither, the heavenly light of the ether, the second revealed it. In the ancient cosmogonies the heavenly Aither) and the dark mists of the netherworld (erebos) were regarded as the sources of day and light rather than the sun. The word Erebus was also used to indicate a region of the Underworld where the dead would go immediately after dying; a place between earth and Hades.

**V. 1. 109 Endymion:** In the Greek myths, Endymion was a handsome prince who, asleep in a cave one night, was spotted by Selene, goddess of the moon. Enraptured by his beauty, she descended to the cave and kissed the sleeping youth. She wanted no more and, throwing him into a magic, eternal slumber, she returned night after night to kiss him and sleep awhile by his side.

**V. 1. 127 Antipodes:** In geography, antipodes are two locations diametrically opposed to one another on the Earth's surface.



## **In Sooth... glossary**

**“Litany in the Time of Plague”:** A poem written by the English playwright, poet and satirist Thomas Nashe. The poem first appeared in Nashe’s 1600 play *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1600). The play was composed during a deadly outbreak of the bubonic plague between the years 1592-1593, and “A Litany in Time of Plague” consequently acknowledges the inevitability omnipresence of death during this time. Titled a “litany,” or a list of prayers, the poem presents a series of petitions to God, meditations upon mortality and eternity, and spiritual instructions for readers to follow.

**Silicon Valley Bank failing:** Silicon Valley Bank was shut down in March 2023 by the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation. Based in Santa Clara, California, the bank was shut down after its investments greatly decreased in value and its depositors withdrew large amounts of money, among other factors. Silicon Valley Bank saw massive growth between 2019 and 2022, which resulted in it having a significant amount of deposits and assets. While a small amount of those deposits were held in cash, most of the excess was used to buy Treasury bonds and other long-term debts. These assets tend to have relatively low returns but also relatively low risk. But as the Federal Reserve increased interest rates in response to high inflation, Silicon Valley Bank’s bonds became riskier investments. Because investors could buy bonds at higher interest rates, Silicon Valley Bank’s bonds declined in value. As this was happening, some of Silicon Valley Bank’s customers—many of whom are in the technology industry—hit financial troubles, and many began to withdraw funds from their accounts. To accommodate these large withdrawals, Silicon Valley Bank decided to sell some of its investments, but those sales came at a loss. SVB lost \$1.8 billion, and that marked the beginning of the end for the bank.

***The Education of a Christian Woman:*** An early sixteenth-century book by Juan Luis Vives, written for the education of the future Mary I of England, daughter of Henry VIII. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the work was popular in both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Vives advocated education for all women, regardless of social class and ability, and stressed intellectual companionship in marriage over procreation. It demonstrated how women's progress was essential for the good of society

**Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization:** A landmark decision addressing whether the Constitution protects the right to an abortion. In Dobbs, the Supreme Court reviewed the constitutionality of Mississippi’s Gestational Age Act—a law banning most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy with exceptions for medical emergencies and fetal abnormalities. In a divided opinion, the Court upheld the Mississippi law

and overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) —concluding that the Constitution does not protect the right to an abortion. As a result, the Court’s decision returned the issue of abortion regulation to the elected branches. In a rare joint dissent, Justices Breyer, Kagan, and Sotomayor criticized the Court for unsettling nearly five decades of precedent and undermining the Constitution’s promise of freedom and equality for women.

**Coventry Carol:** An English Christmas carol dating from the 16th century. The carol was traditionally performed in the city of Coventry in England as part of *The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors*, a medieval mystery play that is part of a ten-play cycle. The play depicts the Christmas story from chapter two in the Gospel of Matthew. The carol refers to the Massacre of the Innocents, in which Herod the Great, king of Judea, ordered the execution of all male children who were two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem. The carol takes the form of a lullaby sung by mothers of the doomed children. Christians venerate these children as the first Christian martyrs, though a majority of Herod biographers hold the event to be myth or legend.



Samson Rowlie

**Samson Rowlie:** Born in Norfolk, England, the son of a Bristol merchant, Francis Rowlie, Samson Rowlie was captured by pirates and castrated by the Ottomans in 1577. He converted from Christianity to Islam and took the name Hassan Aga. Aga would serve the governor of Algiers, Uluç Ali Pasha, as Chief Eunuch and Treasurer.

***Second Book of Songs or Airs:*** A collection of 22 songs by composer John Dowland and published in London in 1600. The book contains songs for the lute, though the title page offers options regarding other instruments to be used. Dowland is best known today for his melancholy songs such as "Come, heavy sleep", "Come again", "Flow my tears", "I saw my Lady weepe", "Now o now I needs must part" and "In darkness let me dwell".



## **In Sooth... glossary**

**“The Lamentation of Follie”:** A ballad written by William Elderton, a noted 16th century actor, lawyer and songwriter. The opening lines of the ballad, “The God of Love,” by Elderton are quoted in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing*.

**Balthazar:** Balthazar, or Bithisarea, was born around 25-20 BC and was one of the members of the legendary three wise men, mostly referred to as Magi, who went to visit and deliver gifts to the infant Jesus. Balthazar is traditionally referred to as the King of Arabia and gave the gift of myrrh to Jesus. In traditional pictorial representations from the Late Middle Ages, Balthazar is represented as a Black person. Many traditionally Christian countries stage pageants that include roles for the three wise men, and, in mainland European countries, it was customary for Balthazar to be portrayed by a person in blackface. In the 21st century, a number of campaigns in Spain pushed for a Black person to play Balthazar instead.



**“Tichborn’s Elegy”:** A poem by 16th century English poet Chidiock Tichborne. Tichborne was raised in the Roman Catholic faith and so was banned from practicing his faith during the reign of Elizabeth I. In 1583, Tichborne and his father, Peter, were arrested and questioned concerning the use of religious objects Tichborne had brought back from a visit he had made abroad. In June 1586, Tichborne agreed to take part in the Babington Plot to murder Queen Elizabeth and replace her with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. The plot was foiled, and though most of the conspirators fled, Tichborne had an injured leg and was forced to remain in London where he was arrested and sentenced to death. While in custody in the Tower of London, Tichborne wrote a letter to his wife. The letter contained three stanzas of poetry that is his best known piece of work, “Tichborne’s Elegy”. The “Elegy” uses two favorite Renaissance figures of speech – antithesis and paradox - and is remarkable for being written almost entirely in monosyllables: Every word in the poem is of one syllable, with ten words in each line. The “Elegy” has inspired many homages and answers, and has been set to music many times from the Elizabethan era to the present day.

## **Court cases cited**

### **Nestlé USA, Inc. v. Doe**

Dismissed in 2021

The U.S. Supreme Court throws out a lawsuit accusing Cargill Inc and a Nestle subsidiary of knowingly helping to perpetuate slavery at Ivory Coast cocoa farms. The plaintiffs were former slave laborers in the cocoa farms.

### **Kennedy v. Bremerton School District**

Decided in 2022

The U.S. Supreme Court determines that “The First Amendment protects an individual engaging in a personal religious observance from government reprisal.” The case involves Joseph Kennedy, a football coach in the public school system who led Christian prayers in the middle of the field after each game. The conflict centered around the school board’s attempts to limit this practice, fearing that it infringed on the separation of church and state.

### **Bittner v. United States**

Decided in 2023

The U.S. Supreme Court determines that The Bank Secrecy Act’s \$10,000 maximum penalty for the failure to file accrues on a per-report, not a per-account, basis. Alexandru Bittner held as much as \$16 million in 272 accounts, but this ruling limits his penalties to no more than \$50,000.

### **Carson v. Makin**

Decided in 2022

The U.S. Supreme Court determines that Maine’s restrictions on school vouchers violated the Free Exercise Clause, as they discriminated against religious-backed private schools. State governments would now be required to provide funding toward attendance at religious institutions.

### **Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid**

Decided in 2021

The U.S. Supreme Court determines that a regulation requiring agricultural employers to allow labor organizers to access their property may not be enforced. That is, unless “just compensation” is provided to the employers.

### **Fulton v. City of Philadelphia**

Decided in 2021

The U.S. Supreme court determines that the government must offer a religious exemption when it’s willing to offer them for other purposes and can achieve its policy goals through other means. It was ruled that officials in Philadelphia violated this precedent by refusing to respect a foster care agency’s faith-based objection to same-sex marriage.



## Noted personalities quoted

**Viktor Orbán:** The leader of Fidesz, Hungary's right-wing political party, Orbán has been the prime minister of Hungary since 2010. He previously held the office from 1998 to 2002 as well. Between 2010 and 2020, Hungary dropped 69 places in the Press Freedom Index, and lost 11 places in the Democracy Index;



*Viktor Orbán shakes hands with then-President Donald Trump*

**George Santos:** A New York Republican representative, Santos is known for having made numerous false or dubious claims about his biography. In May 2023, a federal grand jury indicted Santos on 13 criminal charges; he pleaded not guilty on all counts.

**Tucker Carlson:** A longtime political commentator and writer, Carlson hosted his own nightly talk show on Fox News, beginning in 2016. In June, 2020, "Tucker Carlson Tonight," became the highest-rated cable news show in the U.S., with an average of four million viewers. This came in the wake of Carlson's remarks criticizing the Black Lives Matter movement. Carlson was fired in 2023.

**Larry Elder:** A right-wing political commentator and talk show host, Elder ran as a Republican candidate in the recall election of California governor, Gavin Newsom. The recall was defeated by a wide margin.

**Marsha Blackburn:** A Tennessee senator since 2019, Blackburn is also a member of the Tea Party and a staunch conservative. Blackburn is known for her opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion. Blackburn supported President Trump's 2017 executive order barring citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S.. She opposed the Affordable Care Act, and voted against the Paycheck Fairness Act, which sought to address the gender pay gap in the United States

**Ron DeSantis:** The current governor of Florida, DeSantis is also a founding member of the Freedom Caucus, considered to be the most conservative voting bloc in Congress. In 2022, he oversaw the passage of Parental Rights in Education Act, commonly known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill.

**Matt Gaetz:** A Florida representative, Gaetz first came to national attention for defending the state's controversial "stand-your-ground" law in 2016. In January 2018, Gaetz invited alt-right Holocaust denier Charles C. Johnson to attend Donald Trump's State of the Union address, and he is known to have attended political rallies alongside members of the notorious Proud Boys. In June 2021, Gaetz was one of 21 House Republicans to vote against a resolution to give the Congressional Gold Medal to police officers who defended the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

**Lauren Boebert:** A Colorado representative, Boebert is known for her gun rights advocacy. On January 1, 2021, in a letter co-signed by more than 80 Republicans, Boebert asked Speaker Pelosi and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy to uphold the 1967 law exempting members of Congress from a Capitol Hill ban on firearms, which allowed them to keep arms in their offices. After saying that she planned to carry a gun while working on Capitol Hill, Boebert posted a video showing her placing a handgun in a holster and walking through the neighborhood. She has embraced numerous conspiracy theories, including QAnon, and says she supports eliminating the U.S. Department of Education.

**Brian Babin:** A Texas representative, in 2016, Babin introduced a resolution that would invalidate Title IX protections against gender discrimination. He stated, "The federal government should not be in the business of throwing common sense and decency out the window and forcing local schools to permit a teenage boy who 'identifies' as a girl to use changing rooms, locker rooms and bathrooms with five-year-old girls."



*Reps. Matt Gaetz and Lauren Boebert hold AR-15 rifles as they pose for a picture with supporters during a campaign stop for Gaetz in August, 2022.*

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