

## The Merchant of Venice

### SYNOPSIS

#### *The Merchant of Venice*

Antonio, the merchant of Venice, lends three thousand ducats to his friend Bassanio to help him woo the wealthy and beautiful Portia of Belmont, an estate some way away from Venice. Because Antonio's money is invested in ships bringing cargoes back to Venice, Antonio borrows the money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. The Jews have been badly treated by the Italians, and Antonio has criticized Shylock in the past for his high rates of interest. Shylock agrees to lend, however, under the strange condition that if Antonio fails to repay the loan, Shylock can take a pound of his flesh instead. Bassanio's friend Lorenzo runs away with Shylock's daughter Jessica, and Jessica also steals some of her father's money.

Portia's father has arranged in his will that Portia will marry whoever chooses the right one of three caskets made of gold, silver and lead. Wealthy suitors from Morocco and Aragon fail, but Bassanio chooses the right, lead, casket. His friend Gratiano marries Portia's companion Nerissa at the same time.

News arrives that Antonio's ships have all been lost. The court, under the Duke, must decide whether Shylock can take his pound of flesh. After all that has happened, Shylock insists on it. Without telling their husbands, Portia and Bassanio appear before the court as (male) lawyers, and after establishing that the agreement is correct, they point out that it does not mention blood, so no blood must be spilt. When Shylock now claims money instead, Portia points out that the punishment for attempting to kill a Venetian is death. The Duke pardons Shylock on condition he gives half his wealth to Antonio and half to Venice, and converts to Christianity. Antonio gives up his half, provided Shylock leaves it in his will to Jessica and Lorenzo. Portia and Nerissa demand the wedding rings worn by their husbands, who do not recognize them, as payment.

When they return the husbands are made to feel embarrassed, because they had promised never to part with their rings. Finally there is good news about Antonio's ships after all.

### Media:

#### DVD:

*The Merchant of Venice* (1973), dir. Jonathan Miller and John Sichel, with Laurence Olivier

*The Merchant of Venice* (BBC TV Shakespeare 1980), dir. Jack Gold

*The Merchant of Venice* (2000), dir. Trevor Nunn and Chris Hunt

*The Maori Merchant of Venice* (2002), dir. Don Selwyn

*The Merchant of Venice* (2004), dir. Michael Radford, with Al Pacino

#### Not available:

*Shakespeare's Merchant* (2003), dir. Paul Wagar

#### CD Audio:

*The Merchant of Venice* (BBC Radio Collection)

*The Merchant of Venice* (Pearl), with Orson Welles

*The Merchant of Venice* (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

*Serenade to Music* by Ralph Vaughan Williams (musical setting from Act V Scene 1)

[Michael Mitchell]