

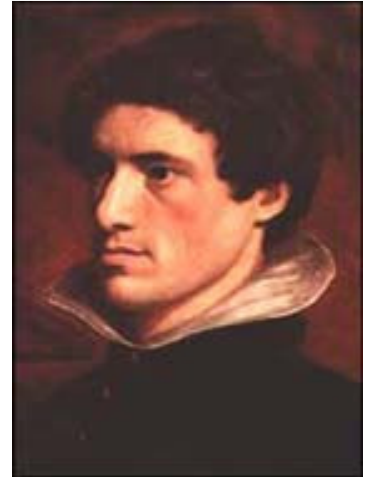
The Merchant of Venice

From Tales From Shakespeare

By

Charles Lamb

Charles Lamb (London, 10 February 1775 – Edmonton, 27 December 1834) was an English essayist with Welsh heritage, best known for his Essays of Elia and for the children's book Tales From Shakespeare, which he produced along with his sister, Mary Lamb. He studied at Christ's Hospital where he formed a lifelong friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Lamb became friends in London with a group of young writers who favoured political reform including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Henry Brougham, Lord Byron, Thomas Barnes and Leigh Hunt. Lamb worked for the East India Company in London but managed to contribute articles to several journals and newspapers including *London Magazine*, *The Morning Chronicle*, *Morning Post* and *The Quarterly Review*. In Tales From Shakespeare, Charles Lamb summarised the Tragedies where as his sister Mary Lamb summarised Comedies. There can be no better introduction to Shakespeare for children than Tales From Shakespeare. The book proved popular with both young and old, and the Lambs followed up this success with others in the same vein. In 1808 Charles published his own version of Homer's *Odyssey* for children, The Adventures of Ulysses, and in 1809 he collaborated again with Mary on Mrs. Leicester's School, a book of children's stories, and poetry for children.



The Merchant of Venice is a tragicomedy by William Shakespeare, written somewhere between 1596 and 1598. The play is remembered for its dramatic scenes, and is best known for Shylock and the famous 'Hath not a Jew eyes'. Love, hatred and mercy are the dominant themes of the play. Antonio, a merchant of Venice borrows money from his enemy Shylock to enable Bassanio, a friend of his, to go to Belmont to marry intelligent Portia. Though Bassanio rejoices over his marriage with Portia where as Antonio is jailed for not clearing his debt to Shylock in time. Shylock's adamant and hatred demands a pound of flesh from Antonio.

Shylock, the Jew, lived in Venice. He was a usurer, who had amassed an immense fortune by lending money at great interest to Christian merchants. Shylock, being a hard-hearted man, exacted the payment of the money he lent with such severity that he was much disliked by all good men, and particularly by Antonio, a young merchant of Venice; and Shylock as much hated Antonio, because he used to lend money to people in distress, and would never take any interest for the money he lent. Therefore there was great enmity between this covetous Jew and the generous merchant Antonio. Whenever Antonio met Shylock on the Rialto, (Exchange) he used to reproach him with his usuries and hard dealings, which the Jew would bear with seeming patience, while he secretly meditated revenge.

Antonio's young friend Bassanio was in love with a rich and beautiful lady called Portia, who lived in the city of Belmont. He wanted to visit her to ask her to marry him, but he did not have the money he needed to make himself look as rich and important as her other suitors. So, he went to Antonio and asked him to lend him a sum of three thousand ducats.

Though Antonio had a large fortune, he had, at this time, no ready money to give Bassanio because he had invested all his money in trade. His ships, carrying rich cargoes, had gone abroad, and they would take some time to get back to the port of Venice. But being very eager to provide his friend with the money he needed, he decided to borrow the sum from an old Jew called Shylock.

Antonio and Bassanio went together to Shylock, and Antonio asked the Jew to lend him three thousand ducats upon any interest he should require, to be paid out of the merchandise contained in his ships at sea.

On this, Shylock thought within himself, "If I can once catch him on the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him; he hates our Jewish nation; he lends out money gratis; and among the merchants he rails at me and my well-earned bargains, which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him!"

Antonio finding he was musing within himself and did not answer, and being impatient for the money, said:

"Shylock, do you hear? Will you lend the money?"

To this question the Jew replied, "Signior Antonio, on the Rialto many a time and often you have railed at me about my monies and my usuries, and I have borne it with a patient shrug, for sufferance is the badge of all our tribe; and then you have called me unbeliever, cutthroat dog, and spit upon my Jewish garments, and spurned at me with your foot, as if I was a cur. Well then, it now appears you need my help; and you come to me, and say, 'Shylock, lend me monies.' Has a dog money? Is it possible a cur should lend three thousand ducats? Shall I bend low and say, 'Fair sir, you spit upon me on Wednesday last, another time you called me dog, and for these courtesies I am to lend you monies.'"

Antonio replied, "I am as like to call you so again, to spit on you again, and spurn you too. If you will lend me this money, lend it not to me as to a friend, but rather lend it to me as to an enemy, that, if I break, you may with better face exact the penalty."

"Why, look you," said Shylock, "how you storm! I would be friends with you and have your love. I will forget the shames you have put upon me. I will supply your wants, and take no interest for my money."

This seemingly kind offer greatly surprised Antonio; and then Shylock, still pretending kindness and that all he did was to gain Antonio's love, again said he would lend him the three thousand ducats, and take no interest for his money; only Antonio should go with him to a lawyer, and there sign in merry sport a bond, that if he did not repay the money by a certain day, he would forfeit a pound of flesh, to be cut off from any part of his body that Shylock pleased.

"Content," said Antonio. "I will sign to this bond, and say there is much kindness in the Jew."

Bassanio grew angry when he heard this. He begged Antonio not to risk his life by signing this strange bond. But Antonio was perfectly sure he ran no risk, and cheerfully agreed to the penalty. As soon as the bond was signed and the money taken, Bassanio left for Belmont.

There he succeeded in winning the hand of Portia, who indeed fell in love with him the moment she saw him and was happy to be asked to marry him. A day was fixed for the wedding.

But before the wedding there came a letter from Antonio bringing dreadful news. Antonio's ships had not been seen at sea. And since the three months mentioned in the bond had now passed, the Jew had filled a suit against Antonio claiming the penalty of a pound of flesh. Antonio wrote to say that before he died he wanted to see his dear Bassanio and bid him farewell. When Bassanio was returning to Venice to help Antonio, Portia gave him a ring and asked him to wear it always. Bassanio said he would certainly do so. As soon as he left, Portia sent word to Bellario, a cousin of hers who was a lawyer, telling him of Antonio's situation and asking for his advice. Bellario quickly sent his advice and also the lawyer's clothes which Portia had asked for. With these clothes for herself and the clothes of a lawyer's clerk for her maid, Portia set out for Venice.

The trial of the case began at the court of the Duke of Venice, in the presence of Bassanio and several other friends of Antonio. The duke decided to wait for some time for Bellario, Portia dressed herself and her maid, Nerissa, in men's apparel, and, putting on the robes of a counsellor, she took Nerissa along with her as her clerk. Setting out immediately, they arrived at Venice on the very day of the trial. The case was just going to be heard before the Duke and Senators of Venice in the Senate House when Portia entered this high court of justice and presented a letter from Bellario, in which the learned counsellor wrote to the duke that he would have come himself to plead for Antonio but that he was prevented by sickness, and he requested that the learned young Doctor Balthasar (so he called Portia) might be permitted to plead in his stead. This the Duke granted, much wondering at the youthful appearance of the stranger, who was prettily disguised by her counsellor's robes and her large wig.

Portia looked around the court and saw on one side Antonio, and Bassanio and their friends. On the other side stood Shylock, quite alone, sharpening a knife! Portia began by arguing in favour of Shylock, and said that he indeed had a right to his pound of flesh. At the same time, in a moving speech she appealed to Shylock to show mercy to Antonio and not to claim the penalty. But this appeal had no effect on the Jew. He insisted upon the pound of flesh which was due to him according to the bond.



"Why then, Antonio," said Portia, "you must prepare your bosom for the knife." And while Shylock was sharpening a long knife with great eagerness to cut off the pound of flesh, Portia said to Antonio, "Have you anything to say?"

Antonio with a calm resignation replied that he had but little to say, for that he had prepared his mind for death. Then he said to Bassanio:

"Give me your hand, Bassanio! Fare you well! Grieve not that I am fallen into this misfortune for you. Commend me to your honourable wife and tell her how I have loved you!"

Bassanio in the deepest affliction replied, "Antonio, I am married to a wife, who is as dear to me as life itself; but life itself, my wife, and all the world, are not esteemed with me above your life; I would lose all, I would sacrifice all to this devil here, to deliver you."

Shylock now cried out, impatiently: "We trifle time; I pray pronounce the sentence."

Portia asked if the scales were ready to weigh the flesh, and she said to the Jew, "Shylock, you must have some surgeon by, lest he bleed to death."

Shylock, whose whole intent was that Antonio should bleed to death, said, "It is not so named in the bond."

Portia replied: "It is not so named in the bond, but what of that? It were good you did so much for charity."

To this all the answer Shylock would make was, "I cannot find it. It is not in the bond."

"Then," said Portia, "a pound of Antonio's flesh is thine. The law allows it and the court awards it. And you may cut this flesh from off his breast. The law allows it, and the court awards it."

Again Shylock exclaimed: "O wise and upright judge! A Daniel is come to judgment!" And then he sharpened his long knife again, and looking eagerly on Antonio, he said, "Come, prepare!"



"Tarry a little, Jew," said Portia. "There is something else. This bond here gives you no drop of blood; the words are, 'a pound of flesh.'"

Now as it was utterly impossible for Shylock to cut off the pound of flesh without shedding some of Antonio's blood. This wise discovery of Portia's, that it was flesh and not blood that was named in the bond, saved the life of Antonio and all admiring the wonderful sagacity of the young counsellor.

This unexpected judgment upset all Shylock's plans. Who could cut off a pound of flesh without shedding a drop of blood?

Realizing that he was completely defeated, Shylock turned to Bassanio and asked for three times his principal. But as Bassanio came forward with a bag of gold Portia stopped him and said, "Shylock has already refused the money. He can only have the penalty." Shylock now said that he was ready to accept his bare principal but even this Portia refused him. He could take his pound of flesh or nothing. All was now lost for Shylock. He turned away angrily to leave the court, but there was something more that Portia had to say to him.

"You cannot leave so soon, Shylock," she said. "The law has now a hold on you, Shylock. You have plotted against the life of a Christian and a citizen of Venice. According to the law of Venice, the punishment for this crime is death. Besides, half your goods and money will go to the State of Venice and the other half to Antonio against whose life you plotted."

This was a terrible blow to Shylock. It was now his turn to beg for mercy. The Duke, who was happy at the way things had gone, was ready to spare his life and even allow him to keep a part of his property, but he would have to give half of it to Antonio. The generous Antonio, however, instead of taking the money himself, suggested that it should be given to Shylock's daughter who had married a Christian against her father's wishes.

After Portia, in the disguise of a lawyer, had won the case for Antonio, Bassanio went to thank her. He, of course, did not know who she was. He asked her to accept a gift. Portia at first refused to receive any, but when Bassanio insisted she suggested that he could give her the ring on his finger. Now Bassanio was in a difficult situation, because he had promised never to part with the ring. He told Portia that the ring was valueless and he wanted to give her something of real value.

But Portia wanted that very ring. Bassanio told her that the ring had been given by his wife and she would not like him to part with it. Indeed she had even made him promise that he would never do so. He appealed to Portia to ask for some other thing. But Portia turned away pretending to be angry.

Antonio thought that she was feeling insulted. "Dear Bassanio," said Antonio, "let him have the ring. Let my love and the great service he has done for me be valued against your wife's displeasure." Poor Bassanio had to agree. How could he say 'no' to Antonio who had risked his life for him? So he very unwillingly gave away the ring.

Just as Antonio and Bassanio were leaving the court, news came that Antonio's ships, which were thought to have been lost, had safely arrived at port! Filled with joy, the two friends now hurried to Belmont to tell Portia the story of their great good fortune.

When Bassanio reached Belmont, he wanted to hide the fact that he no longer had the ring. But Portia soon found that he had not the ring on his finger. When he did not produce it, she told him with a serious face that he had broken his promise! Then Antonio asked Portia to forgive Bassanio. Portia pretended to agree. She said to Bassanio, "Here is another ring, see that you don't lose this one too." Bassanio looked at the ring. It was exactly like the first! As he stood there staring at it, Portia gave a merry laugh and told them the whole story.



Glossary

usurer	someone who lends money to people with the agreement that they will pay back a very much larger amount of money later.
heiress	a female who is entitled to inherit property or a rank.
covetous	desiring something too much, especially something that belongs to someone else.
ducats	any of various former European gold or silver coins, esp. those used in Italy or Netherlands.
fortune`	a large amount of money.
gratis	free.
cur	a mongrel (dog of mixed type), especially one that is frightening or fierce.
commend	to formally praise someone or something.
trifle	a matter or item of little value or importance.
tarry	to stay somewhere for longer than expected and delay leaving.
confiscate	to take a possession away from someone when you have the right to do so, usually as a punishment and often for a limited period, after which it is returned to the owner:
generosity	giving freely.
usury	the lending of money at excessively high rates of interest.
debt	something owed.
Disguise	conceal the identity.
adamant	unwilling to change one's stand/position; not yielding to requests or arguments.
sagacity	wisdom.

Thinking about the Text

1. Why does Shylock hate Antonio?
2. How does Antonio help Bassanio?
3. Why does Shylock feel when Antonio asks for some money? Why is he interested to pay the required sum?
4. What condition does Shylock put forth if the debt is not made in time?
5. How does Bassanio marry Portia?
6. Why is the case brought before the Duke of Venice?
7. Who is disguised as the learned counselor (Doctor Balthasar)? Why has he come to the court of Venice?
8. How did the counselor start his argument and how was he able to get the judgment in Antonio's favour?
9. How does Portia get back her ring?
10. Describe the theme/s of the play.

Language Work

Read the following extract:

Gertrude ,Gqueen of Denmark, becoming a widow by the sudden death of King Hamlet, in less than two months after his death married his brother Claudius, which was noted by all people at the time for a strange

act of indiscretion, or unfeelingness, or worse: for this Claudius did no ways resemble her late husband in the qualities of his person or his mind, but was as contemptible in outward appearance, as he was base and unworthy in disposition; and suspicions did not fail to arise in the minds of some, that he had privately made away with his brother, the late king, with the view of marrying his widow, and ascending the throne of Denmark, to the exclusion of young Hamlet, the son of the buried king, and lawful successor to the throne. In vain was all that his mother Gertrude or the king could do to contrive to divert him; he still appeared in court in a suit of deep black, as mourning for the king his father's death, which mode of dress he had never laid aside, not even in compliment to his mother upon the day she was married, nor could he be brought to join in any of the festivities or rejoicings of that (as appeared to him) disgraceful day. What mostly troubled him was an uncertainty about the manner of his father's death. It was given out by Claudius that a serpent had stung him; but young Hamlet had shrewd suspicions that Claudius himself was the serpent; in plain English, that he had murdered him for his crown, and that the serpent who stung his father did now sit on the throne. At the sight of his father's spirit, Hamlet was struck with a sudden surprise and fear. He at first called upon the angels and heavenly ministers to defend them. for he knew not whether it were a good spirit or bad; whether it came for good or evil: but he gradually assumed more courage; and his father (as it seemed to him) looked upon him so piteously, and as it were desiring to have conversation with him, and did in all respects appear so like himself as he was when he lived, that Hamlet could not help addressing him: he called him by his name, Hamlet, King, Father! And when they were alone together, the spirit broke silence, and told him that he was the ghost of Hamlet, his father, who had been cruelly murdered, and he told the manner of it; that it was done by his own brother Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, as Hamlet had already but too much suspected, for the hope of succeeding to his bed and crown. That as he was sleeping in his garden, his custom always in the afternoon, his treasonous brother stole upon him in his sleep, and poured the juice of poisonous henbane into his ears, which has such an antipathy to the life of man, that swift as quicksilver it courses through all the veins of the body, baking up the blood, and spreading a crust like leprosy all over the skin: thus sleeping, by a brother's hand he was cut off at once from his crown, his queen, and his life: and he adjured Hamlet, if he did ever his dear father love that he would revenge his foul murder. And the ghost lamented to his son, that his mother should so fall off from virtue, as to prove false to the wedded love of her first husband, and to marry his murderer, but he cautioned Hamlet, howsoever he proceeded in his revenge against his wicked uncle, by no means to act any violence against the person of his mother, but to leave her to heaven, and to the stings and thorns of conscience. And Hamlet promised to observe the ghost's direction in all things, and the ghost vanished.

I. Fill in the blanks:

Gertrude is the queen of -----.

Claudius is Hamlet's-----He tells the young Hamlet that his father died of a serpent's-----.

The spirit that appeared before Hamlet was-----.

The spirit revealed to Hamlet that----- killed his father by pouring-----into the ----- of his father.

Hamlet resolves to take -----of his father's murder.

The ghost advises Hamlet to leave Gertrude to-----.

After advising Hamlet, the ghost -----.

Give meanings of the following:

Contemptible, disposition, rejoice, contrive, quicksilver.

II. Linkers: "So..... That"

Read these sentences:

The storm was *so* intense *that* even the beasts were driven to their hiding places.

The forest was *so* thick *that* it was almost impenetrable

'So.....that' is used to express the idea of degree.

Now complete the following sentences using the appropriate clauses given in the box:

- a) *The rains were so heavy that*
- b) *My luggage was so heavy that.....*
- c) *We were so excited that*
- d) *He is so careful with money that*
- e) *Arundhiti Roy's first book was so good that*

- i. *even the porter found it difficult to lift.*
- ii. *he hardly spends at all.*
- iii. *it won her a Booker Prize.*
- iv. *the whole city was flooded.*
- v. *we couldn't sleep a wink last night.*

Writing Work

1. Antonio suffers because he was generous. Do you think he should have waited for the return of his ships and then help his friend? Write your response in (150 – 200) words.
2. Write the character of Shylock.
3. Write a brief paragraph (150-200 words) on friendship.

Discussion

1. Now-a-days, generosity is rarely found in our society. Form groups in the class and discuss why people lack generosity.

Listening Skills

Divide the class into groups of six or more. Select a spokesperson from each group. Distribute the worksheet .Give the groups five minutes to gather information. Then instruct the group to analyze the data. After the stipulated time, the spokesperson of each group will report the findings to the rest of the class.

Ask each other the following questions:

1. How many hours do you spend on reading?
2. Do you like adventure stories?
3. Do you like horror stories?
4. Do you like fairy tales?
5. Do you like romantic stories?
6. Do you like to write a story?

***The teacher can change the hobby according to the interest of the learner.**

Now analyse the data collected and fill up the sheet. Then report it to the class.

_____percent of my group mates spend _____hours on reading _____like to read adventure stories, while _____like horror stories ____ enjoy reading fairy tales and _____romantic stories. Finally, _____said they _____to write stories.

Suggested Reading

Tales From Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb.

The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare.