

● 44 CALIBRE SHAKESPEARE

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THE MERCHANT OF VENICE : ACT III.I 'SHYLOCK'S RANT'

Shylock, who has met quite a run of bad luck, has ended up with one last comfort; the terrible debt owed to him by an anti-Semitic merchant. The agreement was that if he didn't pay up when the time came Shylock would be entitled to 'one pound of his flesh, from nearest the heart', even if it means his death. Now he wants his payment and there is great controversy (as you can imagine), especially that this upstanding citizen will die at the hands of a Jew; don't forget, this is in Venice, one of the epicentres of Christendom. Shylock rants in the street about the unfair nature of their society – his argument being that if a Jew had agreed to such a deal, there wouldn't be a second thought about the matter...

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else,
it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and
hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses,
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my
bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine
enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath
not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison
us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not
revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will
resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian
wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by
Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you
teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I
will better the instruction.

Find the full script and all the others at: <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>