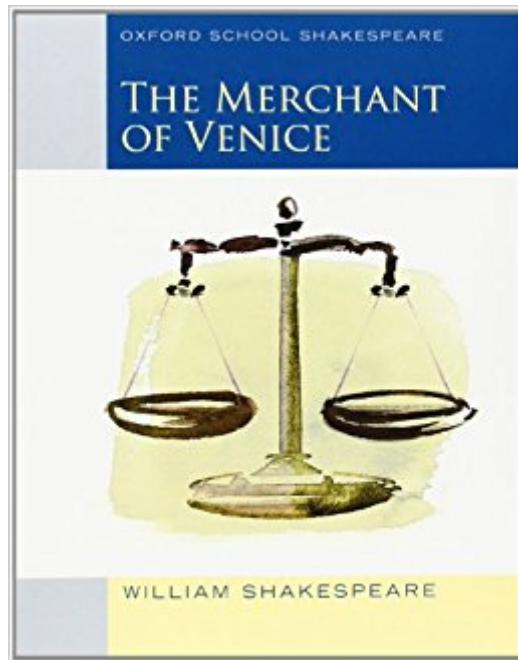


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Merchant Of Venice (2010 Edition): Oxford School Shakespeare (Oxford School Shakespeare Series)



Synopsis

This edition of *The Merchant of Venice* is especially designed for students, with accessible on-page notes and explanatory illustrations, clear background information, and rigorous but accessible scholarly credentials. This edition includes illustrations, preliminary notes, reading lists (including websites) and classroom notes, allowing students to master Shakespeare's work. About the Series: Newly redesigned and easier to read, each play in the Oxford School Shakespeare series includes the complete and unabridged text, detailed and clear explanations of difficult words and passages, a synopsis of the plot, summaries of individual scenes, and notes on the main characters. Also included is a wide range of questions and activities for work in class, together with the historical background to Shakespeare's England, a brief biography of Shakespeare, and a complete list of his plays.

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Customer Reviews

As usual, Gill provides a sturdy commentary and exquisitely readable annotations for young performers of "The Merchant of Venice". Over the years "Merchant" has become Shakespeare's most controversial play, but it has become this reviewer's personal favorite for two main reasons -- first, the "two eyes" speech; and second, the way it has come to be read in such a different manner than it was originally done. "The Merchant of Venice" perfectly displays the Victorian age stereotype of Jews, and people's reactions towards the play have changed according to their attitudes toward the stereotype itself. "Merchant" deals with anti-Jew sentiments, to be sure.

However, the crucial question is whether the play is fighting a stereotype or merely using it to produce a comedy. Shakespeare seems to me to be neither openly supporting nor denying a perception of Jews, but that is mostly because his characters are not entirely painted into black and white. Shylock's forced conversion was Shakespeare's own addition to the original story, and it's an event that suddenly makes all the major characters more complex. Additionally, there's too much humor in "Merchant" for the anti-Jew sentiments to be a very serious thing. Although theoretically, this could be something of a cover. To this reviewer's mind, Shakespeare is too much of an artist to let prejudice color his plays. Master Will was definitely aware of stereotypes; perhaps he also believed that if some Jews (like Shylock) acted as he describes, it was at least partially due to Christians' attitude toward them. It seems to me that, for Shakespeare, we create the masks we wear but society gives a large helping hand (a recurrent Shakespearean theme, esp. in "Othello"). Shakespeare's genius in "Merchant" consists in part in being able to see the human beings under the mask that perhaps a few usurper Jews, who feed the stereotype, were made to wear.

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