

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. London: [Thomas Pavier, 1619]. 6 7/8 inches x 5 1/16 inches (175 mm x 129 mm), [80] pages, A–K4.

The | excellent | History of the Mer- | *chant of Venice*. | With the extreme cruelty of *Shylocke* | the Iew towards the saide Merchant, in cut- | *ting a iust pound of his flesh*. And the obtaining | of *Portia*, by the choise of | *three Caskets*. | Written by W. **Shakespeare**. | [Heb Ddieu device] | Printed by *J. Roberts*, 1600.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

The Merchant of Venice opens with Bassanio, who needs traveling money to court the heiress Portia, asking his friend Antonio, a Venetian merchant, for the funds. Because Antonio's assets are all at sea, he approaches Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan. Because Antonio has insulted him in the past, Shylock demands that Antonio surrender a pound of flesh should he default on the loan. Antonio agrees, and Bassanio leaves for Portia's home. The will left by Portia's father requires that her suitors must choose the correct casket among three, and consent, in the event of failure, to remaining forever unmarried. Two suitors choose the wrong casket, but Bassanio selects the casket with Portia's portrait and thus wins her hand. Antonio's luck is poor compared to Bassanio's: two of his ships sink, the others are lost at sea, and he cannot repay the loan. Shylock is determined to exact the penalty, particularly as his daughter Jessica has just run away to marry Bassanio's friend Lorenzo and has taken much of his money with her. Bassanio rushes back to aid Antonio and Portia follows, disguised as a lawyer. Bassanio offers Shylock the double the amount of the loan, but he refuses. Portia enters the courtroom in her disguise and rules that Shylock cannot take the pound of flesh unless it is without shedding a drop of blood. Further, because Shylock's obvious intent was to kill Antonio, he must forfeit his fortune and convert to Christianity. Bassanio offers to pay Portia, whom he does not recognize; she demands the ring that she gave him. When Bassanio returns to Portia, she shows him the ring, revealing herself to be Antonio's savior.

This second quarto of *The Merchant of Venice* is bound in nineteenth-century red morocco with gold tooling. A stamp in the bottom center of the front cover turn-in ("BOUND BY F. BEDFORD") and on the verso of the

front free endpaper identifies this as the work of the noted nineteenth-century London binder Francis Bedford (1799–1883). The spine is divided into six compartments with raised bands, with “SHAKE | SPEARE | MER- | CHANT | OF | VENICE” in gold in the second spine compartment, and “1600” in the third. The edges of the boards and the turn-ins are gold tooled, the endpapers marbled, and the edges gilt. A note by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps states that the copy has a few leaves of text in facsimile, that this copy may have been purchased by Mr. Lacy for £20, and that he was interested in this copy for the watermarks is handwritten on the obverse of the front free endpaper; copy correction notes by J.O.H. on obverse of back free endpaper.

This quarto was given to Edinburgh University Library in 1872 by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (1820–1889), the English Shakespeare collector and scholar whose *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (1848) was published in several editions. Beginning in the 1870s, he devoted his time completely to the research of Shakespeare’s life. Halliwell-Phillipps was instrumental in the acquisition of New Place, the site of Shakespeare’s last home, and in the creation of the Museum at Stratford-upon-Avon (now Nash’s House and New Place).

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