

The Merchant of Venice

Ana Coutinho

The Merchant of Venice is a play written by Shakespeare that takes place in Venice in the 16th century. It's a play about business, money, anti-Semitism and love (for friends and for their beloved ones). These are the threads that get interconnected and pervade the whole play. Antonio is the main character, but Shylock stands as the most highlighted one. The first is a kind Christian merchant, friend of his friend who is in the disposition of pawning his life and his future, by signing a dangerous contract with Jewish usurer, in order to help his friend Bassano to travel in search of his love. The latter, Shylock, is a heartless villain who personifies profit at others' expenses. He is the one from harsh times, and like a vulture, he waits for his victims on a branch of his tree. Greedy and friendless, even his own daughter leaves him to be with her passion, but his suffering comes from the gold she had taken with her, not from losing a daughter, "flesh of his flesh".

Good and bad are confronted on stage. When Antonio is about to lose his life, as a result of not carrying out the contract he had made with the Jew, there's a volte-face and Shylock is punished by daring cruelty and eagerness of revenge.

In a world of men, women are the ones who decide the course of events, who take the power to judge lives in their own hands, wisely interpreting the law and managing to penalize Shylock, leaving him penniless and forced to adhere to Christianity. After the trial, Portia and Nerissa, that is, the lawyer and his assistant, leave Shylock as a heavy defeated man. He isn't almost a man, as the fire that enabled him to glow was extinguished, but a falling leaf at the mercy of our feet. In the same way, Shylock's daughter takes her destiny in her own hands and leaves home to live with her beloved one.