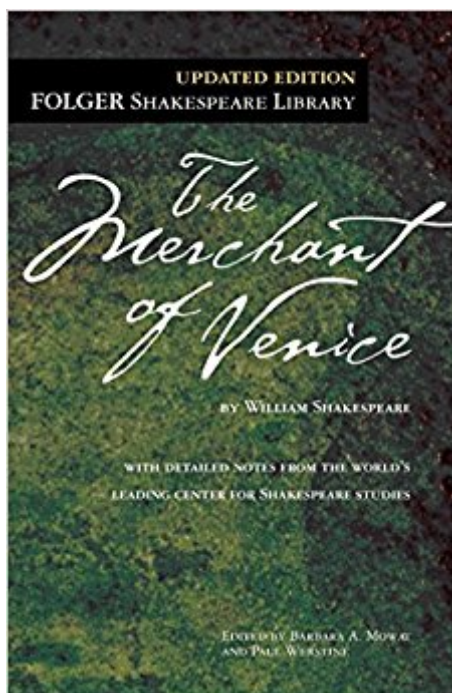


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# The Merchant Of Venice (Folger Shakespeare Library)



## Synopsis

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the path to marriage is hazardous. To win Portia, Bassanio must pass a test prescribed by her father—his will, choosing correctly among three caskets or chests. If he fails, he may never marry at all. Bassanio and Portia also face a magnificent villain, the moneylender Shylock. In creating Shylock, Shakespeare seems to have shared in a widespread prejudice against Jews. Shylock would have been regarded as a villain because he was a Jew. Yet he gives such powerful expression to his alienation due to the hatred around him that, in many productions, he emerges as the hero. Portia is most remembered for her disguise as a lawyer, Balthazar, especially the speech in which she urges Shylock to show mercy that “droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.”

The authoritative edition of *The Merchant of Venice* from The Folger Shakespeare Library, the trusted and widely used Shakespeare series for students and general readers, includes:

- Freshly edited text based on the best early printed version of the play
- Newly revised explanatory notes conveniently placed on pages facing the text of the play
- Scene-by-scene plot summaries
- A key to the play’s famous lines and phrases
- An introduction to reading Shakespeare’s language
- An essay by a leading Shakespeare scholar providing a modern perspective on the play
- Fresh images from the Folger Shakespeare Library’s vast holdings of rare books
- An up-to-date annotated guide to further reading

Essay by Alexander Leggatt

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## Customer Reviews

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, on England's Avon River. When he was eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway. The couple had three children – an older daughter Susanna and twins, Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died in childhood. The bulk of Shakespeare's working life was spent in the theater world of London, where he established himself professionally by the early 1590s. He enjoyed success not only as a playwright and poet, but also as an actor and shareholder in an acting company. Although some think that sometime between 1610 and 1613 Shakespeare retired from the theater and returned home to Stratford, where he died in 1616, others believe that he may have continued to work in London until close to his death. Barbara A. Mowat is Director of Research emerita at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Consulting Editor of Shakespeare Quarterly, and author of *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* and of essays on Shakespeare's plays and their editing. Paul Werstine is Professor of English at the Graduate School and at King's University College at Western University. He is a general editor of the *New Variorum Shakespeare* and author of *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* and of many papers and articles on the printing and editing of Shakespeare's plays.

Lies, deceit, treachery, poison, knives in the night, justified paranoia, guilt, revenge... it is all there, and more, in this classic story of how the lust for power can literally drive people crazy. It can also kill them. I first read this play of William Shakespeare as a high school reading assignment, the way the vast majority of people do. So these many years later, I've undertaken a project of re-reading a lot of those H.S. reading assignments, including the plays of Shakespeare, in part to determine how much I missed the first time around, which, in two short words is normally: a lot. The play is set in Scotland. The king is Duncan. His not faithful lord, called "thane" in Scotland at the time, is Macbeth. And he has a wife who has become a symbol of all wives who relentlessly push their husbands to be "successful," and who is normally addressed with the misnomer of "Lady." (That's no lady,

that Macbeth is murdered in his sleep, with those proverbial long knives. Macbeth skillfully diverts the blame to his body guards, who are conveniently also killed (a death man tells no tales) while also casting suspicion on Duncan's sons, who have fled for their lives to further shores. How many times, throughout all the cultures and civilizations of the world, has this scenario basically unfolded? Throughout many of his plays Shakespeare utilizes elements from the ancient Greek plays, such as prophecy and a chorus that predicts future events, often esoterically. In this play, Shakespeare uses three witches around a cauldron, stirring, and if there is one line that most people remember from the play, it is the first line of their chorus: "Double, double, toil and trouble. A fellow reviewer noted a quip that Shakespeare's plays are simply quotes strung together, a humorous way of noting that many portions of the play have entered the popular, albeit intellectual portion, of our culture. For example, after the first Iraq War (yeah, I know, it is hard to say which one was the first one now), the cover to the Economist featured the line: "When the hurlyburly's done. My first high school reading failed me, and I had no idea this was a reference to a line in Macbeth's opening scene, with the second line being: "When the battle's lost and won. And is that battle lost or won? Proving the enduring relevance of Shakespeare in so many settings, later in the same scene he writes: "Her husband's gone, master of the Tiger. I haven't seen The Economist use that line to refer to its British citizens going to fight for ISIS. Another quote that I remembered, and life experience has proven to be so true: "Sleep that knits up the ravel'd sleeve of care. Hum. Another quote that life experience proves true: "Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him... makes him stand to and not stand to..." Finally, so that I literally don't quote the entire play, another classic scene that personally resonated, due to my travels, was Lady Macbeth's efforts to wash the blood off her hands, and she proclaims: "All the perfume of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Another excellent, still so relevant play of Shakespeare, that needs to read more than twice. 5-stars, plus.

My favorite inexpensive version for teaching my middle school students. I use the text and buy a few No Fear editions but I don't share those until I've taught kids how to unpack the language with scanning and paraphrasing. If I wait for awhile, almost all of my students can decode the R and J in the original language. Great edition. Highly recommended.

We've had good luck with the "Made Easy" series... but this version of Macbeth is trickier than others in the series. Macbeth is a trickier play, I grant you. But the paraphrasing does not follow the Shakespeare as well as it could. Still, this is a great book. But because the kids are having a hard time with it, I whipped out the LEGO Shakespeare tragedies book and the Gareth Hinds Macbeth book to coax them along.

I think I understand Macbeth and the authorship better than I ever have. This book is a very thoroughly researched and well written account. It makes a convincing case that Edward de Vere was the author. I will never read or look at performances of Macbeth in the same way. If you are interested in Macbeth and Shakespeare, this is a must read. Frank.

I purchased these for my 9th grade English students. They love them! It is a wonderful resource for developing deeper understanding in all students. The visual connection to the text allows for more consistent pacing, strong comprehension of plot, and a well developed insight into character dynamics. The only issue with the text is that there is no indication on the page as to who each character is. As a class we pair the graphic novel with the play text so it is easy enough to make the connections visually, but inconvenient regardless. Overall, a great product. Basic quality that you would see from any graphic novel but an incredibly valuable resource for students to see and experience Shakespeare in a way that truly engages students and allows for a more genuine interaction and conversation with and about Romeo and Juliet.

One of Shakespeare's finest works. After you read this, you'll find similarities to this plot in many other books and films. Interesting characters, fantastic story-line. Note that this play can be read/downloaded for free legally many places online, but I always prefer to have the physical book. It may be tough to get into Shakespeare at first, but after some persistence it pays off!

This is the way to read Shakespeare. You can choose to be purist and stay on the Olde English

side, or glance over when it gets too confusing. I've never gotten so much out of reading the Bard. I now have quite a collection of the "No Fear" books.

This is my very favorite play written by the Bard. I say this having read most of Shakespeare's major plays, with the notable exceptions of King Lear and A Midsummer Night's Dream, but Macbeth outshines his others. Even Hamlet didn't carry the psychological nuances that this play did, and it reveals Shakespeare's understanding of human nature, and of how power corrupts. I won't say too much in the way of plot--this review is more for the sake of raving the Folger Library Edition--but the most excellent Netflix series "House of Cards" is based on it, if that gives you any hints. This edition was perfect for me. I was reading the play for fun, and the script was well organized and the hints unobtrusive. It was useful having the definitions and explanations on the left page rather than having to look through endnotes or some other such nonsense. It was both cheap and well translated, so I have absolutely no complaints!

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