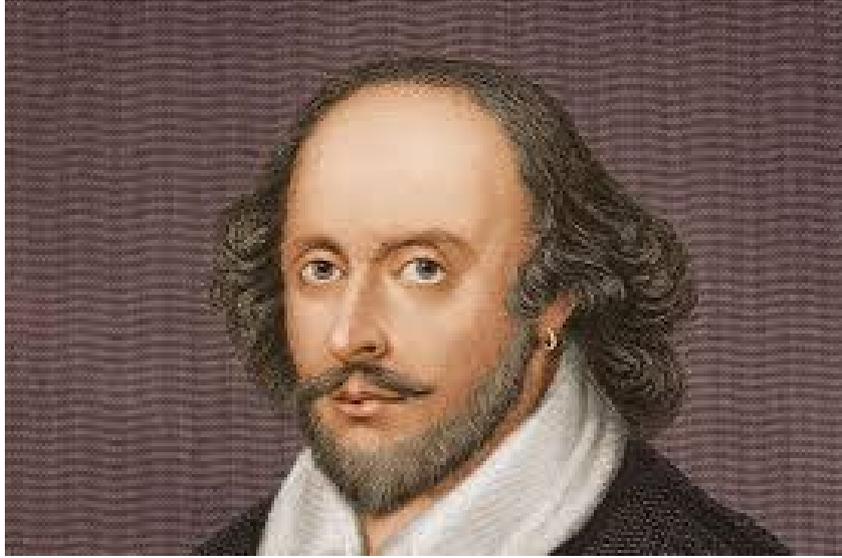


# SHAKESPEARE



## ON SCREEN

Week Four

## Welcome to *Shakespeare On Screen*

### Week Four

Welcome to Week Four of Shakespeare On Screen.

This week, we'll be looking at a couple of kings – our delayed Richard II plus the seldom adapted John, but we'll be giving special attention to one play and one character that have continued to fascinate, outrage and drive interpretation and contextualisation more than any other in the catalogue.

*The Merchant of Venice* and its protagonist/antagonist Shylock have, for reasons that swiftly become obvious, been the source of critical and public debate for centuries. Is Shylock an antisemitic caricature? Is *Merchant* an antisemitic play?

Much like Dicken's Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, Shylock on the page is an uncomfortable creation. Indeed, the character's influence on depictions of Jewish characters that followed was far-reaching and often hateful. Actors playing Shylock, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, habitually played him as an almost cartoon villain, after his 'pound of flesh'. The Nazis used *Merchant* as propaganda – albeit excising Shylock's final speech, for fear it might elicit sympathy.

Even the best interpretation of the play's text – focusing on Antonio's own bigotry as the root cause of the events that ensue – and its author's intent partially relies on Shylock's conversion under duress being a get out of hell free card for the moneylender.

Yet *in the text*, modern audiences have found a plea for tolerance. A rejection of bigotry and a moral warning against the results of it. Perhaps Shakespeare, like many writers, even with the prejudices of his age firmly in place – and certainly happy to use them for entertainment purposes – couldn't help but give Shylock a third dimension, his full humanity.

The end result is a play that will continue to stand as both a record of antisemitism and, played now in context, a rejection of it, regardless of Shakespeare's and his age's initial impulses.

## WEEK FOUR FILMS

### Richard II

Age of Kings (1960)

*Michael Hayes*

Chimes at Midnight (1966)

*Orson Welles*

King Richard the Second (1978)

*David Giles*

The Hollow Crown (2012)

*Rupert Goold*

### King John

King John (1899)

*Walter Pfeffer Dando, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, William Kennedy & Laurie Dixon*

The Life and Death of King John (1984)

*David Giles*

Omnibus (1961)

*Andrew McCullough*

### The Merchant of Venice

The Jew of Mestri (1923)

*Peter Paul Felner*

The Merchant of Venice (1969)

*Orson Welles*

The Merchant of Venice (1973)

*John Sichel*

The Merchant of Venice (1980)

*Jack Gold*

The Māori Merchant of Venice (2002)

Don Selwyn

The Merchant of Venice (2004)

*Michael Radford*