



Mondavi Center ArtSmarts
2002-2003 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

GARETH ARMSTRONG:
SHYLOCK

October 24, 2002
Mondavi Center, Studio Theatre, UC Davis, 11:00am

Dear Teachers:

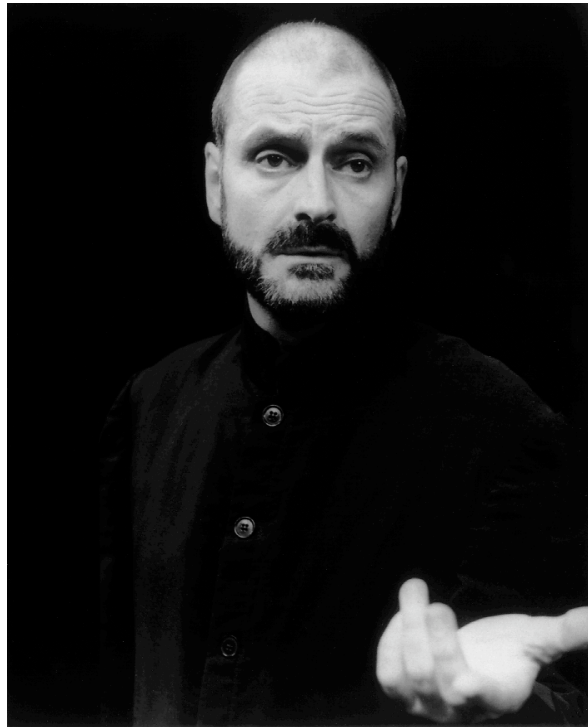
We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the **Gareth Armstrong: *Shylock*** school matinee. The Guide provides background information on the Shakespearean actor Gareth Armstrong and his one-man performance based on Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. The *Shylock* matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, will provoke questions about stereotypes as well as introduce a dramatic masterwork.

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2002-2003 Season of Performing Arts:



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GARETH ARMSTRONG: *SHYLOCK*



A veteran performer with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Gareth Armstrong has enlivened some of Shakespeare's least understood characters to the delight of audiences around the world. Two seasons ago, Armstrong appeared in Davis with *Shylock*, his daring one-person play exploring the strange, turbulent life of literature's most famous Jewish character. Armstrong returns to Davis to perform *Shylock* which combines Armstrong's consummate performance skills with immaculate research and superb writing to produce an unforgettable theatrical experience.

Gareth Armstrong was born in Wales and graduated from the drama program at Hull University. He began his professional career in English regional theatre. He has played in the West End, and as a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company has worked in Stratford and at the Aldwych. His work as a director includes founding the 'Made in Wales' Stage Company, formed to present new Anglo-Welsh playwriting, and he was an artistic director of Cardiff's Sherman Theatre. As a freelance director he has worked in Salisbury and Northampton, and on touring productions, most recently *Sherlock Holmes: The Last Act* and *The Gospel According to John*.

Shakespeare has taken Gareth Armstrong to more than 30 countries worldwide as an actor, director, and teacher, and he has played roles ranging from Puck to Richard III, and from Andrew Aguecheek to Macbeth. In collaboration with the British Council, Armstrong has toured *Shylock* all over Europe, as well as playing in New Zealand, and extensively in the US. Armstrong is an associate director of the American based A.C.T.E.R. Company, records commentaries and voice-overs for films, and is a frequent broadcaster with the BBC.

Armstrong was inspired to create *Shylock* after playing the role in an English production of *The Merchant of Venice*. "I became fascinated by this most controversial of Shakespeare's characters," says Armstrong. "Shylock is the ultimate outsider, and misfits are always the most

interesting parts to play. Shylock is the only major Jewish character in Shakespeare. Is he the stereotype comic villain that his own audience expected, or is he something more complex, more demanding of our attention? Only Hamlet has inspired more debate and dissension. But no academic who writes about the play can know what it's like to be Shylock. Only an actor knows that." According to *The Independent on Sunday*: "Armstrong . . . presents Shylock's bitterness as a product of persecution, conveyed here with such innovation, delight and energy. It is an exceptional piece of theatre. Everyone should see it. "

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Shylock: *n.* an extortionate usurer. Also, a Jew, a pawnbroker; in U.S. (with lower-case initial), an abusive term for a moneylender; = loan-shark (These uses are considered offensive.)
v. 'shylock,' to force (a person) to repay a debt, esp. at an exorbitant rate of interest.

--Oxford English Dictionary

Examining the changing perceptions over the past 400 years of the memorable and controversial character from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Gareth Armstrong's *Shylock* is told from the point of view of Shylock's friend Tubal, the only other Jewish character in Shakespeare's work, and filtered through the lens of centuries of anti-Semitism. During the solo performance Gareth Armstrong conjures up the playwright, the players, the passions, and the enduring prejudice, from Pontius Pilate to Adolf Hitler, from Dracula to the Wandering Jew. *Shylock* explores Jewish history, European history, the history of theater and the history of the role of Shylock. When Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* he would not have ever met a Jew, officially speaking that is, because Jews were not permitted in England at the time. Many had been exterminated in the York purge of 1104; others had been driven out. Any who remained and survived were forced to renounce their faith. Venice was one of the few places in Europe where Jews were tolerated in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. They were excluded from most occupations and were forced to live in one area of the city. The term ghetto originates from that time

and place. As Christians were forbidden to be moneylenders, usury was one of the few careers paths open to Jews.

–Information excerpted from <http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/~melissas/shylock.html>

THE PLAY: In Venice, young Bassanio needs a loan of 3,000 ducats so that he can court a wealthy heiress of Venice named Portia. To get the necessary funds, Bassanio asks his friend Antonio, a merchant, for help. Antonio's money, unfortunately, is invested in merchant ships that are presently at sea; however, to help Bassanio, Antonio arranges for a short-term loan of the money from Shylock, a wealthy Jewish usurer (money-lender). Shylock has a deep-seated hatred for Antonio because of the insulting treatment that Antonio has shown him in the past. When pressed, Shylock strikes a terrible bargain: the 3,000 ducats must be repaid in three months, or Shylock will exact a pound of flesh from Antonio. The merchant agrees to this, confident in the return of his ships before the appointed date of repayment.

At this stage of the play, the wealthy heiress Portia is introduced. Due to her father's will, all suitors must choose from among three coffers—one of which contains a portrait of her. If a man chooses the right one, he may marry Portia; however, if he chooses wrong, he must vow never to marry or even court another woman. Princes of Morocco and Arragon fail this test and are turned away. As Bassanio prepares to travel to Belmont for the test, his friend Lorenzo elopes with Jessica, Shylock's daughter (who escapes with a fair amount of Shylock's wealth in the process). Bassanio chooses the lead casket, which is the correct one, and Portia happily agrees to marry Bassanio that very night.

In contrast to this happiness, Antonio finds himself in trouble. Two of his ships have already wrecked in transit, and Antonio's creditors—including the vengeance-minded Shylock—are grumbling about repayment. Word comes to Bassanio about Antonio's predicament, and he returns to Venice, leaving Portia behind. Portia, however, travels after him with her maid, Nerissa; they disguise themselves as a lawyer and clerk, respectively. When Bassanio arrives, the loan is in default and Shylock is demanding his pound of flesh. Even when Bassanio (backed now by Portia's inheritance) offers many times the amount in repayment, Shylock is intent on revenge. The duke, who sits in judgment, will not intervene. Portia enters in her guise as a lawyer to defend Antonio. Through a technicality, Portia declares that Shylock may have his pound of flesh so long as he draws no blood (since there was no mention of this in the original agreement). And, since it is obvious that to draw a pound of flesh would take Antonio's life, Shylock has conspired to murder a Venetian citizen; he has forfeited his wealth as well as his loan. Half is to go to the city, and half is to go to Antonio.

In the end, Antonio gives back his half of the penalty on the condition that Shylock bequeath it to his disinherited daughter, Jessica. Shylock also must convert to Christianity. A broken and defeated Shylock accepts in a piteously moving scene. As the play ends, news arrives that Antonio's remaining ships are returned to port; with the exception of the humiliated Shylock, all will share in a happy ending.

–See this and other play synopses at: <http://www.bardweb.net/plays/06.html>

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



For all his fame and celebration, William Shakespeare remains a mysterious figure with regards to his personal history. There are just two primary sources for information: his works, and various legal and church documents that have survived from Elizabethan times.

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, allegedly on April 23, 1564. Church records from Holy Trinity Church indicate that he was baptized there on April 26, 1564.

William's father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and leather merchant, and his mother, Mary Arden, a landed heiress. William, according to the church register, was the third of eight children in the Shakespeare household—three of whom died in childhood. John Shakespeare had a remarkable run of success as a merchant, and later as an alderman and high bailiff of Stratford, during William's early childhood. His fortunes declined, however, in the 1570's.

There is great conjecture about Shakespeare's childhood years, especially regarding his education. Scholars believe that Shakespeare attended the free grammar school in Stratford, which at the time had a reputation to rival the celebrated Eton. While there are no records extant to prove this claim, Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin and Classical Greek would support this theory. In addition, Shakespeare's first biographer, Nicholas Rowe, wrote that John Shakespeare had placed William "for some time in a free school." John Shakespeare, as a Stratford official, would have been granted a waiver of tuition for his son. As the records do not exist, we do not know how long William attended the school, but certainly the literary quality of his **works** suggest a solid education. What is certain is that William Shakespeare never proceeded to university schooling, which has stirred some of the debate concerning the **authorship** of his works.

The next documented event in Shakespeare's life is his marriage to Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. William was 18 at the time, and Anne was 26. Their first daughter, Susanna, was born on May 26, 1583. The couple later had twins, Hamnet and Judith, born February 2, 1585 and christened at Holy Trinity. Hamnet died in childhood at the age of 11, on August 11, 1596.

For seven years, William Shakespeare effectively disappears from all records, turning up in London around 1592. This has sparked as much controversy about Shakespeare's life as any period. Rowe notes that young Shakespeare was quite fond of poaching, and may have had to flee Stratford after an incident with Sir Thomas Lucy, whose lands he allegedly hunted. There is also rumor of Shakespeare working as an assistant schoolmaster in Lancashire for a time. It is estimated that Shakespeare arrived in London around 1588 and began to establish himself as an actor and playwright.

Shakespeare must have shown considerable promise: by 1594, he was not only acting and writing for the Lord Chamberlain's Men (called the King's Men after the ascension of James I in 1603), but was a managing partner in the operation as well. With Will Kempe, a master comedian, and Richard Burbage, a leading tragic actor of the day, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became a favorite London troupe, patronized by royalty and made popular by the theatre-going public. When the plague forced theatre closings in the mid-1590's, Shakespeare and his company made plans for the **Globe Theatre** in the Bankside district, which was across the river from central London.

Shakespeare's success is apparent when studied against other playwrights of this age. His company was the most successful in London in his day. He had plays published and sold in octavo editions, or "penny-copies" to the more literate of his audiences. It is noted that never before had a playwright enjoyed sufficient acclaim to see his works published and sold as popular literature in the midst of his career. While Shakespeare could not be accounted wealthy, by London standards, his success allowed him to purchase New House and retire in comfort to Stratford in 1611.

William Shakespeare wrote his will in 1611, bequeathing his properties to his daughter Susanna (married in 1607 to Dr. John Hall). To his surviving daughter Judith, he left £300, and to his wife Anne left "my second best bed." William Shakespeare allegedly died on his birthday, April 23, 1616. This is probably more of a romantic myth than reality, but Shakespeare was interred at Holy Trinity in Stratford on April 25. In 1623, two working companions of Shakespeare from the Lord Chamberlain's Men, John Heminges and Henry Condell, printed the **First Folio** edition of the *Collected Works*, of which half the plays were previously unpublished. The First Folio also contained Shakespeare's sonnets.

William Shakespeare's legacy is a body of work that will never again be equaled in Western civilization. His words have endured for 400 years, and still reach across the centuries as powerfully as ever. Even in death, he leaves a final piece of verse as his epitaph:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear to dig the dust enclosed here. Blessed be the man that spares these stones, And cursed be he that moves my bones.

—Information excerpted from Pressley, J. M. "An Encapsulated Biography." Shakespeare Resource Center, September 12, 2001. October 11, 2001.

HELPFUL WEB RESOURCES

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

THINK ABOUT IT!

Dear Students:

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now

compare ideas, ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe Gareth Armstrong's *Shylock* performance to a friend?
- 2) A stereotype is an (often) unfair generalization about a group. Can you describe the kinds of generalizations introduced in the program?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

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