

A Pound of Flesh

What if Portia never came to Venice?

The Merchant of Venice reimagined with a queer slant

"The pow'rful love I bear him o'erwhelms and harsh confounds me.

I know not whether my heart is raised to heaven's gate or drawn to baser thoughts 'gainst nature's law."

Who is the queerest character in Shakespeare? How about Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*? Unmarried, he frequently protests his love for young Bassanio and lends him money again and again without any guarantee that he will see it repaid. Even when, unable to repay Bassanio's debt, Antonio is threatened with death at the hands of Shylock the moneylender, he has no regrets. He may die but his young friend now has a beautiful rich wife.

What about Bassanio? Where does his loyalty lie? He needs Antonio's money to woo wealthy Portia - an heiress who just happens to be beautiful as well. Isn't Bassanio just a hustler preying on an older gay man in order to get more money from another source - Portia? Or what are his real feelings for Antonio?

Martin Foreman's version of Shakespeare's classic tale, *A Pound of Flesh* focuses on the relationship between these two men in a world where Portia no longer comes to Venice to save Antonio's life. In this new play Bassanio comes to terms with his own greed (*"Had you but known my crooked heart before it saw your face, my face had ne'er seen yours."*). Meanwhile, Shylock - a woman in this version - retains her righteous anger (*"Christians' scorn is but to spite the glass that shows their face."*), while Portia is frustrated by fate (*"With heavy heart, unhappy pen and solemn ink I write from Padua."*). Tragedy is inevitable, but what form it takes is uncertain until the end.

*"Without thy breath, without thy love, this world must be a haunted room
wherein thy ghost no longer grants this mortal audience."*

In this fifty minute play premiering at the 2025 Edinburgh Fringe, five talented actors bring *A Pound of Flesh* to life: Gabriel Bird as Antonio, Millie Deere as Portia, Danielle Farrow as Shylock, Ollie Hiemann as Bassanio and Michael Robert-Brown as the Doge of Venice and other parts. Sound is by Dug Campbell, lighting by Freya Game. Shakespeare's words are combined with new writing that echoes the Bard's rhythm and imagery. In addition to creating the play, Martin Foreman directs, in one of the Fringe's most popular venues in the heart of the Scottish capital.

Venue theSpace on the Mile (Venue 39)

Dates	1, 2 August (reduced price previews)	20.20 (50 mins)	£8 (£6)
	3 - 9, 11 - 16, 18 - 23 August	20.20 (50 mins)	£12 (£10)

Full details of cast and crew, publicity images and background material can be found on the website.

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for links to cast biographies, images and other information

Information about Arbery Theatre's other Fringe production, **Transfers**, will be available late April/early May