



# ANATOMY OF A TRIAL: JUSTICE & MERCY IN VENICE

Decoding the ultimate courtroom chess match in Act 4, Scene 1.



*It must not be...  
perhaps what is this...  
shop... impose on...  
managers on the... it is...  
and music of the year.*

*The... in the...  
which... of the...  
is... in...  
... have...  
....*

*Daughter... make...  
... beside them, and...  
the... Noe...  
... of...  
... by...  
....*

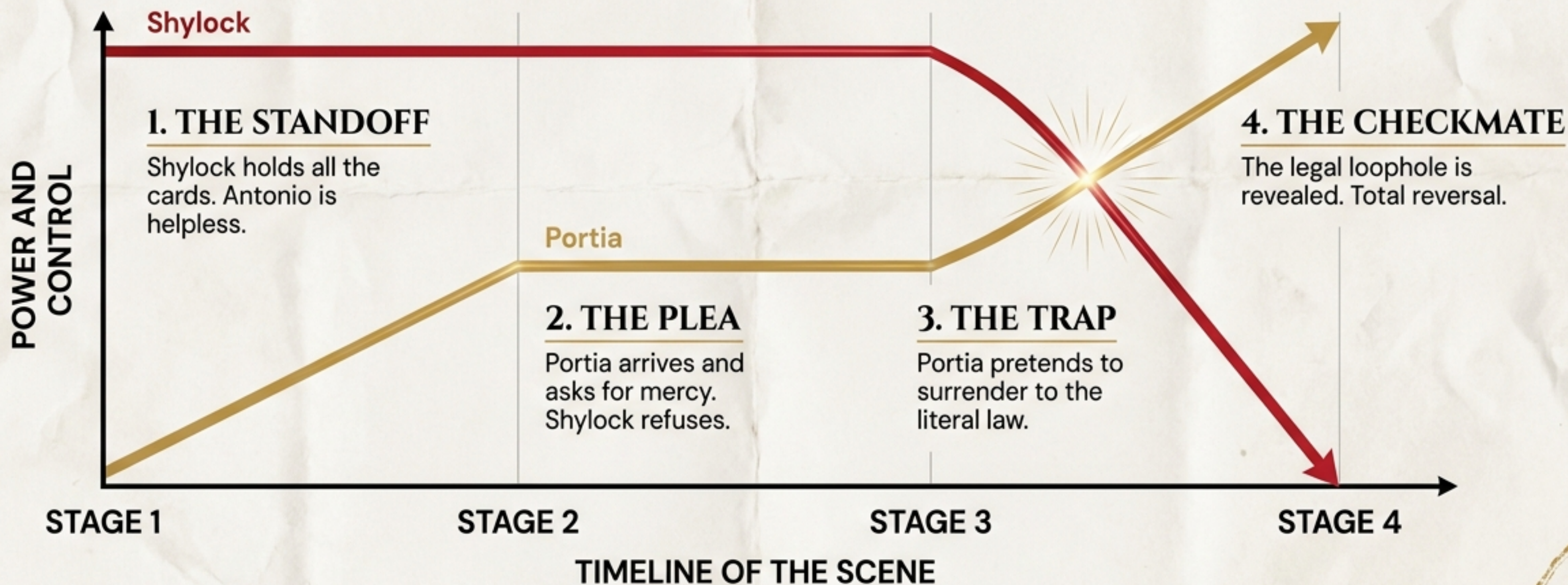
*Cyprius... is a...  
... in...  
... and...  
... to...  
... he...  
... of...  
... to...  
....*

Evidence Dossier / Junior Cycle English Edition



# THE ARC OF THE SCENE: A SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER

Follow the power shift through 13 key pieces of evidence.



**“an inhuman  
wretch  
incapable of  
pity, void and  
empty from  
any dram of  
mercy.”**

## The Duke → Speaking about Shylock

### Modern Translation

He is a monster completely incapable of showing even a tiny drop of mercy.

### Strategy & Context

The Duke is the judge, yet he clearly despises Shylock before the trial even starts. This reveals the intense anti-Semitism in Venice.

Shylock is an outsider seeking strict justice from a court that already views him as a villain.



[Theme: Prejudice]



[Theme: Mercy]

# SHYLOCK → TO THE DUKE & THE COURT

**“If you deny it, let the danger light upon your charter and your city’s freedom.”**

Venice relies entirely on international trade. Shylock warns that if the court ignores a legal contract just because he is a foreigner, the city’s economic reputation will be destroyed.

**“So can I give no reason, nor will I not, more than a lodged hate and a certain loathing I bear Antonio.”**

When asked why he wants dead flesh instead of money, Shylock drops the legal arguments. He admits it is driven purely by deep, unmoving hatred.

**SHYLOCK: 90%**

**ANTONIO: 10%**

# Antonio → To Bassanio & The Court

“You may as well question with the wolf, Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb.”

Antonio tells his friend Bassanio to stop arguing. He believes Shylock's cruelty is just part of his nature, as inevitable as a starving wolf hunting a sheep.

[Theme: **Resignation**]

POWER METER

**Shylock: 95%**



“Let me have judgement and the Jew his will.”

Total psychological defeat. Antonio is exhausted and ready to die. He simply wants the agonizing wait to be over.

[Theme: **Animal Imagery**]

**Antonio: 5%**



# Shylock → To the Court

**“If every ducat in six thousand ducats were in six parts and every part a ducat, I would not draw them. I would have my bond.”**

**Modern Translation:** Even if you multiplied the money by 36,000, I still wouldn't take a single coin. I just want my contract fulfilled.

**Strategy & Context:** Bassanio offers to pay double the original loan to save his friend. Shylock rejects an unimaginable fortune. This proves to the court that he cannot be bought; his desire to inflict pain is absolute.

**[Theme: Revenge Over Wealth]**

**Power Meter**

**Shylock: 95%**

**Antonio: 5%**



**JUSTICE**



**MERCY**

**POWER METER**

Shylock: 95%

Portia: 5%

Portia (as Balthazar) → To Shylock

**“The quality of mercy  
is not strained.”**

**Modern Translation**

Mercy cannot be forced or squeezed out of someone. It must fall naturally, like gentle rain from heaven.

**Strategy & Context**

Portia argues that showing mercy is a divine, god-like trait that benefits both the person giving it and receiving it. She is giving Shylock one final moral opportunity to do the right thing before she resorts to legal warfare.

[Theme: Mercy]

[Theme: Divine Right]

# Setting the Trap: The False Victory

## PORTIA'S BAIT

**“There is no power in Venice  
Can alter a decree established.”**

Portia falsely agrees with Shylock.  
She publicly declares the law  
cannot be broken to save Antonio.  
This strokes Shylock's ego and  
makes him trust her completely.



## SHYLOCK'S HUBRIS

**“There is no power in the  
tongue of man to alter me.”**

Believing he has won, Shylock  
arrogantly locks himself into his  
position. By refusing to budge a  
single inch, he seals his own doom.  
He is entirely blind to the trap.

**POWER METER**

**Shylock: 99%**

**Antonio: 1%**



## Shylock → To Portia

**“Is it so nominated  
in the bond?”**

### Modern Translation

Is that written exactly like that in the contract? Show me where.

### Strategy & Context

Portia asks Shylock to have a surgeon on standby to stop Antonio from bleeding to death. Shylock refuses because the word doctor isn't physically written on the paper. His obsession with the exact, literal wording over basic human decency provides Portia with the exact weapon she needs.

[Theme: Literal Law vs. Spirit of the Law]

### POWER METER

Shylock: 99%

Portia: 1%

# The Loophole

Portia -> To Shylock

“this bond doth give thee here no jot of blood.”



## Modern Translation

The contract gives you exactly one pound of flesh, but it doesn't give you permission to take a single drop of blood.

## Strategy & Context

Portia uses Shylock's own logic against him: strict, literal interpretation. He can have his flesh, but if he spills blood (which isn't nominated in the bond), he breaks Venetian law.

## POWER METER

Shylock: 10%

Portia: 90%

# Portia → To Shylock

“if thou dost *shed* one drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods are by the laws of Venice *confisnmicate* unto the state of Venice.”



## Modern Translation

If you spill one drop of his blood, the state will immediately seize everything you own.

## Strategy & Context

Because it is physically impossible to cut a pound of flesh without spilling blood, Shylock is trapped. He demanded absolute, ruthless law, and now Portia is unleashing absolute, ruthless law upon him.

[Theme: Poetic Justice]

POWER METER

Shylock: 5%

Portia: 95%

Portia -> To the Court

**“He hath refused it in the open court. He shall have merely justice and his bond.”**

### **Modern Translation**

He already publicly refused the money. Now, he gets nothing but the exact justice he demanded.

### **Strategy & Context**

Realizing he is beaten, Shylock tries to backpedal and accept the huge sum of money offered earlier. Portia denies him. He showed zero mercy to Antonio, so he is shown zero mercy in return. He is left with nothing.

**POWER METER**

**Portia: 100%**

# The Double-Edged Sword of the Law

## What Shylock Demanded

## How Portia Turned It Against Him

**The Contract:** Absolute, literal adherence to the bond.

**The Contract:** Portia enforced the literal absence of the word blood.

**The Money:** Refused unimaginable wealth to inflict pain.

**The Money:** Portia uses his public refusal to legally deny him the money later.

**Mercy:** Refused to show mercy when he held the power.

**Mercy:** The Venetian court ultimately refuses to show him mercy when he is powerless.

**Key Takeaway:** Shylock's greatest weapon—the strict interpretation of the law—became the exact tool used to destroy him.

# Exam Prep: Mapping the Themes

Explored through the **conflict** between the **strict letter of the law** (the bond) and the spirit of the law (fairness).

**JUSTICE**

The invisible engine of the scene. The extreme, hateful actions in this courtroom are the result of a **deeply biased, anti-Semitic** society.

Explored through Portia's **famous speech**, contrasted against the Christians' utter lack of mercy toward Shylock at the end.

**MERCY**

**PREJUDICE**

## EXAMINER NOTE:

When writing your essay, never just drop a quote. Use these quotes evidence of a character's strategy in the courtroom.