

## Name and Essence of “A Pound of Flesh”: On Identity Anxiety in The Merchant of Venice

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**Abstract :** The Merchant of Venice focuses on identity anxiety through the contract of “a pound of flesh” and refers to the economic, legal and religious issues related to identity. The development of the emerging capitalist economy in Venetian society prompted Shylock to become a usurer. The social identity of Shylock’s lender enabled him to use the power of money to consolidate the interdependent relationship with Christians and strive for his position and living space in Venetian society. However, there have long been economical and religious conflicts between Jews and Christians. Therefore, in order to take vengeance on Antonio and take his life, so as to revenge the whole Christian society, Shylock insists on taking a pound of Antonio’s flesh in the name of abiding by the contract and the law. The choice of “a pound of flesh” is essentially the representation of human materialization and commercialization under the background of the rise of capitalism and economic transformation. At the same time, it also symbolizes Shylock’s efforts and attempts to reshape himself and his racial identity.

**Keywords :** merchant of Venice, ethical choices, Shylock, a pound of flesh, identity anxiety

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