

OUCH! What a Bloody Mess!



by Reg Green

Another summer of productions of *Merchant of Venice* in parks around the country has done nothing to resolve the disagreement between 1) those who admire Portia's ingenuity as a lawyer for agreeing that Shylock can cut a pound of flesh from her client's body in repayment of a debt but only if he doesn't take a drop of blood too and 2) those who think she is a nutcase who should be disbarred.

Richard Armour, whose commentaries on Shakespeare I've been revisiting lately, throws some light on the subject by observing that when Portia refuses to take any payment for her successful ploy, it's clear she doesn't know the first thing about lawyers.