

ANDRÉ TCHAIKOWSKY/JOHN O'BRIEN, 17 surviving letters from their correspondence

1. J O'B to AT

(from) *Lakka, Paxos, Greece*

(to) *c/o The Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia*

3rd September 1968

Dear André,

I had your letter just before I left Finchden. Thank you. And I did bring a copy of *The Merchant* with me at least as far as Corfu. Somewhere between there & here I lost it. So much for all my good intentions. However, I did read the play several times before I left & I was in shock by several things – (1) it is a very good play & very skillfully balanced provided that you do not put Shylock at the centre but Portia. This forces the climax to Act V even if the crisis is in Act IV at the trial scene where Portia's behaviour is pretty vile unless you see her as playing a part – the “good” barrister, I mean clever. Throughout the play she reveals herself as enjoying making little dramas & has a lovely sense of timing.

To the Elizabethans the forced conversion of Shylock would be a “good thing” (1066, etc.) and showing great mercy – “you will suffer for the good of your soul my man, & you should be very grateful.”

(2) Antonio is meant to be a good man & of generous spirit whose folly is funding cheap friends, & his huge pride. I think he must be made to be a magnifico, a huge merchant explorer & adventurer. If only because he talks so little he is a cut above the rest of the Venetians who are made to look a pretty shabby bunch who lack the grace to live out their material values with real splendour, last year's debutantes who think they are still coming out. This is an unusual view of the Venetians who in their time were held in a kind of awe.

I don't think that Antonio's melancholy is all that difficult to understand. Nor do I think you have to read it that he's queer unless it amuses you to throw that in as spice, it has no bearing on the play. I don't think it contradictory to point to Sonnet 116, which to me at least is not about sex, where the rhythm & sound are not by any means gay or happy & more solemn than the seriousness demanded by the words if they were written in prose. The same kind of tension should be generated by the character of Antonio. “Let me not...admit impediments” seems to me an attempt to assert the will over & above mood & passion which is what Antonio tries to do over & over except in the all important case of Shylock. The failure by Antonio to meet Shylock on human terms is one of the tragic elements in the play but not at the play's centre (Antonio has so little to say.) This is all a bit rambling & I need the text to point my remarks. What is important first is that you should give me some idea of what you want. Or would you rather I set about cutting with a specific view of the play in mind & sent you that to disagree with?

I'll start to work on the script as soon as I get back but [the] sooner you know & can tell me which things in the play you want to stress the easier it will be to try cutting.

I don't altogether agree with telescoping Salerio & Solanio, 2 silly bastards chattering to each other is more amusing & more natural that 2 become 1 chattering to someone who doesn't listen. Antonio's double relation to all these people should be maintained. Certainly the lines can be cut down as can Gratiano. Why not have them all sing together at different speeds throwing up some of the more important lines about argosies, etc. into relief then drowning them? For that is what they do to everything they speak of, feeling nothing for it. (Same principle could be used in the 'casket scene', the rivals alternating their praise of themselves, like the song in 'Annie get your gun': “Anything you can do I can do better. No you can't, Yes I

can, No...etc) Or is that too flippant for so ceremonious a scene? Mind you, Wagner did it in *Meistersinger* & *Tannhäuser*.

If I were producing it as a play I would not cut all that much, only play the waffle very fast like bubbles in a fizzy drink or soda water...pssst bubble, bubble & then still water.

The clowns are tedious & the scene between Dad & Sonny boy I would leave out.

Enough of this vagueness. I am reading Ovid in an Elizabethan translation (Golding) Shakespeare made much use of. It's fun.

Paxos is marvellous, quite unsophisticated surrounded by rocks for sun & sea for bathing & there is a tolerable bed that I make great use of. I am more idle than I have been since I was at University.

Best wishes for the tour.

If you cannot read my writing keep all letters till you have enough of them to decipher by comparison. It can be one of the preliminary exercises in preparation for your opera.

John

2. AT to J O'B

(from) *Wrest Point Hotel, Hobart*

(15th September 1968)

Dear John,

Many thanks! You've helped me very much already. I had sketched the opening scene and had no trouble with Antonio's lines (melancholy comes easily to me), but got hopelessly stuck when it came to Salerio's reply. Then I got your letter, put Solanio back in, and immediately things began to click: a fast, comic duet, with xylophone as obbligato instrument. On their future appearances they will always sing the same kind of music, without the least relation to what they may have to say, and it will sound funnier still when they comment on more serious situations.

The two comic suitors won't sing at all: they'll dance. They'll mime their attitudes to Portia, the different caskets, and their dignified rage at the end. I've got a very funny minuet for Aragon, and a short march for his entrance and exit, but nothing so far for Morocco: he is quite difficult as I am using orientalism for Shylock, so that's out, and what else is there – African drums? You're so good at dramatic mimes, can you think up some funny ones for these two?

As for the "morals" of the play, I don't really agree with you. The Christians in this play aren't bad, merely limited, just as Shylock is, and there is no need to find excuses for Portia & Co.'s behaviour in the trial scene. Neither of the two worlds in this play can recognize the humanity of the other, and it would not be fair to expect them to – Shakespeare's own humanity being all-inclusive, he was in a good position to observe this point! There is no point in choosing between Portia and Shylock: the author takes no sides, and as for the center of the play, the point is that there is no center, but a void, with two separate civilizations on either side, not unlike our world of today.

About Antonio's queerness, it doesn't amuse me, but it's the only way I can understand his lines in the trial scene ("I am the tainted wether of the flock, Meetest for death") or why he should seem so positively pleased to die, when all his friends are falling over themselves to save him. It's not the loss of his ships, for he was melancholy before that; and nothing else I can think of can account for the crucial word "tainted". Since you quote Sonnet 116, you might as well quote it all: "love is not love, Which alters when it alteration finds, Nor bends with the remover to remove." This applies exactly to Antonio: he loved Bassanio, found alteration in his friend, let him "remove" himself to Belmont and a prosperous marriage, helped him with all he had, and never altered in his love himself. He is the other tragic character, and it's especially poignant to find the play's two outcasts versus one another. Read it this way, and every line falls into place: Solanio's "I think he only loves the world for him", Antonio's own "Pray God Bassanio comes To see me pay his debt, and then I care not!" and his farewell to Bassanio in Act IV. No need to talk of sex: it's irrelevant whether A.'s feeling was ever consummated, or even reciprocated; but it made him "tick", it is taken away from him, and his wish to die parallels Shylock's "Nay, take my life and all!" As you say, it is a very closely balanced play.

As for cutting, I believe the first 3 acts should be cut down to the minimum, and the last 2 very little: there is hardly a word too many in the trial scene, and the last act is sheer music and apart from the two unnecessary messengers, can be set just as it stands. But earlier on we must be merciless: words set to music take many times longer than words spoken, and we'd have a Wagnerian cycle on our hands before we knew! Look how drastically *Othello*, that most economic of Sh.'s plays, has been cut by Boito & Verdi – not by lines, or even scenes, but by an act! They also change things round sometimes, and so might we.

For a start, please help me out of Gratiano and/or Launcelot. Someone must come with Bassanio and marry Nerissa, but there is little else for him to do, and Gratiano's long speech in the first scene makes

no sense since the character later shrinks rather than develops (I think Sh. meant to create a real character, rather like Mercutio, on equal social terms with A. & B., and let himself down by making Gratiano become a servant). The sooner A. & B. meet, the better.

Portia's first scene should be cut to a short, lightly wistful aria ("I cannot choose, I cannot choose. I can neither choose whom I want, nor refuse whom I dislike") and Nerissa's explanation of the casket scheme; the only suitor to be mentioned is Bassanio, with Portia's sudden explosion of "Yes, yes, it was Bassanio" followed by the comic belated attempt at coolness: "...as I think, so was he called." There is nothing more tedious than stereotyped jokes on different nationalities (being Jewish, I can appreciate that).

I'll finish with a project of synopsis:

A short orchestral prelude (1 min.)

Act I – Shylock

Scene I – as in Sh., minus Lorenzo & Gratiano, 7-8 mins., perhaps 10

Scene II – Belmont. – as suggested, about 5 mins.

Scene III – Before Shylock's house.

This will include Sh.'s Act I scene III, Act II scenes III, V, VI and Lorenzo's few lines at the end of scene IV: he can explain that to his friends while already in front of Jessica's house, in counterpoint to the carnival music. Then Shylock comes home, finds it empty, and explodes into the outburst related by Solanio in II, 8: "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" etc. and exits followed by a jeering chorus of little boys parodying him ("Why, all the boys in Venice follow him, crying his stones, his daughter, and his ducats"). This, of course, is adding rather than cutting, but it does make an effective operatic curtain (circa 40 mins.)

Act II – The Caskets

Scene I – Portia & Morocco (Sh. II, 1 & II, 7) 5-6 mins.

Scene II – Before the curtain, with a backdrop representing a ship. (Antonio & Bassanio's parting, as related by Salerio in Sh. II, 8) Antonio sings a short arioso, & Bassanio one line: "I think he only loves the world for me...", the only point of the scene being to prevent Morocco & Aragon from following on each other's heels. (5 mins.)

Scene III – The fall of Aragon (Sh. II, 9) 5-6 mins.

Scene IV – Venice (Sh. III, 1) about 8 mins., no more than 10

Scene V – Belmont (Sh. III, 2) Here Bassanio's comments on the portrait are best out: "Or whether, riding on the balls of mine" might prove the wrong kind of humour with modern audiences. About 25 mins.

Act III – The Trial

Scene I – (Sh. III, 3) 4 mins.

Scene II – The girls dress up as boys, (Sh. III, 4, from "Come on, Nerissa; I have work in hand", etc.) 5 mins.

Scene III – The trial (Sh. IV, 1). 30-35 mins.

Interlude before the curtain (Sh. IV, 2), while the orchestra repeats the short vivacious prelude. 1-1½ mins., leading to

Epilogue – A night in Belmont (Sh. V, 1) circa 20 mins.

I've added the projected timings up and see it comes to very nearly 3 hours! Rather too long, if you then add the two intervals (20 mins. each). A semi-comic opera should not run to more than 3 hours with the intervals. *The Rake's Progress* is exactly the right length: 2 acts of 40 mins. each and a 3rd act lasting one hour. Now our last act, including the epilogue, will last at least that, so we must cut the first 2 acts still further: starting with the 1st scene, can you put Salerio & Solanio through the meat-grinder?

I'd better stop or you will need another holiday! I'm very glad you had such a good one. Can one get about in modern Greece on classical Greek? Or can you speak modern Greek too? When on earth do you keep it up?

I find our collaboration very stimulating. There is nothing like work to cheer one up! I've been scoring my impending Piano Concerto, and this too has been keeping me cheerful. So far, indeed, it hasn't been too bad at all.

Please forgive me – I have been spilling lemon tea all over this letter. Give my love to the chief, staff and boys and give Pete Townsend a kiss if he will let you: I should never attempt it myself.

Cheers, André

3. J O'B to AT

(from) Finchden

6th October [1968]

Dear André,

Thank you for your letter full of fascinating things. I won't start a discussion tonight, but simply enclose a suggested Act I, scenes I, II & a part of an extended Scene III. I'll try to finish off Act I this week & send it as soon as possible with a few, more detailed explanations.

As you see, I've cut out some big lumps & you may not like the abrupt joins that result in some places. There are several places where I have left queries.

In Sc. I (lines 7-40) I imagine a Sandwich with Salerio as the bread & a filling of Solanio & Salario [sic – meaning unclear] up to line 40 – in fact it is 12 lines or at most 17, then I would leave Sol & Sal on stage till Gratiano & Lorenzo leave. Gratiano interrupts Bassanio's first effort at speaking to Antonio & speaks an abridged infinity (Einstein & relativity to the rescue here) of nothing which ends in light-hearted farewells at line 113 leaving about 60 lines to be shared by Bassanio & Antonio.

Sc II is fairly ravaged but you may wish to cut even further. I am assuming you wish to make an aria around

“Yes, yes it was Bassanio. I remember him well & I remember him worthy of praise.”

Do you want a singing Servingman? If not he can convey his message to Nerissa who passes it on. Portia presumably thinking of Bassanio rather than Morocco.

About Sc III. My cutting here is more tentative as I have not yet linked up all the bits, though I have been through all the scenes with a now blunted pencil. Quite a lot here will depend I think on the actual stage organization so that we can change locale without changing scenery. I'll try to elaborate this next time.

About Gratiano – After establishing him as a character in Sc. I, much can be done by stage business (even in small gestures & hints in the music) to carry him on without deflecting the centre of interest in the Belmont scenes.

Please forgive so hasty a letter & so lacking in useful information, but at least you have a bit of libretto to play with. I hope to have more time this next week & will write again soon.

Have not yet summoned up the courage to kiss Peter for you, but you never know...

Best wishes, John

4. J O'B to AT

(from) *Finchden*

14th October 1968

Dear André,

I hope my last letter has arrived or this one will make little sense. Here are more scratched & scribbled over pages, which together with what I've already sent are a suggestion for a first Act.

Scene III is what poses most problems, in that we must establish Jessica & deal with the 'bond', the spending of the money – so to speak – & the 'abduction' of Jessica before Shylock can bring down the curtain. It is a lot to get into one scene & you may feel I have not been savage enough. I imagine a slow beginning to this scene giving Shylock space to establish himself, then a rapid succession of very short episodes before Shylock's dramatic "My daughter, O my ducats."

Quite a lot here will depend on staging & I have envisaged a stage divided in two – a large acting area outside Shylock's house divided by a canal from another acting area but the two areas joined by a little bridge – it is Venice after all. This should help to dispel the incongruity of all the various activity happening under Shylock's nose. I always think of opera scenery as "solid" & local, quite the reverse to Shakespeare's settings, which are defined only when necessary. If I can summon up the courage by the end of this letter I'll draw you a little sketch.



However – the text itself. I've cut out the two Gobbo's, or should it be Gobbi?

Sc. III (1) Children play on bridge & outside Shylock's house. Bassanio arrives, summons Shylock from the house & [the] scene follows as you have it after Shylock has chased the children away. When Bassanio & Antonio have left, Shylock comes out of the house again –

(2) Jessica comes to the door & when her father has gone has the lines "Our house is hell – Alack – what heinous sin..." (p. 65) & goes back indoors. [Perhaps the children could reappear as they obviously like her & she could give one of them the letter for Lorenzo.]

(3) Bassanio returns obviously in haste & giving orders (p.65) (going from A – B) he meets Gratiano (p.67/68) & tells him to behave properly at Belmont (this I think is important, everyone is a "better" person at Belmont, Morocco & Aragon behave pretty well when they learn the worst, etc... & it all builds up to the idyllic scene at the end) then leaves him to talk with

(4) "Lorenzo & the rest" who have appeared on the other side of the bridge (B) [with the boy & letter from Jessica?] Gratiano goes over to Lorenzo, Salerio, Solanio (p.70) & the plot is briefly explained. They all leave.

(5) Shylock returns (p.71) "What Jessica..." then goes off to dinner.

(6) Masquers, Gratiano & Salerio followed by Lorenzo p.73-76. Antonio's entry here seems to me to say so much about Antonio & is the natural lead into a scene

(7) – if you want it (p.80) - without words but only music where Antonio makes his farewell to Bassanio & is left alone in his loss until lights fade & then

(8) come up again for Shylock as he returns, discovers Jessica has fled, makes his lament, cries for justice & is followed off the stage by the mocking children (p.79)

Apart from the general layout does this help at all with Gratiano?

Until I began writing this letter I had felt unhappy about the scene (7) between Antonio & Bassanio but I see that it could be beautifully staged contrasting the frivolity of the departure in general & the personal leave taking – Antonio is impatient with Gratiano on Antonio’s [sic] behalf but then must face his own loss while Bassanio is impatient to go, etc. etc. – & of course it juxtaposes Antonio & Shylock at the moment of crisis for each of them where they reveal the bases of their moral law “love & be silent” on the one hand, “Justice” on the other. Or is that overstating it?

At all events, I look forward to your comments, & to knowing whether you feel this is the right approach at this stage. By the way, have you had time to put music on paper or is life a hurricane across that huge continent?

All good wishes, John

P.S. If you have ideas of spectacle for this opera & surely it calls for it the leave taking at the end could involve a little float of gondolas & other Venetian craft crossing the stage at the back & seen through the arch of the bridge with a solitary Antonio standing on the quay... I am obviously still under the spell of Venetian romance.

J.



5. AT to J O'B

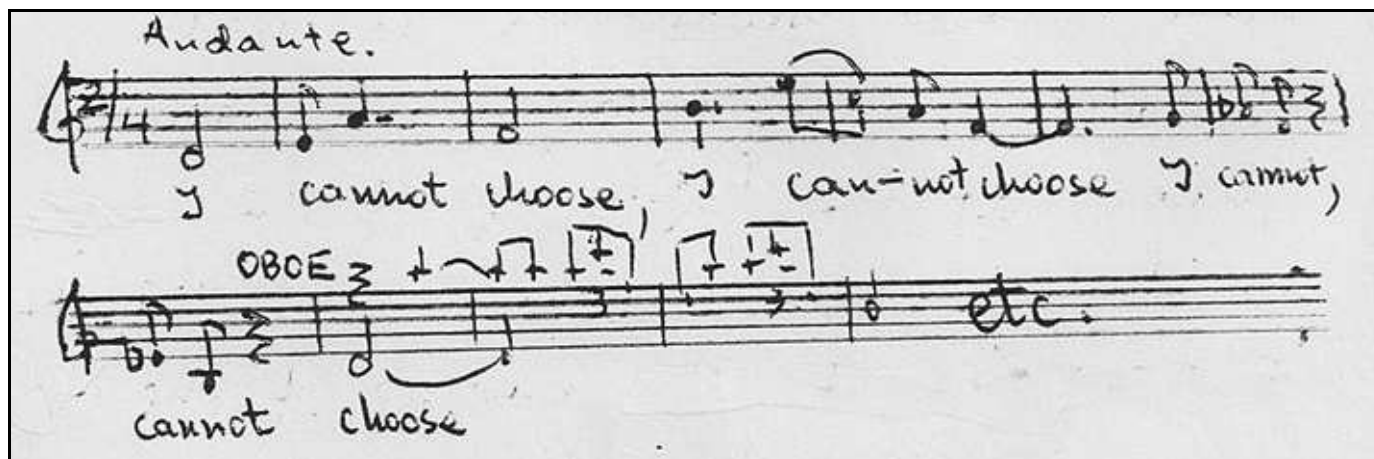
(from) ANSETT-ANA

(1968) [?]

Dear John,

I delighted in both your letters for a fortnight without opening them, as I couldn't afford to get too absorbed in composition during the last, particularly busy part of the tour, and I knew that once I read your version of the *Merchant* I'll be lost to everything else! Last night, however, I was free and alone for the first time since getting your letters and spent a few happy hours over them. I think your double-set is a real brain-wave; it pays even better dividends in opera than in the theater as it enables two separate groups of people to sing, unbeknown to one another, in perfect contrapuntal ensemble! It gives the whole long scene some shape, unity and concision and ensures that something is always happening somewhere. I also welcome your idea of using the children's chorus early in the scene, but this poses a problem: what the hell will they sing? W.S. has not written anything. Suppose they didn't sing at all, just played to some wood-wind music, and Jessica gave one of them the letter in silence? After all, this must be done quickly and furtively. Jessica has a nice opening aria – "Our house is hell" is an excellent beginning – and we're well rid of Launcelot. But at what point does she deliver the letter? Perhaps she could write it on stage (but where?) while singing: "Oh, Lorenzo..." etc. No, that's no good. Another brainwave: your perfectly timed inclusion of Antonio's farewell to Bassanio. This, of course, is the moment for it! And it will be so much better without words – "Slubber not business" etc. is a very unsingable text.

Which brings me back to scene II. Nerissa's lines are also eminently unsingable. I can leave out the beginning, and in fact I'd like to – one has more sympathy for a heroine that starts with a tune straightaway rather than a recitativo (Cf. The countess in *Figaro*), and before hearing from you I had already started an opening aria:



This sounds better than you might think with the various wood-wind counterpoints.

But what about Nerissa? At the very least, she must bring in the "lottery" (from: "Your father was ever virtuous") and so far my mind goes blank at the prospect of fitting any music to it.

So far the fragments I have sketched are:

- 1) Opening of Act I, scene I
- 2) " Act I, scene II

3) Shylock's leitmotiv at the beginning of I, III – he's the only character to have a leit-motiv, as well as trombones and tuba, so as to be a complete anachronism in the pseudo-Mozartian world of the whole opera. I'd rather not have the children at the beginning of the scene, as Shylock's theme needs undivided attention; also, for the ending of the Act to be effective, the kids and Shylock shouldn't be seen together till then. Let us save them till Jessica's entrance. Also I've got the scene of Jessica's elopement.

4) Most of II, 1 – Aragon's entrance-march, Aragon's minuet and the beginning of Morocco's wild dance.

5) Portia's opening aria in II, 3

6) Most of III, 2 (Portia and Nerissa's disguise project). But looking back at it, I think it's no good. The main theme is nice – I'll have to start on it again.

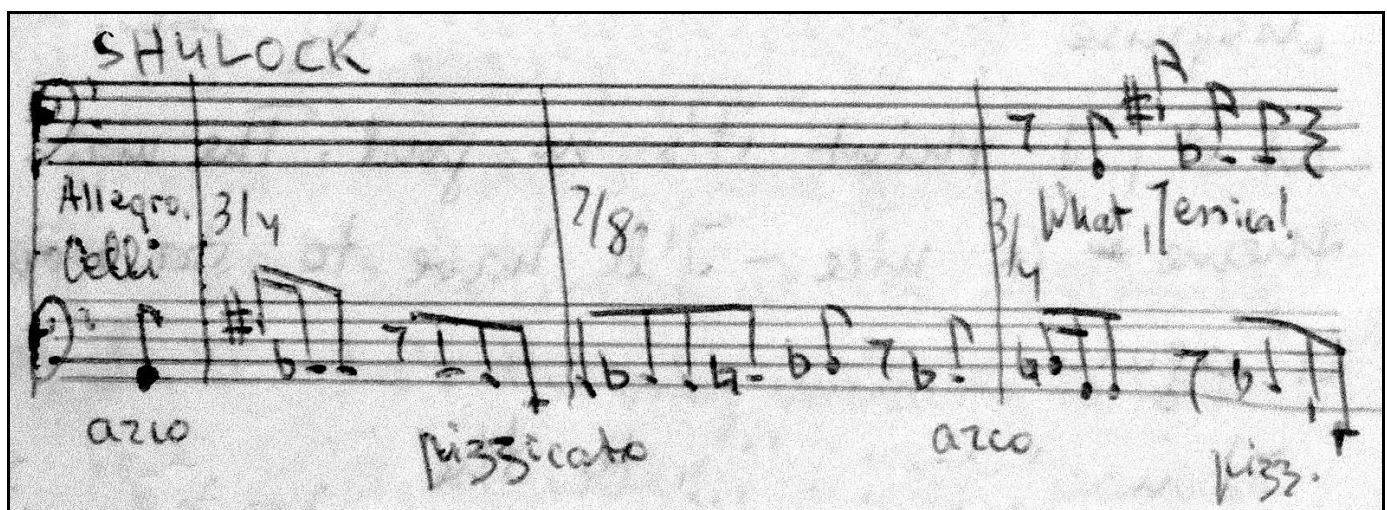
7) An introduction to the trial-scene

8) Epilogue – the opening love-duet, the stage music, then follows a complete chaos of disconnected sketches.

As you see, the character I've done least of is Shylock – I'll keep his scenes till last, as something very special is needed there and I still feel inhibited. This is his motif:



This lends itself to many variants, some of them humorous, as:



etc., Shylock in canon with the strings.

I can't go on now - they're waiting for me for lunch with the ABC "concert officer" (that's what they're called!) and I'm playing a recital tonight. Please go on with the rest of the play - I'd like to have the whole libretto, so I can write the music as it comes to me, not necessarily in order. But of course I know that now, with Christmas coming, you'll be busier than ever. Are you producing a play as well this winter?

Many thanks and congratulations, and much love and best wishes to all! How fares the Chief?

Ever yours, André

P.S. You can reach me here (c/o the A.B.C., G.P.O. Box 487, Sydney, N.S.W.) till the 27th November. I'll give you my next address when I have got one. If you mail your next letter by the 15th, I am sure to get it, and I'll be free to do some real work.

6. J O'B to AT

(from) Finchden Manor, Tenterden

(to) c/o the A.B.C., G.P.O.Box 487, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

(14th November 1968)

Dear André,

Please forgive a hasty scribble – It is already 14th. I am glad you approve what's done, by & large, & many thanks for your long letter. A few quick points – (1) the children – to have them at the beginning & end would be more shapely. There is no need for them to sing. I had not thought of them doing that, just music & play. They run off when Bassanio & Shylock arrive. Perhaps they are summoning Jessica who watches from her window & gives warning of the “[illegible]” coming (again all gesture & movement, no song.) If the children then come back to play later on there is already formed the connection with Jessica whereby the passing of the secret letter is more meaningful & can be done “quickly”. With the split stage “side doors” come into their own.

(2) I'll look again at the scene with Nerissa & Portia. I do agree, the shorter (fewer words, that is) the better.

(3) The rest of the libretto. I'll do what I can here. After such an encouraging beginning I'd like to spend a bit of time on it. But the Chief has asked for a children's pantomime. I've just written that in 4 days & now have 4 weeks to produce it in, together with a lot of teaching, etc. However, *The Merchant* & you are often in my thoughts so that when I get down to it, it should come quickly. I'll write a better letter in a week or so, but I did want to get this much sent before you move off again. I'm sure you are wise to keep Shylock untouched till you feel in full flight.

All good wishes. Are you going where a real rest in the sun, or is it to be all work till you get back? Please send your next address as soon as you can so that I can send anything I've done quickly. I've only to start a note to you to want desperately to get back to the text.

I've been going into gentle raptures over a little Mozart Flute Quartet (K.285) in D. It “picks me up” at about 2a.m.

Yours, John

7. J O'B to AT

(from) *Finchden*

17th November 19[??]

Dear André,

I began last evening to read through *The Merchant* again. I read & re-read & crossed out here & altered there until I felt I had come up against the real questions.

What is an opera?

What is a libretto? & what relation can it have with the text of a "poetic drama"? The function of the poetry is essentially taken over by the music in an opera & what is required is singable words which act as framework for emotional utterance, the emotion being carried & created in the music. This suggests that only very little of Shakespeare's text can be used (not merely to avoid elephantiasis) because Shakespeare's words will conflict with the musical expression. Or rather the two experiences interfere. This is suggested strangely by Shakespeare himself when he stops verbal action & introduces music as song. The songs in the plays are kept basically very different from the other verse & condense the experiences which surround them, dispensing with explanations in narrative. Of course there are lines which are eminently singable [Take the scene – Act III Scene II when Bassanio meets Portia & makes his choice. After the two scenes where Portia is civil & patient with what is repugnant when Morocco & Aragon & after 110 lines of the scene with Bassanio she becomes wrapped [sic: "rapt"?] in "prayer" which has 3½ lines

"O love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy
In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess –
I feel too much thy blessing, make it less
For fear I surfeit."

There is Portia! & when she is won (which is outside her power of choice) she has only to say "You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand, such as I am" & the rest simply enlarges on this & swells the scene. & the ideas conquered by the expression of the feeling in these 3½ lines are the same that she directs at Shylock in reply to his "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.]"

I fear I have not made myself clear, but what I am wrestling with is how to provide you with just enough words to give the scope for your music to flow while keeping a story going & doing justice to W.S. The problem becomes more apparent in the Casket Scene, The Trial & the final scene in Act V.

Act V seems to me [to] be at once obscure about & an expression of Harmony by means of intimately poised metaphor. But Harmony itself as "used" here is a metaphor, which ranges between the spheres & the bedclothes & the grassy bank & raking in actual music as a means to & expression of their Harmony. Shakespeare used words, you will use music & voice. Here is my problem. I am very excited by it, but see that it must not be rushed especially as I am easily intoxicated at the moment each time I read Act V. This letter is really to tell you I am deeply in the *Merchant* & bitterly (at times that is) regret having so little time at present to work on it. However, I should have more to send you in a week or two. Meanwhile "bring your music forth into the air."

John

8. AT to J O'B

(from) 29 Waterlow Court, Heath Close, London NW11

(21st August 1972)

Dear John,

I've just shown *The Merchant* to Hans [Keller], and he expressed astonishment at both the quantity and the quality of what has come along since he last saw the sketch six weeks ago! I'm so excited I certainly couldn't resist ringing you up right now if I knew where. However, I've come across my first dramatic problem (I won't bother you with the musical ones, which are numerous but soluble) and I hope you'll agree to help me with it. The point is the servants' chorus on page 3 of Act II, which is too static and mournful after Portia's own copious complaints. It doesn't tell the audience anything new – Nerissa has briefly explained the "lottery" and we'll soon see it in action anyway – and if anything, holds up the plot. Besides, there hasn't been any quick music in the Act as yet (Portia's opening tune is Lento, Nerissa's Andante), and this scene is crying out for some. What I should like is for Portia to sail forth to meet her suitor alone, leaving Nerissa in command of the hall and the necessary preparations. She then can start immediately with "Quick, quick, I pray you", summoning up the servants into the hall, and what I now need is a quick answering chorus, as they run in and rapidly re-arrange the scenery (drawing the back curtain to reveal the caskets, and whatever else you can think of to give an impression of cheerful bustle). The tone of their comments might profitably be flippant; they've performed the ceremony often enough to have grown somewhat cynical about Portia's suitors. As for their actual comments, would Portia's description of the first few unlucky candidates in I, 2 guide your inspiration, or even perhaps provide some of the lines?

Nerissa's part in this scene is analogous to Despina's, as she arranges the wedding banquet at the start of the Act II finale in *Così* – the same matter-of-fact, busy cheerfulness, contrasting to the point of shock with the ineffable previous scene of Fiordiligi's surrender to Ferrando. I've just got the score out to re-read that bit, and find that the servants sing only 4 lines! though the last line is, as usual, repeated twice. And this is all I need too: if music proliferates, I can always repeat a few lines – or, of course, cut the music out! To be safe, send me about 8-10 lines (short ones, e.g.

First came the German,
Reeking of wine,
Then came the saucy
Count Palatine.

...etc.)

At this rate, ten lines can be got over in half a minute, and of course you are more than welcome to write more! If you did, I might give different words to different parts of the chorus and use them first antiphonally and then in a kind of free stretto! What do you think of all this?

It was lovely to see you the other night – it gave me a boost that made me do a lot more work in time for the session with Hans (mainly on Nerissa). And I was thrilled to see in your letter that you are thinking of the Passion of Judas. One of the first effects of sustained thinking on Judas should be a better grasp of Shylock on my part!

Lots of love – enjoy the early spring in Africa and the inevitable poignancy of returning home... Let me hear from you soon.

Yours, André

P.S. – The omelette pan is still unusable.

9. AT to J O'B

(from) George Hotel, Solihull

(2nd October 1972)

My dear John,

This is not a letter, but an intensely felt apology for not having written one. I simply can't stand the way day after day goes by without my having a chance to write to you properly, with that minimum of concentration without which correspondence can have no point, and thank you for the new servants' chorus which you provided with such miraculous speed. Alas, it's only when I've done some work on it that I shall know just how good it is – it certainly was the case for the rest of the second act. But it certainly looks "just the thing", and I am longing to be able to start working on our joint venture again! This, however, won't be till December, as the season is now in full swing and I am under pressure again. Besides, I've been pretty depressed for the last 2½ weeks, and I'm not playing my best (though I may yet), so I cannot afford to do what I'd like most! One of the things I'm most looking forward to is having you back in London – even though we don't meet very often, it's always good to know you're around. Have a wonderful time in Africa, but please don't put off your return!

Love, André

10. AT to J O'B

(from) Botleigh Grange Hotel, Botley, Southampton SO3 2GA

(6th October 1972)

Dear John,

Sorry I sent you such a dirge a few days ago! Since then my mood has changed: two decent concerts were all that was needed to accomplish that. Besides, the weather is glorious. I still have got no time to write, but it shouldn't prove too difficult to get *The Merchant* started again in December – it has a life of its own, unlike an instrumental piece which doesn't yet exist and disintegrates into nothing when one lets go of it for a while! Your return will be an added incentive.

Lee Marwood came to my recital last night, with a lovely girl-friend, and we spent a couple of hours together afterwards. Now I am trying to persuade G.L. to come for the weekend! He might, you know; nothing can be put past George Aubrey Lyward.

I'm off to Mexico on Friday the 13th (how is that for a lucky date?), assuming I get the visa, and shall be back on the 31st. Don't forget we've got a date at my QEH recital on the 12th of November! I'll leave you a ticket next to G.L. and Elisabeth.

Lots of love, André

11. AT to J O'B

(from) Hotel Royal-RAMADA, Newton Road, Singapore, 11, Republic of Singapore

(to) Mhlatane High School, P.O. Box 100, Pigg's Peak, Swaziland

(10th April 1973)

My dear John,

Your second letter caught me just as I was leaving New Zealand, and only a day or two after I'd sent you a few lines wondering at your silence! Now that it's reached me, I only wonder that you've managed to write me at all. Teaching in Swaziland sounds much harder than writing *The Merchant...* I should not be surprised if one day you decided to take up a school of your own.

Well, I've been working on either side of the servants' chorus, and have got most of the sketches in full score. I could only write in short snatches in between the concerts, but even so quite a few little gaps have been filled – orchestrating one fragment leads so spontaneously to sketching the next. Aragon's portrait is now all but complete, but I still haven't got Morocco, and Nerissa seems at the moment to steal the show from Portia – this is partly because I haven't got much of P.'s opening aria, and anyway her really big moments don't come till the arrival of Bassanio – “O, love!” etc. Anyway, I shall not have much time to write till late May or early June, so don't kill yourself over the servants' chorus. I'd like to complete the first half of the second act sometime this summer and then lay it aside and go back to the second string quartet – I'm sure quartet writing improves the quality of both invention and workmanship.

The concerts down under were astonishingly successful: however I played, they seemed determined to respond with rave reviews and a standing ovation. The only event in my personal life was the discovery of transcendental meditation – have you come across that? It made me sit through an earthquake in Wellington, perfectly conscious of what was happening, but without getting in the least upset.

But I still get terrified and play badly at each other concert!

Lots of love, André

P.S. I'll be home the day after tomorrow – can you write me there?

12. AT to J O'B

(19th November 1975)

My dear John,

This is the first day since the première of my piano concerto [28th October 1975] when I have leisure to sit down and try to answer some of the many letters I've received; and yours comes first. After all, the post brought me only one libretto! And I was utterly fascinated by it. Gratiano, as you've conceived him, is in his different way as disturbing and menacing as, say, Soliony in *The Three Sisters*, who also speaks very little but brings unease every time he enters. If I was producing the play, I would pilfer your ideas at once.

But, John, dare I say it? Your Gratiano does not fit in with the music I have written for him in the 2nd act. I did all my best to lend him a certain cocky charm, and set his entire long duet with Nerissa as a minuet – a rough one to start with, but growing progressively gentler and more Mozartian as Portia's lady-in-waiting exercises her civilizing influence. Now, unless the audience is ready to like Gratiano as well as laugh at him, his wooing of Nerissa will produce nothing but impatience. How long would you be willing to watch a Nazi storm-trooper dance a minuet?

Disturbing and effective as your new version of Act I now is, reality is more disturbing still. It is no villain, but a nice ordinary person, that pushed my mother into the gas chamber! I should have been just that man, probably, if I'd grown up in his environment. Now this is the point I'd like to bring across to the no doubt unwilling and disgusted audience. Fool them first into liking Gratiano, Portia, etc. and seeing Shylock as the only menace (as I honestly think Shakespeare does) and then turn the tables on them. Let them see the gentle heroine, still extolling mercy, crush Shylock's face under her boot, and the brash but patently harmless man-in-the-street clamour for his hanging to enhance the pleasure of his own bridal night! Let them realize with all the shock of sudden and unwelcome insight that they had identified themselves with the wrong side. (There is, alas, no right side in *The Merchant of Venice*, any more than in *Measure for Measure* or *Troilus and Cressida*; is Isabella really preferable to an Angelo?)

My main point is that if I accept the explicit moral irony of your Act I, my Act II is a bore. It's 45 or 50 minutes long, full of lovingly fastidious detail, and it hinges entirely on the audience's sympathy with all the characters except Aragon and Morocco (very unfair to the latter, of course). Incidentally, I gave Gratiano the first 3 lines of the "With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come" speech, so I'd rather not use these lines before. He sings them on his first entrance to Belmont, before Nerissa's entrance. On the other hand, your placing G.'s "You look not well, Signor Antonio" at the end of the act is absolutely masterly, showing at once the obtuseness and callousness of his reaction to A.'s tragedy. I wouldn't miss this point for anything!

What do you suggest? I hope you are not cross with me for all these comments. In any case, I couldn't get round to Act I before we meet again in early June; for one thing, I'm under pressure to finish the second string quartet, and for another, I'm due to play all the Mozart concertos in Perth, W.A. between March and May! I only know half of them. Besides, now that I've come to feel at home in the tonal world of Belmont, I'd prefer to write the Epilogue before tackling the two Venice Acts. Shylock still gives me cold feet!

Do let's meet: it will be both beneficial to the *Merchant* and a joy to ourselves. If you cannot come to Cape Town, I'll visit you at your next address. Can you give me that? By the way, my own address has changed, as I have sold the flat at Waterlow Court and haven't yet got anywhere else to stay. The safest and quickest way to reach me is c/o Eve Harrison (remember Eve?), Flat 6, 60 Great Russell St., London W.C.1. I'll give you my next address as soon as I've got one.

Do let me hear from you soon. It's marvellous to know you'll be able to teach in a truly creative way from next year onwards! Where will you be till the next school term?

Love, André

P.S. The piano concerto proved my greatest success to-date.

13. J O'B to AT

(from) Mhlatane High School, P.O. Box 100, Pigg's Peak, Swaziland

30th November 1975

My dear André,

I was very happy to have your letter and hear that your Piano Concerto was well received. Does this mean that there will be more performances in the near future? I wish you were less modest about telling me about such a major achievement! Did the orchestra do you justice with so little time for rehearsal?

I'm not at all cross about the *Merchant*. This is the only way we are going to get it right and achieve a unity. If we can do that we have done something which Shakespeare himself did not quite pull off in the *Merchant*!! I am sure it would be a mistake to interfere with Act II at this stage, not only because of your loving care and labour, but because it acts as the framework onto which the rest must be structured. I assume (don't forget that I have not seen any of the music) that you treat Belmont as in some sense an enchanted place (I'll come back to this later – particularly in regard to Portia and the Epilogue) where everyone is charmed into a better way of behaving. That would be true to Shakespeare who seems so unhappy about boy-girl romance that he always places it outside the rude rough world. Gratiano and Bassanio must therefore be coarser in Acts I and III. And the question we have now reached is – how coarse must Gratiano be?

What I tried for, but seemingly failed, was a Gratiano whose menace was as yet only latent. The kind of menace that I often feel in young people who, having been promised the world as children, find that life is boring and are forced as much by circumstance as personality to hang about waiting for something to happen – i.e. waiting their chance in a world sufficiently egocentric to pay them little attention except when they are useful or a nuisance. The mixture of viciousness and tenderness was something I noticed at Finchden and again here in Swaziland among people of a very different culture. Now in a fiction such as we are trying to create we need both the shock that you speak of when Gratiano screams his (and polite society's) hate and vengeance and some clues, planted early on which elicit a further shock and revulsion which is personal – why the hell did we not notice that at the time? Now in the play the moral irony is there. Antonio's first words to Bassanio are "Is that anything now?" asked of Gratiano. And later when Gratiano asked if he may accompany Bassanio we have the reply "Thou art too wild, too rude..." It seems to me that Shakespeare is here pointing to the way any group of people has its own level of tolerance for misbehaviour by its own members which it will not countenance in people of a different group, be it class, race or even social clic. We smile at our friends' misbehaviour. 'No, don't worry, that's just old so-and-so. He's quite harmless really!' Meaning, he won't harm us, and that is all that matters. Obviously for the play, and the opera, to work, the audience have got to feel this way towards some of Antonio's clic for at least some of the time. And Gratiano must elicit an indulgent if not affectionate smile. Even his ugly and insensitive remarks to Antonio "You look not well..." must not put the audience off completely. Having him slightly tipsy was my way of ensuring indulgence. The issue for the libretto is this. Is it in the words or lack of words that the menace comes through explicitly, or is it in the stage business? The latter is easy to deal with, just cut it down and leave out the dagger-fiddling, the former is much more difficult. I don't think I should try to do anything more than think about this until we can talk it over, particularly as you are going to continue with Belmont before starting on the Venetian Acts.

At the risk of boring you with what is already obvious to you, may I go on a bit about the menace in the play. If Shylock is the only menace the play breaks in half. Shylock is the obvious menace. Historically speaking his menace is [a] stubborn (heroic if you are a Jew, but the play is written from a Christian point of view for a Christian audience) refusal to become a Christian. If Shylock becomes a Christian, Antonio will use Shylock's wealth in partnership, and all is forgiven. We may be revolted by this, perhaps Shakespeare was, but his

audience would not have been. Shakespeare takes particular care to present Shylock's case as a man (to a lesser extent he does the same for the other cultural alien, Morocco) and then robs Shylock of the benefit of it by making him juxtapose vicious comments, which makes it difficult to accept the full nobility of his pleas. What he stands for is noble, but as an individual he is diminished, he can be taken as a nasty joke. If for no other reason this is necessary to the comic convention. The play must move to a happy ending. But we can look at the play from two other angles – Antonio, who gives the play its title or Portia/Nerissa, the female half of the romantic comedy.

If Antonio is the real hero of the play it is a tragedy in a comic mode. Within the conventions that Shakespeare was writing and living, Antonio cannot be allowed to win, for then boy gets boy and the society disintegrates. Antonio does in sooth know why he is so sad by the end of the play. And his remark to Portia “you give me life and living” is ironic if not a direct lie. We know he is not deeply distressed about his business, and we have heard, though from Solanio, “I think he only loves the world for him.” Antonio – that noble Roman in virtue – must not only sacrifice his principles and go to Shylock for money and the first bond on his body, he must accept graciously all that is implied by a bond upon his soul to give up his friend. He is left with nothing and has no real place in the world of the play. The moving force behind all this is Portia. She is a ‘delightful’, but not im-potent witch.

When we first hear of Portia it is in the context of Jason and the Golden Fleece. Portia has become both the golden fleece (wealth) and of course Medea. And like Medea she must be reached by sea after an extravagant expedition; like Medea she goes against the wishes of her father, deceiving him for a lover secretly, but puts it all right so that the lover is acceptable; like Medea using Magic charms to restore Aeson to youth, she restores Antonio to “life and living” by clever tricks – where did she find out about the list of argosies if not ‘magically’? – and like Medea she demonstrates her power over her husband's suspected infidelity. Though of course in the latter it is all a joke because the play is a comedy. It is interesting in this respect that Shakespeare extends the play for two acts beyond the marriage, but delays consummation till the final curtain.

This cunning and beautiful witch – now integrated so far into the European consciousness as to be not only desirable but the apogee of social prestige – is just as absolute for bonds and the letter of the law as Shylock and has to secure her prey – husband absolutely. She herself has been deceived by Bassanio, who is not wholly free. He is in debt to his friend who also has some part of his affection. So to secure Bassanio she must free Antonio and thus earn their deepest thanks (hence perhaps the extent of her cruelty to Shylock), and place them in her debt[;] then she must trick them into a slight indiscretion, for which Antonio can be blamed, and withhold her forgiveness and a place in her bed until Antonio has bound himself upon his soul not to come between her and her husband. It's a sort of castration for Antonio just as failing to choose the right casket was a form of castration for the other suitors. Thus Portia is as much villain as she is heroine but convention requires her to win and be delightful. But as with Shylock her power is at odds with personality. That long prose scene that we have so radically cut (I.ii) relies enormously on the audience being deaf, thanks to cunning predisposition. She is shallow and bitchy, conceited and rather ordinary. It is the setting of Belmont and what has been said about her that makes us accept her. That she is in some way outside the magic circle that she and Belmont create is brought out again on her return to Belmont after the trial. All the nonsense about praying and visits to hermits is a reminder if necessary that these ‘Christians’ are only so in name. It is a pagan and hedonistic society they live in and the business of wiving well (or husbanding well, as is so often the case in Shakespeare) is one of its most potently binding social conventions. Both Shylock and Antonio are antipathetic within such a structure. It is as if Shakespeare says in this play ‘I'll play your game, but I'll play my own too, and the real laugh if you only recognized it is on you’.

Several of Portia's most gracious and seemingly generous remarks are (like Shylock's noble pleas for human dignity) robbed of something by catty or trite remarks just before or after the fine ones: especially to Morocco and Antonio and of course the whole business with Shylock at the trial.

Act V has the little surprises which I think help to support this way of looking at the play. The Jessica-Lorenzo duet in the moon-drenched garden has its own natural 'charm' but what they talk about is odd. Cressida was a lovely whore, and rather stupid with it. Thisbe and her lover died from the results of impatience (dealt with as comedy and tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*). Dido, the great alien lover, was betrayed so that Western Civilization could be established in its Roman, hence catholic, mode.

Medea I've mentioned. Then Jessica and Lorenzo refer to themselves as 'unthrift love' and "stealing" from each other. But no mention of any sense of guilt at robbing her father. It is only after this rather ambiguous opening that Shakespeare settles into the theme of harmony and the potency of music to work as a healing charm. This in turn is interrupted by Portia whose obviously disingenuous remark comparing her bad voice to the cuckoo is curious. She does break the spell in her garden and the intruders, however affectionately received there, are once again put in their place as refugees, but more than that Portia introduces the loaded word 'cuckoo' which sets the tone for the near farcical ending. Cuckoldry is the perpetual fear of the married, as being a bachelor/spinster for life is the fear of the unmarried, within the dramatic as well as the social convention. And the end of the play is raucous with its very unsubtle sexy jokes on women's rings. And it seems to me that there is a mild contempt in the way Shakespeare gives the last lines of the play to Gratiano "...I'll fear no other thing so sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring." And we all laugh.

Although all ends happily on stage for all except Antonio, a doubt has been sown and just as Shylock has been shown to have placed too much faith in his bond and the law and thereby been made to look ridiculous as well as suffering deep humiliation, so also lovers' oaths can be broken, if not in fact, then in imagination, with the consequences revealed in *Othello* and the *Winter's Tale*. Though very little of this can be made (or even should be made) explicit in a performance it is part of the undercurrent and is perhaps why the play is so popular and yet felt to be unsatisfactory. Perhaps Shakespeare was trying to do too many things at once or he was trying to make a play out of material which was unacceptable to his audience. I know it has taken me a long time to recognize how often Shakespeare is antagonistic to the conventional boy-girl relationship. So often in the comedies the hearts of the men are won only when the girls are disguised as men. And the hearts of the audience are won too! The covert plea for the understanding of the 'other' is one of Shakespeare's unending preoccupations until Prospero can say "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" and then find himself as lost and stranded as Antonio, left face to face, not with other actors, but with the audience and something in the face of which prayer is meaningful. It is only given dramatic form in Cordelia, who does not try to be God – as the duke does in *Measure for Measure* and is censured for his presumption.

I am being somewhat circuitous – I hope you have not lost patience – but I am trying to circle the idea of menace, as I see it for the moment in Shakespeare. Shylock is the obvious alien. Foreign in manners as in belief, and for the English even more remote for having been banned from living in England for several centuries. But there is always the added irony that the Christian religion derives from the Judaic and his morality is essentially Judaic and his Saviour was a Jew. Added to which was the awareness among such people as were aware that the Jews in Europe had contributed enormously to European learning and were in the middle ages the most educated group in the whole society because all Jewish boys had to learn to read. Abraham with his knife ready to kill Isaac was a potent bogey man, made more potent by his being at the centre of [the] Old Testament idea of the chosen people. This in itself was made more potent by the emphasis placed on biblical studies by the leaders of the Reformation who attended not only to the Old Testament but to that highly odd (in a Christian context but perfectly intelligible in a Judaic) Book of Revelation, in which the Second Coming of the Christ when the Jews had been spread throughout the world and converted. The heathen Turks, Africans and later the American Indians take their place with Shylock as obvious threats. For other reasons the Spaniards are also placed there, but more as figures of fun for immediate propaganda. Phillip II was still a very real menace in Holland and the Spanish Netherlands even after the destruction of the Armada.

But there is another threat to social well-being – the mob. The nice ordinary people. And Shakespeare has a deep distrust of them. In the Histories, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, they are always shown as fickle and dangerous and susceptible to bribes either emotional or monetary, but never open to reason. Like the Tribunes of the Roman plays, Gratiano is their representative, with the added factor that he is on the edge of the aristocratic class and accepted by them also.

Then there is the menace at the interpersonal level. The homosexual. Though this is a poor word these days. It might be better to say the homo-sentimental. All of Shakespeare's characters who fall into this group seem to be without an expressed sexual motivation, only a sentimental one. From the suffering lover of the sonnets, through Mercutio, Benvolio, Falstaff? Antonio in the *Merchant*, Antonio in *Twelfth Night*, to Horatio, Kent in *Lear*? and Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*, there seems to be [a] similar strain of manly virtue, courage, passivity and ultimate perplexity, leading to silence, quiet suffering or something like suicide. For most if not all these people Shakespeare wins the audience's affection. They are not effeminate or camp but their sentimental (and I don't mean the modern pejorative sense but where feeling is expressed in other forms than through sexual desire) attachments are strong and towards men with a very definite exclusion of women. Whatever their virtues, they are excluded from a place in the society.

And they are all treated with pathos. Now in the *Merchant* Shylock says "For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe" and then goes on to demonstrate that he does not intend to continue in this role but to move into the active role. Thereby he moves into the position of being tragic or farcical and he becomes both. Passivity cannot in the long run be taken as a joke. It may bring down contempt but the contempt rebounds, as both Jews and Indians have demonstrated. Finally it calls forth something else. Here is one more of the ironies of this play, and of the Christian/Jew opposition. Patient suffering is supposed to be the highest Christian virtue.

In the *Merchant*, Shylock eschews this mode of behaviour and Antonio assumes it. His friends talk about it and do nothing to help, needless to say. But to triumph over death by dying is not really part of the traditional tragic-heroic pattern. And such people are odd-men-out in most cultures. In this alone they are a challenge to the society, but their non-participation in the sexual customs makes them even more threatening. Though the Christian religion has as its focus and reason for existence just such a man whose sentimental relation to all people was non-sexual, who was celibate, passive and unvengeful and whose central doctrine was a love which was totally undemanding of a personal response, such a mode of life has been rejected by most Christians, who would find it just as threatening as either Jews or Romans found it 2000 years ago. For it challenges all the usual forms of authority and social contracts (bonds).

Then there is a last threat, and I suspect that this is Shakespeare's own problem – sexuality and in particular female sexuality. A complex of ideas (or fears) which can be summed up by linking Medea and Circe with Eve. Women are alien, magical, degrading and treacherous. From the Sonnets onwards this complex forms and reforms. And however truly it may be felt and admitted among men, it cannot for obvious reasons be accepted overtly in a society where women and sex are essential to the maintenance and survival of the society. This ambivalent attitude to women is very obvious here in Swaziland, where even teenagers feel free to be insulting to women, where wife beating is the accepted norm and women are in certain respects slaves. They are bought and treated as property.

Portia has the charm and some of the magic. At Belmont men are improved but it is a bit like a horse market, where stallions are assessed for the husband stakes. And Portia is relentless in getting absolutely what she wants, and on her own terms, nothing less will do. And like Shylock she takes out insurance on her marriage deal with Antonio the premium.

This does not counter your comment that there is no right side in *The Merchant of Venice* but only extends it as in the Sonnet beginning "Two loves I have of comfort and despair..." to the point where the good and bad, right and wrong are inextricably intertwined, though good and bad, right and wrong have been recognized and presented.

If you have got this far you are very patient. I don't quite know where to go from here except to think over ways of trying to achieve a balance, an over all balance like a piece of mobile sculpture in which numerous local imbalances are reconciled often at considerable remove from one another. If you feel that I am talking a lot of balls or straying too far from what has to be handled in the libretto, please say so, otherwise I shall keep on producing ideas which don't fit with your overall ideas, and you'll suddenly be short of words to work on.

Enough of that! But is there any chance of my seeing a little bit of the score (= photocopy of a page or two of Gratiano's music)?

Please give my love to Eve, how can I not remember her! You must ask her to knit you some warm socks for your approach to Shylock.

Our term ends here in a fortnight's time and I shall go to Johannesburg for Christmas – P.O. Box 4493, Johannesburg.

Early in January I'll move on to Botswana and the address will be –

Maru-a-Pula, Private Bag 45, Gaborone, Botswana, Southern Africa.

Maru-a-Pula is the name of the school and means both Clouds of Rain and Blessings. The point being that rain is so scarce in Botswana then when it comes it is a blessing indeed. Hopefully education is to be like rain. Well, we can all dream.

If you will give me precise dates a bit later on, I'll try to arrange to get a few days away during the term, and if we can't meet in Cape Town we can try Johannesburg or even Gaborone, but that is not the ideal place for a holiday although it is certainly quiet.

You sound as if you have a very busy few months. It never ceases to amaze me how you musicians can keep so much music in your heads in such beautiful order, and bring out each phrase how you want it. It always seems to me a more remarkable skill than an actor's ability to learn lines when acting in repertory. But I'm sure you will have fun with the Mozart. Slide in a cadenza from Act II of the *Merchant*.

All good wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Love, John

14. AT to J O'B

(from) Captain's Club, in flight with Quantas

(8th March 1976)

My dear John,

You have no idea how welcome your letter was. Yes, I'd love to visit you in Gaborone! My last Cape Town concert is on the 3rd of June, I could come on the 4th or 5th and stay for three days (if you can bear me for so long). Your work sounds a change for the better, you were being wasted in Swaziland! That's far worse to endure than overwork.

Regarding Gratiano, don't you think a patter aria would suit his voice and character? He is a basso buffo and speaks an infinite deal of nothing – he might as well speak it fast. The trouble is that English, unlike Italian, is full of consonants, which can trip a singer up at top speed. Leporello can deliver line after line Presto with clarity (e.g. "È confusa la mia [recte: sua] testa", etc.) but the only Mozartean example of patter in German I remember is "Einen kleinen Papageno, Papapapapapageno, Papapapapapageno", which is perfect patter but hardly articulate German. Here's a challenge to you! Can you give Gratiano lines that sound reasonably Shakespearean and yet can be sung at maximum tempo? Try singing them yourself, to whatever tune comes to your head, and see how fast you can say them.

Drop me another line at Currie Hall, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, W.A. 6009; I'll be there till mid-May. Let me know if the time of my visit suits you. It will be great to see you again!

Lots of love, André

15. AT to J O'B

(from) Sharella Motor Inn, 20, Glenmore Street, Wellington, N.Z.

(9th February 1977)

My dear John,

Could I quickly ask you a favour? I have no time for a proper letter till the tour is over, but then I'm planning to stay on for 3 weeks in New Zealand, and this is where the favour comes in. I am orchestrating the 1st act in between the concerts, but in early March I shall be free enough to go back to actual composing – and I haven't been optimistic enough to take the libretto with me. I have completed Jessica's opening arietta, so I now need Lorenzo's first appearance, Shylock's admonition to her, etc. – say up to the Masquers' chorus. Could you photostat the relevant few pages and send them to me? My address from the 25th Feb. will be the Avon Motor Lodge, Christchurch, N.Z.

I hope you are well and not too isolated. In the latter case, you are always welcome at Cumnor, Oxfordshire! You can have a bigger room there than you did at Finchden.

All love,

Yours, André

P.S. Greetings to David.

16. AT to J O'B

(from) 30, The Park, Cumnor, Oxford OX2 9QS, England

(to) Maru-A-Pula, Private Bag 0045, Gaborone, Botswana

[??] June 1977

My dear John,

The season is now over. What a joy to be able to compose again! It's only now that I've managed to start on Lorenzo's first entry (not entrance as dusk has now fallen and he's been able to creep in unnoticed and eavesdrop on Jessica's aria.) But I need your help.

The problem is that Lorenzo has too little to sing on his first appearance. A tenor good enough to do justice to the epilogue will resent being neglected for most of the opera, and it's especially important to "establish" him as soon as he's seen. I am partly doing this through orchestration: Jessica is accompanied by woodwind only, and Lorenzo is sustained first by a solo cello, then a solo viola, then two solo violins, and finally by the whole string quartet that's been thus assembled, plus a background of remaining strings... Ideally, then he'd need 3 phrases, or even 4, before Jessica can bring the woodwinds back in and join him for a short duet (though she will have an occasional ecstatic sigh on hearing his voice). Now you are a wizard at writing Shakespeare (e.g. Jessica's own aria), so could you help him out? He obviously didn't realize in Act I that Gratiano would be only a manservant, or how important Lorenzo would become later on. It's for us to rescue the Bard from his shortcomings...

Anyway, do drop me a line: I often wonder how you are and whether Botswana is suffering from the increasing tension in neighbouring countries. When do you think you could come to Europe? You'll be more welcome than I can say. Has David made it to England yet?

Despite your irrepressibly cheerful disposition, I suspect you must feel a bit lonely now and then, wishing you could see Hamlet rather than just teach it, go to an opera as well as write one! Do come then: there is plenty on. The economic difficulties have only made people the more inventive: unable to provide lavish sets, they've had to give up gimmickry and concentrate on the text – hallelujah!

And you'll adore Oxford. Do you know it? It has more to offer for its size than any other city I know, and it would take a totalitarian take-over to make me move again...

All love as ever, André

17. AT to J O'B

(from) 30, The Park, Cumnor, Oxford OX2 9QS, England

(to) Maru-A-Pula, Private Bag 0045, Gaborone, Botswana

(13th June 1978)

My dear John,

Done at last! The Guinness record (I nearly wrote "Book of Records") and the Italian Song-book are on their way to you. A rather slow way, I'm afraid: the surly girl at the post-office said airmail parcels to Botswana couldn't be registered, and I chose safety rather than speed. If you don't get them by, say, late July, write! and I've got a certificate of posting which will enable me to raise hell, if nothing else. But why can't they register airmail? Sphinx was obviously a bureaucrat.

I had to wait till today, as both records were missing; fortunately, I got just the version of Eliot you want. While waiting, I orchestrated the end of Jessica's elopement, which I had taken the liberty of changing slightly, so as to have Gratiano on stage (he's hardly the type to miss that kind of fun). So now, while Jessica and Lorenzo walk off arm in arm, he sings: "All things are with more pleasure chasèd than enjoyed", followed in canon by copycats Salerio and Solanio, and answered by the chorus:

"But lovers know it not!
For love is blind, " etc.

As they go out, following the lovers, Gratiano notices Antonio, who's staggered onto the stage looking ill (it would be particularly poignant if he had to push his way through the merry crowd). Here's more fun, of a crueller sort! So he stays and taunts the wretched man, just as the urchins will later taunt Shylock.

Do you like this arrangement?

Also, I left out the chorus accompanying Bassanio's departure: he and Antonio shake hands or, possibly, embrace in fraught silence, to instrumental music. Also, if B. is Jason, Portia is Medea! This seems a bit unfair, especially to a lady yet unseen...

All my love; I've tentatively accepted the offer of a S.A. tour to be able to see you and play in Gaborone! (I'm told all audiences are now integrated).

Ever yours, André