***Act III Scene III***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

Shylock tells the jailer to watch out for Antonio, for Antonio will try to get him to feel sorry for him. Yet Shylock reminds Antonio of all the times he has had little sympathy for Shylock, and so now he has come to collect the debt owed to him. Antonio pleads with Shylock to listen to him, but gives up, believing that Shylock hates him for giving money to those who could not repay their debts to Shylock. Solanio tells Antonio that the Duke will never allow Shylock to take such a measure against him, but Antonio believes that the Duke will uphold the law, for if he does not, Venice will suffer. Shylock hopes that Bassanio will arrive to see him repay the debt.

Sympathy for Shylock evaporates in this scene, as we see him bent solely on revenge. Shylock takes his anger to extremes by demanding the pound of flesh from Antonio. Shylock is completely blinded to forgiveness and grace by his own rage and past humiliations. The audience is also introduced to the importance of law in Venice. While Solanio sees the Duke as a good, moral man, Antonio reminds him how important it is to keep emotions and the law separate. This distinction will play an important part in later scenes.

***Summary:***

* On a street in Venice, Shylock presses the jailer to go after Antonio, calling Antonio a fool who lent out money for free. Antonio keeps trying to plead his case, but to no avail. Shylock is hell-bent on having Antonio seized. He says they've sworn an oath, and he insists on getting the bond that was sworn for.
* Shylock notes that Antonio called him a dog before he had any reason to—but now he's determined to live up to his reputation.
* Continuing on his rant, Shylock demands justice from the Duke and the jailer, despite how hesitant everyone is. Shylock leaves in a huff, repeating that he'll have his bond with no interference from the Christians.
* Solanio is understandably stressed out and declares Shylock to be an impenetrable dog. Antonio understands why Shylock has it in for him—often people who had forfeited their debts with Shylock moaned about it to Antonio, who then rescued them. Antonio thinks this undercutting is the reason Shylock hates him. (That and his cruel and unrelenting anti-Semitism, perhaps?)
* Antonio has concluded that there's nothing the Duke can do about the situation now. Venice allows foreign nationals some commercial privileges, which keeps trade alive. If the Duke were to impose on the rights of aliens for Antonio's sake, it would compromise justice, trade, and profit in the whole diverse city.
* At this point Antonio has basically given up—he's been so reduced by all this grief and loss that a pound of flesh doesn't matter to him anymore. In fact, he says, he's so wasted away that he doubts Shylock will even be able find a pound on his body to take. Resigned to his fate, he gives himself over to the jailer and hopes out loud that his beloved friend Bassanio will come see him. After that, Antonio doesn't care what happens.

***Critical Study:***

[Shylock](https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/character/shylock/) escorts the bankrupt [Antonio](https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/character/antonio/) to prison. Antonio pleads with Shylock to listen, but Shylock refuses. Remembering the many times Antonio condemned him as a dog, Shylock advises the merchant to beware of his bite. Assured that the duke will grant him justice, Shylock insists that he will have his bond and tells the jailer not to bother speaking to him of mercy. Solanio declares that Shylock is the worst of men, and Antonio reasons that the Jew hates him for bailing out many of Shylock’s debtors. Solanio attempts to comfort Antonio by suggesting that the duke will never allow such a ridiculous contract to stand, but Antonio is not convinced. Venice, Antonio claims, is a wealthy trading city with a great reputation for upholding the law, and if the duke breaks that law, Venice’s economy may suffer. As Solanio departs, Antonio prays desperately that [Bassanio](https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/character/bassanio/) will arrive to “see me pay his debt, and then I care not” (III.iii.36).

***Critical Analysis:***

In Venice, Antonio has been allowed to leave the jail, accompanied by his jailer. He hopes to speak with Shylock and plead for mercy, but Shylock refuses to listen. Five times while Antonio begs Shylock to let him speak, the moneylender repeats emphatically, "I'll have my bond!" Antonio has publicly called Shylock a "dog"; now Antonio will feel the fangs of that dog. Shylock refuses to be a "soft and dull-eyed fool" and "rent, sigh, and yield." He is absolutely certain that the Duke of Venice will see that justice is carried out according to the terms of the bargain.

Salarino tries to comfort Antonio but is unsuccessful. Antonio knows that one of the chief reasons why Shylock hates him so much is that Antonio often saved people who were in debt to Shylock by paying their debts for them. Thus he prevented Shylock from foreclosing and claiming their collateral. He also knows that the Duke of Venice must judge according to the letter of the law. Venice is an international trade center; money lending is a major business and cannot be treated lightly. Antonio must pay his debt according to his contract. He knows that Shylock seeks his life, and the law cannot save him. He is prepared to die if only Bassanio will "come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not."

In this short scene, the action of the bond plot quickens toward its climax at the beginning of Act IV. Here, Shylock's language indicates his obsession with a single idea through the repetition of a single word. The word is "bond," repeated twice at the opening of his speech, recurring again at lines 12 and 13, and a final time as Shylock makes his exit, deaf to any more pleading: "I will have my bond."

In stark contrast to Shylock's fiery outbursts is Antonio's quiet, almost fatalistic acceptance of his position. He sees that prayers are useless; later, he conceives of himself as being a "tainted wether of the flock." The phrase "He seeks my life" is delivered with the hopeless finality of one already on the way to execution. Such passive acceptance suggests that he is doomed and increases our dramatic anticipation of what is to come. Furthermore, Antonio himself points out that the Venetian state cannot save him; their commercial existence depends upon the rigorous enforcement of the law. Yet, Shakespeare has embedded in our minds how miserly Shylock is; now he teases us and keeps us in suspense: Will Portia's money be enough to satisfy Shylock and make him give up his obsession with the "bond" of a pound of flesh?

***Significance:***

In Venice, Antonio has been allowed to leave the jail, accompanied by his jailer. He hopes to speak with Shylock and plead for mercy, but Shylock refuses to listen. Five times while Antonio begs Shylock to let him speak, the moneylender repeats emphatically, "I'll have my bond!" Antonio has publicly called Shylock a "dog"; now Antonio will feel the fangs of that dog. Shylock refuses to be a "soft and dull-eyed fool" and "rent, sigh, and yield." He is absolutely certain that the Duke of Venice will see that justice is carried out according to the terms of the bargain.

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***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

Back in Venice, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) escorts [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) to prison, accompanied by a jailer and [Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters). Shylock tauntingly tells the jailer not to have any mercy on Antonio, who is a fool who "lent out money gratis." Antonio begs Shylock for mercy, but Shylock cuts him off: "thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause, / but since I am a dog beware my fangs" (3.3.6–7).

***Analysis Part 1:***

Shylock here admits that he is acting like an animal. But he insists that he is doing so because he has been forced into it by the Christian's own harsh and unfair treatment of him. They force him to act like a dog, then complain when he bites.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) gives up on asking for mercy. He knows that [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) wants revenge on him because he has paid off the debts of so many people who owed Shylock.

***Analysis Part 2:***

By paying off the debts of others, Antonio stopped Shylock from collecting interest. He thinks Shylock's anger stems only from monetary loss.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) assures [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) that the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) won't allow Shylock's demand to be carried out. Antonio disagrees: "The Duke cannot deny the course of law," (3.3.26) or else he will discredit the justice of the state of Venice. Such an action, in turn would offend the many diverse "strangers" (3.3.27) upon whom the commerce of the city depends.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Antonio recognizes that Shylock has the law on his side. Notice that while Venetian Christians look down on foreigners, their city's wealth also relies on the trade of those "strangers," so the law must take precedence over the Venetian's prejudices.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) jokes that he has grown so thin in his stress and grief that it will hardly be possible to cut a pound of flesh from him. Then, he urges the jailer on. If [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) comes to see him pay his debt, Antonio says, he does not care whether he dies or not.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Antonio's resignation to his fate, and even his thinness, makes him a Christ figure. Christ also went willingly, gently, to his death on the cross.