***The Merchant of Venice***

***Act 1 Scene 3***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Summary:***

Shylock and Bassanio are working out the details of the loan. Shylock, the Jewish moneylender, tells Bassanio that Antonio must be a very good man to guarantee such a loan while his ships are all sailing. After all, who knows what will happen to them. Shylock asks to speak with Antonio, and Bassanio asks him to dine with them, but Shylock declines, as there will be pork at the table. As Antonio walks up, Shylock tells himself how much he hates Christian men like Antonio, whose lending out money generously has ruined interest rates in Venice.

Shylock tells the men that he will not charge any interest, though Antonio tells him in this one instance he is willing to bend his own rules against paying interest, for Bassanio. Instead, Shylock tells Antonio, that he wants a pound of flesh if the debt cannot be repaid. Despite Bassanio's protests, Antonio agrees, for he believes he will earn three times what he owes from his investments. Bassanio expresses his concerns when a villain like Shylock acts nicely.

***Analysis:***

As a stark contrast to the fun-loving and caring Christian men we have seen so far the more harsh and disliked character of Shylock is introduced. It was not uncommon in Shakespeare's time to vilify Jews in theatrical presentations, yet Shylock is not a fully evil character. Shylock's malice is brought on by both his nature and his treatment by the Christians. The audience sees a major difference in the way Antonio treats Shylock versus Bassanio in the same scene.

It is seen that, though Shylock is jaded and seeks revenge, he is neither fully evil nor ignorant of Christian values. Shylock readily quotes the New Testament to the Christians, especially when they ask him to dine with them, knowing that he will not eat pork (Jewish custom forbids eating anything from a pig). However, instead of showing Shylock mercy, the Christian men compare him to the Devil, who is adept at quoting and twisting scripture. Shakespeare uses these scenes to exhibit a hypocrisy of many Christians in Venice.

***Detailed Summary:***

Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, agrees to loan Bassanio three thousand ducats for a term of three months. Bassanio assures Shylock that Antonio will guarantee the loan, but Shylock is doubtful because Antonio’s wealth is currently invested in business ventures that may fail. In the end, however, Shylock decides that Antonio’s guarantee of the loan will be sufficient assurance, and asks to speak with him. When Antonio arrives, Shylock, in an aside, confesses his hatred for the man. Antonio, Shylock says, is a Christian who lends money without interest, which makes more difficult the practice of usury, in which money is lent out at exorbitant interest rates. Shylock is also incensed by Antonio’s frequent public denunciations of Shylock. Antonio makes it clear to Shylock that he is not in the habit of borrowing or lending money, but has decided to make an exception on behalf of his friend Bassanio. Their conversation leads Antonio to chastise the business of usury, which Shylock defends as a way to thrive.

As he calculates the interest on Bassanio’s loan, Shylock remembers the many times that Antonio has cursed him, calling him a “misbeliever, cut-throat, dog / And spit upon [his] Jewish gaberdine” (I.iii.107–108). Antonio responds that he is likely to do so again, and insists that Shylock lend him the money as an enemy. Such an arrangement, Antonio claims, will make it easier for Shylock to exact a harsh penalty if the loan is not repaid. Assuring Antonio that he means to be friends, Shylock offers to make the loan without interest. Instead, he suggests, seemingly in jest, that Antonio forfeit a pound of his own flesh should the loan not be repaid in due time. Bassanio warns Antonio against entering such an agreement, but Antonio assures him that he will have no trouble repaying the debt, as his ships will soon bring him wealth that far exceeds the value of the loan. Shylock attempts to dismiss Bassanio’s suspicions, asking what profit he stands to make by procuring a pound of Antonio’s flesh. As Shylock heads off to the notary’s office to sign the bond, Antonio remarks on Shylock’s newfound generosity: “The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind” (I.iii.174). Bassanio remains suspicious of the arrangement, but Antonio reminds him that his ships will arrive within the next two months.

***Detailed Analysis:***

Shylock is an arresting presence on the stage, and although Antonio may be the character for whom the play is named, it is Shylock who has come to dominate the imaginations of critics and audiences alike. Shylock’s physical presence in the play is actually not so large, as he speaks fewer lines than other characters and does not even appear in the play’s final act. However, in many ways, the play belongs to Shylock. The use of a Jew as the central villain was not unknown to Renaissance comedy, as evidenced by The Jew of Malta, a wildly popular play by Shakespeare’s contemporary Christopher Marlowe, which revolves around a malevolent, bloodthirsty Jewish character named Barabas. Shylock, however, differs in that his malice seems to stem, at least in part, from the unkindness of his Christian colleagues. Exactly how to read Shylock has been a matter of some debate, and even the most persuasive scholars would be hard-pressed to call him a flattering portrait of a Jew. One could certainly argue, however, that Shylock receives far less of a stock portrayal than what was common in Shakespeare’s time, and that, given the constant degradation he endures, we can even feel something akin to sympathy for him.

At the heart of any sympathy we might feel for Shylock lies the fact that the bonhomie and good nature that so mark Antonio’s appearance with Bassanio disappear, and his treatment of Shylock is unexpectedly harsh and brutal. Even though Bassanio and Antonio require a favor from Shylock, Antonio’s is still a tone of imperious command, and his past, present, and future attitude toward Shylock is one of exceptional contempt. Shylock vividly illustrates the depth of this contempt, wondering aloud why he should lend Antonio money when Antonio has voided his “rheum,” or spit, on Shylock’s beard, and he kicked Shylock as he would a stray dog (I.iii.113–114). The repeated mention of spittle here sharply differentiates Antonio’s Venice, where even shipwrecks seem like spice-laden dreams, from Shylock’s, where the city is a place of blows, kicks, and bodily functions. Without these details, Antonio’s haughty attitude toward Shylock could easily be forgiven, but the very visceral details of spit and kicks show a violent, less romantic side to Antonio, and our sympathies for him cannot help but lessen.

Shylock is noticeably different from Shakespeare’s other great villains, such as Richard III or Iago, in several ways. In the first place, these other villains see themselves as evil, and while they may try to justify their own villainy, they also revel in it, making asides to the audience and self-consciously comparing themselves to the Vice character of medieval morality plays. Marlowe’s Jew, Barabas, is a similarly self-conscious villain. Though the Christian characters of The Merchant of Venice may view Jews as evil, Shylock does not see himself in that way. His views of himself and others are rational, articulate, and consistent. Also, Shakespeare’s other villains are generally more deceitful, passing themselves off as loving and virtuous Christians while plotting malevolently against those around them. Shylock, on the other hand, is an outcast even before the play begins, vilified and spat upon by the Christian characters. Shylock’s actions are relatively open, although the other characters misunderstand his intentions because they do not understand him.

Indeed, Shylock understands the Christians and their culture much better than they understand him. The Christian characters only interact with Shylock within a framework of finance and law—he is not part of the friendship network portrayed in Act I, scene i. Though Bassanio asks him to dine with them, Shylock says in an aside that he will not break bread with Christians, nor will he forgive Antonio, thereby signaling his rejection of one of the fundamental Christian values, forgiveness. Shylock is able to cite the New Testament as readily as Jewish scripture, as he shows in his remark about the pig being the animal into which Christ drove the devil. Antonio notes Shylock’s facility with the Bible, but he uses this ability to compare Shylock to the devil, who, proverbially, is also adept at quoting scripture. As we see more of Shylock, he does not become a hero or a fully sympathetic character, but he is an unsettling figure insofar as he exposes the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the Christian characters. Shylock never quite fits their descriptions or expectations of him. Most significantly, they think he is motivated solely by money, when in fact his resentment against Antonio and the other Christians outweighs his desire for monetary gain.

***Critical Study:***

Bassanio seeks out Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan of three thousand ducats on the strength of Antonio's credit. Shylock is hesitant about lending Bassanio the money. He knows for a fact that Antonio is a rich man, but he also knows that all of Antonio's money is invested in his merchant fleet. At the present time, Antonio's ships are bound for distant places, and therefore vulnerable to many perils at sea. Yet he says finally, "I think I may take his bond." He refuses Bassanio's invitation to dinner, however; he will do business with Christians, but it is against his principles to eat with them.

When Antonio suddenly appears, Shylock (in an aside) expresses contempt for him, saying that he hates Antonio because he is a Christian, but more important, he hates Antonio because Antonio lends money to people without charging interest; moreover, Antonio publicly condemns Shylock for charging excessive interest in his moneylending business. Finally, though, Shylock agrees to lend Bassanio the three thousand ducats. Antonio then says that he — as a rule — never lends nor borrows money by taking or giving interest. Yet because of his friend Bassanio's pressing need, Antonio is willing to break this rule. The term of the loan will be for three months, and Antonio will give his bond as security.

While Bassanio and Antonio are waiting to learn the rate of interest which Shylock will charge for the loan, Shylock digresses. He tells them about the biblical story of how Jacob increased his herd of sheep. He calculates the interest which he will charge and announces: "Three months from twelve; then, let me see; the rate." Shylock then accuses Antonio of having repeatedly spit upon him and called him a dog. And now Antonio and Bassanio come asking him for money. Yet they pride themselves that Antonio is a virtuous man because he lends money to friends, with no interest involved. Is this loan, Shylock inquires, a loan to be arranged among "friends"? On the contrary; this is not to be regarded as a loan between friends, Antonio asserts. In fact, Antonio says, Shylock may regard it as a loan to an enemy if he wishes. Then, surprisingly, Shylock says that he wants Antonio's friendship, and to prove it, he will advance the loan without charging a penny of interest. But in order to make this transaction "a merry sport," Shylock wants a penalty clause providing that if Antonio fails to repay the loan within the specified time, Shylock will have the right to cut a "pound of flesh" from any part of Antonio's body. Bassanio objects to his friend's placing himself in such danger for his sake, but Antonio assures him that long before the loan is due that some of his ships will return from abroad and that he will be able to repay the loan three times over. Shylock insists, at this point, that the penalty is merely a jest. He could gain nothing by exacting the forfeit of a pound of human flesh, which is not even as valuable as mutton or beef. The contract is agreed to, and despite Bassanio's misgivings, Antonio consents to Shylock's terms.

This scene has two important functions. First, it completes the exposition of the two major plot lines of the play: Antonio agrees to Shylock's bond — three thousand ducats for a pound of flesh; and second, and more important dramatically, this scene introduces Shylock himself. In this scene, Shakespeare makes it clear at once why Shylock is the most powerful dramatic figure in the play and why so many great actors have regarded this part as one of the most rewarding roles in all Shakespearean dramas.

Shylock enters first; Bassanio is following him, trying to get an answer to his request for a loan. Shylock's repetitions ("Well . . . three months . . . well") evade a direct answer to Bassanio's pleas, driving Bassanio to his desperately impatient triple questioning in lines 7 and 8; the effect here is similar to an impatient, pleading child badgering an adult. Throughout the whole scene, both Bassanio and Antonio often seem naive in contrast to Shylock. Shylock has something they want — money — and both Antonio and Bassanio think that they should get the loan of the money, but neither one of them really understands Shylock's nature.

In reply to Bassanio's demand for a direct answer, Shylock still avoids answering straightforwardly. Shylock knows what he is doing, and he uses the time to elaborate on his meaning of "good" when applied to Antonio. Only after sufficient "haggling" does he finally reveal his intentions: "I think I may take his bond." At Antonio's entrance, Shylock is given a lengthy aside in which he addresses himself directly to the audience. Shakespeare often uses the devices of asides and soliloquies to allow his heroes and, in this case, his "villain," a chance to immediately make clear his intentions and motivations to the audience — as Shylock does here.

Shylock's declaration of his hatred for Antonio immediately intensifies the drama of the scene; the audience now waits to see in what way he will be able to catch Antonio "upon the hip" and "feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him." Then Shylock is called back from the front of the stage by Bassanio, and he pretends to notice Antonio for the first time. Their greeting has ironic overtones for the audience, which has just heard Shylock's opinion of Antonio. There then follows a debate between Antonio and Shylock on the subject of usury, or the taking of interest on a loan — permissible for Shylock but not for Antonio, according to Antonio's moral code.

In making Shylock avoid committing himself immediately to lending Antonio the money, Shakespeare is building a dramatic crisis. For example, Antonio's mounting impatience leads to increased arrogance; he compares the moneylender to the "apple rotten at the heart." Still, however, Shylock does not respond; he pretends to muse on the details of the loan, producing from Antonio the curt and insolent remark, "Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?" Only then does Shylock begin to answer directly, and he does so with calculated calm. "Signior Antonio," he says, "many a time and oft / In the Rialto you have rated me." His words are controlled but carry a cold menace that silences Antonio at once. At the phrase "You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog," Shylock reveals to us that Antonio did "void your rheum upon my beard / And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur / Over your threshold!" This is a vivid dramatic change, climaxing in his taunting lines: "Hath a dog money? Is it possible / A cur can lend three thousand ducats?"

In Shylock's earlier aside ("I'll hate him [Antonio] for he is a Christian"), the audience was inclined to pigeonhole Shylock as the "villain" of this drama; anyone who hates a man simply because he is a Christian must logically be a villain. Yet now, in this speech, there is much more depth and complexity; we are given a most revealing glimpse of a man who has been a victim, whose imposition of suffering on others is directly related to his own suffering. Shakespeare is manipulating us emotionally; we have to reconsider Shylock's character.

After Shylock regains control of himself and skillfully leads Antonio toward the sealing of the bond, he says that he "would like to be friends" with Antonio. This gives him the excuse to make light of the bond, but a bond sealed "in merry sport" — a bond where a pound of flesh can "be cut off and taken / In what part of your body pleaseth me." Here, Shakespeare has the difficult problem of making us believe that Antonio is actually innocent enough to accept such a condition; after all, Antonio is probably fifty years old and a wealthy merchant; he is no schoolboy, and this "merry sport" of a bond is absurd. Clearly, to us, Shylock's interest is not only in money in this case, but Antonio does not realize this, nor does he realize or fully understand the depth of Shylock's hatred of him. He is therefore unable to be persuaded that this bond is dangerous. To him, the bond is merely a "merry bond." And thus Shylock is able to rhetorically ask Bassanio: "Pray you tell me this: / If he should break his day, what should I gain / By the exaction of the forfeiture?"

Shakespeare has set up a situation in which a man has put his life in the hands of a moral enemy and the outcome depends on fortune — that is, whether or not Antonio's merchant ships survive pirates and the high seas. Antonio and Shylock are diametrical opposites. Shylock is cunning, cautious, and crafty; he belongs to a race which has been persecuted since its beginnings. As a Christian, Antonio is easy-going, trusting, slightly melancholy, romantic, and naive. Shylock trusts only in the tangible — that is, in the bond. Antonio trusts in the intangible — that is, in luck. Here, Shylock seems almost paranoid and vengeful, but on the other hand, Antonio seems ignorantly over-confident — rather stupid because he is so lacking in common sense.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) negotiates with [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock), a Jewish moneylender, to borrow 3,000 ducats for three months in [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio)'s name. Shylock acknowledges Antonio has sufficient fortune but worries because he has heard much of Antonio's fortune is currently at sea in ships bound for Tripoli and Libya as well as for the Indies, Mexico, and England. He speculates on the hazards of weather and pirates and wonders if Antonio will be able to repay him. Bassanio invites Shylock to join him and Antonio for dinner so Shylock can speak with Antonio directly, but Shylock refuses the invitation because he follows different customs. Just then Antonio arrives, and Shylock speaks in an aside of his hatred for Antonio and how he would like to get revenge on him. However, Shylock treats Antonio with businesslike politeness until he enumerates the wrongs Antonio has done to him in the past: spitting on his clothing, calling him a dog, and criticizing his business practices in public. Antonio becomes defensive and says he is likely to do so again, but Shylock claims he wants to forgive and forget the past. He agrees to lend Antonio the money free of interest, asking Antonio to promise a pound of his own flesh to secure the bond as "a merry sport." Antonio agrees to these terms even though Bassanio protests.

[Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s doubts about [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio)'s fortunes and his hesitation to extend Antonio credit show his reluctance to help Antonio and [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) from the start of their negotiation. The aside in which he speaks of his hatred of Antonio and his desire for revenge on him, in contrast with his outward proclamations of friendship, or forgiving and forgetting, make Shylock appear scheming and untrustworthy. However, Shylock's description of his past interactions with Antonio, which Antonio affirms as true with his threat of continued mistreatment toward Shylock, also paint Antonio as untrustworthy where Shylock is concerned. Until Antonio actually appears in the scene, Shylock focuses only on the business at hand. He worries about Antonio's ability to repay him and expresses legitimate concerns about Antonio's business decisions. He refuses Bassanio's dinner invitation out of fidelity to his religious customs and a desire to keep the transaction professional. In [Act 1, Scene 1](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-1-scene-1-summary/) the audience experienced Antonio as a caring, generous friend. It is not until Antonio and Shylock meet that hostility emerges in both characters; these two men clearly bring out the worst in one another. Shylock's scheming against Antonio becomes obvious with his suggestion of the "pound of flesh" as collateral for the loan, because he presents this request as if it were a joke, calling it "a merry sport." Only Bassanio picks up on the threat this bond actually poses, as Antonio either accepts Shylock's suggestion as a joke or does not doubt at all he will be able to repay the loan. While Bassanio verbally protests Antonio's agreement to this arrangement, it is notable that he does not walk away from the proceedings and accepts the money once it has been borrowed.

This is the end of Act 1, which has set up the central conflict of the plot—the deadly agreement between Shylock and Antonio, which is motivated by Bassanio's determination to win [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) and Antonio's devotion to Bassanio. This conflict can also be seen as allegorical. An allegory is a story in which the characters stand for abstract concepts and which often imparts a moral. Here Shylock and Antonio may be seen as representing Judaism and Christianity. Thus, theirs is the conflict between the Old Testament and the New Testament approach to life. Shylock brings up this contrast in his aside to the audience when Antonio arrives in this scene. He says Antonio looks like a "fawning publican" and refers to the Jews as "our sacred nation." The allusion to a publican, or tax collector, is actually a jab at Shylock, since it likens him to the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10), in which the prideful Pharisee glories in his superiority to a humble publican. (Of course, aside from Shylock's sense of moral superiority, it's not a completely appropriate likeness since Antonio is far from humble where Jews—especially Shylock—are concerned.) While Shylock embraces Old Testament laws regarding such things as diet, women's social roles, and crime and punishment, Antonio—at least superficially—epitomizes New Testament values such as charity, turning the other cheek, and loving others as oneself. For example, his love of Bassanio as well as his interest-free loans to Bassanio and others can be viewed as the selfless love a true Christian has for his fellow man. This also explains his easy willingness to give his own flesh and blood as collateral to secure Bassanio's happiness.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Back in Venice, Bassanio is trying to convince [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock), a Jewish moneylender, to lend him 3,000 ducats for three months, with [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) bound to repay the debt. Frustrated by Shylock's stalling, Bassanio demands an answer. Shylock concedes that Antonio is a "good man" (1.3.16)—that is, Shylock believes Antonio will be good for the money that Bassanio wants to borrow. Therefore, after a little more waffling, he accepts the terms that Bassanio has proposed.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Even in this brief exchange, Shylock shows that he interprets the world through a different framework than Bassanio: he understands "good" as meaning "having enough money" whereas Bassanio, in theory, values other "good" qualities in his old friend. (Though Bassanio also, clearly, appreciates Antonio's money.)

***Summary Part 2:***

[Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) then asks whether he can speak with [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) himself. [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) invites Shylock to dine with them both that night, but Shylock declines. Although he will do business with Christians, he explains, it would go against his religious principles to eat or drink or pray with them.

***Analysis Part 2:***

By distinguishing between business activities and his private life, and by refusing Bassanio's offer to share a meal, Shylock shows that he has religious differences that set him apart from the Christian Venetians.

***Summary Part 3:***

By coincidence, at this moment, [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) appears. Although [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) notices Antonio at once, at first he ignores him, remarking privately that he harbors an "ancient grudge" (1.3.47) towards the "Christian" (1.3.42). Shylock explains to the audience that he hates Antonio because he "lends out money gratis" (1.3.44), or free of interest, thereby bringing down interest rates for professional moneylenders such as himself (who are almost all Jews). More importantly, Antonio has repeatedly insulted the Jewish people in general and Shylock in particular. Shylock is determined to get revenge on Antonio not only for himself, but also for his "tribe" (1.3.51).

***Analysis Part 3:***

Shylock reveals his prejudice against Christians and explains the way in which he has experienced anti-Semitic prejudice himself. Notably, both groups' ideas of the other revolve around ideas of commerce: the Christians believe it is wrong to practice usury (lending money for interest), whereas the Jews—who were forbidden by law from engaging in most other professions—often resorted to usury as a way to make a living. Being treated badly has given Shylock a desire for revenge.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) approaches [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock), saying that he ordinarily would not take part in a transaction involving interest but that, this one time, he will break his personal principle in order to help his friend. Shylock agrees to lend [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) the money.

***Analysis Part 4:***

After stating his "Christian" business principles (and denigrating the Jews' principles), Antonio publicly declares that there are no limits to what he will do for Bassanio.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) then defends his practice of charging interest by citing the Biblical story of Jacob. When Jacob was working as a shepherd for his uncle Laban, Shylock reminds [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio), he found a clever way to earn interest for his efforts. He cut a deal with Laban in which he got to keep any sheep that were born with a "streaked" color. Then he employed a magic trick to get all the sheep to breed streaked lambs, which he was, by contract, entitled to keep for himself. Shylock defends this kind of behavior, similar to his own, as representing "thrift" (1.3.90) rather than theft.

***Analysis part 5:***

Citing the Book of Genesis, Shylock shows how different interpretations are the basis of his religious and personal differences with the Christians. The Christians believe that usury is immoral because it is unnatural to breed money from money. But Shylock interprets the Bible to say that charging interest is no different than Jacob's breeding of animals, which Christian law would permit as totally natural.

***Summary Part 6:***

Outraged that [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) would cite the Bible in order to defend what Venetian Christians consider to be the sin of usury, [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) insults Shylock. Shylock, in turn, cites Antonio's previous mistreatment of him: Antonio has publicly abused him many times and even spat upon his clothing. Why, Shylock asks, should he lend to Antonio as freely as he would to a relative or friend? Enraged, Antonio begins to insult Shylock again. There is no need to pretend to be friends, he says: lend money to him as to an enemy.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Shylock reveals the years of abuse he has received from Antonio and other Venetian Christians as the source of his desire for revenge. By noting that Antonio is not his friend, he shows that this abuse has made it clear to him that he is an outsider to the polite society of Venetian friends on display in 1.1. Antonio, for his part, openly declares Shylock to be an enemy.

***Summary Part 7:***

Teasing [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) for getting so worked up, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) then goes on to propose an unusual compromise. He says that, this time, he will not charge interest on his loan. However, if Antonio defaults on the loan and is unable to pay, Shylock will be entitled to cut one pound of Antonio's flesh from any part of Antonio's body that Shylock chooses.

***Analysis Part 7:***

The contract Shylock proposes is hard for the Christians, and a modern audience or reader, to understand. By trading in flesh, rather than making money "breed" by usury, Shylock is actually adopting the Christians' stated business principles but directing them toward a monstrous end, which mocks those Christian principles in turn.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) agrees, despite [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio)'s nervousness about binding his friend to such a potentially dangerous contract. Talking to himself, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) gleefully hints at the fact that he has achieved the first step in his still-mysterious plan for revenge. But Antonio remains unconcerned: he is sure his ships will return, with three times 3000 ducats, at least one month before Shylock's deadline.

***Analysis Part 8:***

For the first time, Bassanio shows some scruples about putting his greed before his friend—who, by agreeing to put a price on his pound of flesh (and his life) has become like an animal headed to slaughter. Antonio will not be held back in his generosity, and by signing the contract agrees to be bound by law. So Shylock's revenge plot starts moving into action.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation1:***

SHYLOCK  
Why, look you, how you storm!  
I would be friends with you, and have your love,  
Forget the shames that you have stain'd me with,  
Supply your present wants, and take no doit  
Of usance for my moneys, and you'll not hear me.  
This is kind I offer. (1.3.18)

***Explanation 1:***

Shylock's offer seems too generous not to come with a catch. Still, perhaps he's trying to be the bigger man of the two. He might be offering up his friendship, and seeking Antonio's, because he sees these unusual circumstances as a chance for the two to break their cultural isolation from each other.

***Quotation 2:***

SHYLOCK  
I will buy with  
you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so  
following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray  
with you. (1.3.9)

***Explanation 2:***

Shylock is isolated from Christian society. He can engage with Christians in business dealings, and so he has a livelihood, but it's clear from this passage that he keeps his distance socially. He's a Jew in a Christian country, which explains the animosity we see from and toward him.

***Quotation 3:***

ANTONIO  
I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee, too.  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend? (1.3.140-144)

***Explanation 3:***

Antonio will never be friends with Shylock because 1) Shylock is a Jew and 2) Shylock charges interest on his loans, which Antonio thinks is wrong. Check out the themes of ["Race"](https://www.shmoop.com/merchant-of-venice/race-theme.html) and ["Wealth"](https://www.shmoop.com/merchant-of-venice/wealth-theme.html) for more thoughts on all this.

***Quotation 4:***

BASSANIO.  
You shall not seal to such a bond for me!  
I'll rather dwell in my necessity. (1.3.166-167)

***Explanation 4:***

Bassanio protests against Antonio's offer to put up a pound of flesh to secure his loan with Shylock, but he goes ahead and lets his friend take the risk anyway.

***Quotation 5:***

SHYLOCK  
I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls 'interest.' Cursèd be my tribe  
If I forgive him! (1.3.42-52)

***Explanation 5:***

Here, Shylock says he hates Antonio because the guy is 1) a Christian and 2) lends out money free of interest, which has a negative impact on Shylock's money-lending biz. As we know, one of the biggest bones of contention between Christians and Jews in this play is the practice of usury (lending out money and charging interest). The Christian characters think it's wrong to charge interest and make money off of loans, which is a reflection of 16th-century English attitudes about usury.

The Church believed that interest should never be charged when one Christian loaned money to another Christian. This idea comes from Deuteronomy 23:19-23: "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother, interest on money, interest on victuals, interest on anything that is lent for interest. To a foreigner, you may lend upon interest, but to your brother, you shall not lend upon interest." Christians in England were allowed, however, to borrow money (with interest) from foreigners. Since Jews were classified as "foreigners" in England, they were encouraged to set up banks when they arrived in England.

***Quotation 6:***

SHYLOCK  
Antonio is a good man.  
BASSANIO  
Have you heard any imputation to the  
   contrary?  
SHYLOCK  
Ho, no, no, no, no! My meaning in saying he  
is a good man is to have you understand me that he  
is sufficient. (1.3.12-17)

***Explanation 6:***

Shylock reveals his own prejudices about money here. When he talks about people's "goodness," he's not evaluating morality or character, just whether they're good for their borrowed money

***Quotation 7:***

If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend? (1.3.142-144)

***Explanation 7:***

Antonio is willing to borrow money from Shylock but insists that charging interest is wrong. (This is why he goes out of his way to put Shylock out of business by lending money "gratis.") What's interesting about this passage is the way Antonio talks about money as though it were capable of "breed[ing]"—as if it were a living being.

***Quotation 8:***

SHYLOCK [aside]   
How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls "interest." Cursed be my tribe  
If I forgive him! (1.3.41-52)

***Explanation 8:***

There's no love lost between Shylock and Antonio. Shylock insists that he hates Antonio because he's a "Christian" and because he undermines his money-lending business and talks smack about him at the Rialto (the merchant's exchange in Venice). We also learn that Antonio hates Shylock's "sacred nation," and we'll soon learn just how much of an anti-Semite Antonio is.

***Quotation 9:***

SHYLOCK  
You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,  
And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine,  
[...]  
'Fair sir, you spet on me on Wednesday  
   last,  
You spurned me such a day; another time  
You called me dog; and for these courtesies  
I'll lend you thus much moneys'?  
ANTONIO  
I am as like to call thee so again,

To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. (1.3.121-122; 135-141)

***Explanation 9:***

When Shylock points out that Antonio has treated him like garbage, Antonio is unapologetic and insists that his racist behavior will never change, not even if Shylock lends him money. When we read passages like this, we wonder whether Antonio's abuse of Shylock is at least partially to blame for our "villain's" treacherous behavior later in the play.

***Quotation 10:***

SHYLOCK  
This kindness will I show.  
Go with me to a notary, seal me there  
Your single bond; and in a merry sport,  
If you repay me not on such a day,  
In such a place, such sum or sums as are  
Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit  
Be nominated for an equal pound  
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken  
In what part of your body pleaseth me.  
ANTONIO  
Content, in faith. I'll seal to such a bond,  
And say there is much kindness in the Jew. (1.3.155-165)

***Explanation 10:***

Shylock's business proposition is associated with a racist stereotype. When he suggests that a pound of Antonio's "fair flesh" should serve as a bond for the loan, Shakespeare's 16th-century audience would have been reminded of the (completely false) stories about murderous Jews who supposedly sought Christian blood for use in religious rituals.

***Quotation 11:***

BASSANIO  
If it please you to dine with us.  
SHYLOCK  
Yes, to smell pork! To eat of the habitation  
which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the  
devil into!  I will buy with you, sell with you, talk  
with you, walk with you, and so following; but I  
will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with  
you. (1.3.132-138)

***Explanation 11:***

Here we receive a lesson in how <em>not</em> to turn down a multi-faith dinner invitation. Shylock reveals here that he can be just as bigoted as Antonio when he refuses to eat, drink, or pray with men who don't share his religious identity.

***Quotation 12:***

ANTONIO  
Hie thee, gentle Jew.  
The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind. (1.3.191-192)

***Explanation 12:***

Antonio's sarcasm is pretty blatant here—he cannot fathom the possibility that Shylock the Jew is just being "kind." We also notice Antonio's use of the word "gentle," a term that shows up quite a bit in this play.  For Antonio and many of the other characters, "gentle" means a few things: 1) considerate behavior, 2) aristocratic heritage, and 3) gentile (Christian).  In other words, Antonio is saying that Shylock will never be "gentle" (considerate or upper class) because he's *not* a Christian.

***Quotation 13:***

BASSANIO  
For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.  
SHYLOCK  
Antonio shall become bound, well. (1.3.2)

***Explanation 13:***

It seems Bassanio doesn't grasp the gravity of his choice to offer up Antonio as collateral for his debt, especially if Shylock is out for blood from the very beginning.

***Quotation 14:***

SHYLOCK  
Signior Antonio, many a time and oft  
In the Rialto you have rated me  
About my moneys and my usances.  
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug  
(For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe).  
You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,  
And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine,  
And all for use of that which is mine own.  
Well then, it now appears you need my help.  
Go to, then. You come to me, and you say  
"Shylock, we would have moneys"—you say so,  
You that did void your rheum upon my beard,  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur  
Over your threshold. Moneys is your suit.  
What should I say to you? Should I not say  
"Hath a dog money? Is it possible  
A cur can lend three thousand ducats?" Or  
Shall I bend low and, in a bondman's key,  
With bated breath and whisp'ring humbleness,  
Say this:  
"Fair sir, you spet on me on Wednesday  
   last;  
You spurned me such a day; another time  
You call'd me 'dog'; and for these courtesies  
I'll lend you thus much moneys"? (1.3.116-139)

***Explanation 14:***

Shylock makes the reasonable point that it would be questionable if he were simply to repay Antonio's injustices against him with kindness. This would be merciful, but Antonio doesn't ask him for mercy, nor does Shylock seem too keen to give it. Their hatred of each other may have been justified, but when Antonio comes to seek help from Shylock, the tables are turned. Shylock can rightfully demand an apology, or at least some recognition of the injustice against him.

***Quotation 15:***

SHYLOCK  
Pray you, tell me this:  
If he should break his day, what should I gain  
By the exaction of the forfeiture?  
A pound of man's flesh taken from a man  
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,  
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. I say,  
To buy his favor, I extend this friendship.  
If he will take it, so. If not, adieu;  
And, for my love I pray you wrong me not. (1.3.174-182)

***Explanation 15:***

We've got to wonder why Shylock actually does want Antonio's flesh. It's suspicious that he had the pound-of-flesh solution in mind, and even more suspicious that he defends it so glibly as no big deal. Maybe Shylock was never kidding about the pound-of-flesh thing, and it was all premeditated.

***Quotation 16:***

ANTONIO  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend?  
But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face  
Exact the penalty. (1.3.142-147)

***Explanation 16:***

Antonio is really asking for it here. He says that because he's not coming to ask for money out of friendship, and this is just business, Shylock has the right to exact a penalty should Antonio fail his bond. While Shylock's seeking a pound of flesh seems rather extreme, it can be linked back to Antonio's extravagant and unapologetic manner of asking for the money in the first place.