***The Merchant of Venice***

***Act 2 Scene 3***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Summary:***

* At Shylock's house, Jessica, who is his rebellious daughter, laments Lancelot's impending departure. Living in Shylock's house is apparently miserable, and Lancelot was always a good distraction from the surrounding misery. Giving him a gold coin, she instructs Lancelot to take a letter to Lorenzo, who should be at Bassanio's house for dinner.
* Lancelot, all tears, calls Jessica a "sweet Jew" and says goodbye.
* Despite being a rebellious daughter, Jessica at least feels guilty about the fact that she is ashamed of being Shylock's daughter.
* Still, Jessica declares that, even though she shares her father's blood, she's nothing like him. Jessica hopes to put an end to all her troubles by becoming Lorenzo's wife and converting to Christianity.

***Brief Summary:***

Shylock’s daughter Jessica bids good-bye to Launcelot. She tells him that his presence made life with her father more bearable. Jessica gives Launcelot a letter to carry to Bassanio’s friend Lorenzo, and Launcelot leaves, almost too tearful to say good-bye. Jessica, left alone, confesses that although she feels guilty for being ashamed of her father, she is only his daughter by blood, and not by actions. Still, she hopes to escape her damning relationship to Shylock by marrying Lorenzo and converting to Christianity.

Jessica, Shylock's daughter, tells Launcelot that she is sad to see him leave, but gives him a letter for Lorenzo. To herself, she deplores herself for being ashamed of her father. Yet she vows to become a Christian and marry Lorenzo.

***Brief Analysis:***

Again, Shylock seems condemned by those around him, even his own daughter. The audience wonders about Shylock's character since all these characters seem to hold him in such contempt, yet none voice any other reason for the malice except for Shylock being a Jew and somewhat tedious. This same voice coming from his daughter also calls into question her own virtue, as she berates herself for her own sin of being ashamed of Shylock. It calls into question her own morality and leads us to think of Jessica as a spoiled, impetuous girl.

***Critical Study:***

In this scene, set in Shylock's house, we are introduced to Jessica, Shylock's daughter. She is speaking with Launcelot, and she expresses her sorrow that he decided to leave his position as her father's servant. "Our house is hell," she says, "and thou a merry devil / Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness." She then gives him a letter to deliver secretly to her lover Lorenzo "who is thy new master's [Bassanio's] guest." After Launcelot leaves, we discover that Jessica is planning to elope with Lorenzo; in addition, she is planning to renounce her father's faith and become a Christian.

This brief scene in Act II provides the final piece of plot exposition. Here, we are introduced to Shylock's daughter, Jessica, and in her first words, we have a clear idea about her relationship with her father, and we receive some justification for her plan to leave the old moneylender's house; she says, "Our house is hell."

Her love letter, to be given to Lorenzo, will figure in the second of the play's love affairs (Gratiano and Nerissa will prove a third in this play). It is important that the audience in this scene and in the next scene be aware of Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo, since it adds very heavy irony to Shylock's multiple warnings to his daughter in Scene 5 to guard his house well.

In this scene, Shylock is cast in the clichéd role of the villain, primarily because of Jessica's remarks, but one should remember that in a romantic comedy, one of the fathers would have to be a villain of sorts; here, it is Shylock. Interestingly, even though Jessica's intention to leave her father's household and rush into her lover's arms seems natural enough, Jessica is aware of her "sin," being her father's child. Finally, though, as part of the romantic plot, all will be well with Jessica, and she will be a part of the general happiness at the play's end.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) bids Launcelot Gobbo goodbye as he prepares to leave her father's service. She tells him he has been a source of fun in their serious house and sends Launcelot to [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s dinner with a letter for Lorenzo. Launcelot predicts she will marry a Christian, and they both cry at parting. Once Launcelot is gone, Jessica hopes Lorenzo will get her message and come to take her away and marry her.

It is possible to question Launcelot Gobbo's reliability as a judge of [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s character in [Act 2, Scene 2](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-2-scene-2-summary/), because Launcelot is a silly character whose primary purpose is to serve as comic relief in the play. But [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica)'s judgment of her father is more reliable. She describes her house as "hell" and credits Launcelot with bringing some merriment into it. If the only other person who lives in her house is Shylock, he must be the source of her unhappiness. Unlike the Christian characters in the play, Jessica has no prejudice against her father. Quite the opposite, she should be predisposed to love her father, so whatever she feels for him is based entirely on his actions toward her throughout her life. Her desire to escape from her father's house is the clearest evidence against Shylock's character presented thus far in the play.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

At [Shylock's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) house, [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) bids farewell to Shylock's daughter, [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters). Jessica says that she will miss him—his presence helped make her life at home more tolerable. Then, she gives him a letter and asks him to pass it on secretly to Bassanio's friend [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) at dinner that night. Tearful at having to leave her, Launcelot takes the letter.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Identifying the defector Launcelot as her ally in her own home, Jessica immediately shows "Venetian"-style prejudice against her own group—the Jews—and hints at the disloyalty and betrayal to which she will subject her own father.

***Summary Part 2:***

After [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) departs, [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) worries that her shame at being her father's child is a sin. Yet, she reflects, she is daughter only to his "blood" (2.3.18); she does not share his "manners" (19). Then, she reveals why she sent the letter with Launcelot: [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) has promised that he loves her and wants to marry her. If he keeps his vows, she vows that she will convert to Christianity and become Lorenzo's wife.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jessica's reflections on what it means to be someone's child call into question the division between animal and human traits—that is, "blood" versus "manners." Her blithe betrayal of her father also casts some doubt on Jessica's character, despite the affection that the Christians show for her.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation1:***

JESSICA  
Alack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be asham'd to be my father's child!  
But though I am a daughter to his blood,  
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,  
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.2)

***Explanation 1:***

Jessica is isolated. She neither fits in with her father (and implicitly her Jewish background) nor is she a Christian. This tension causes her distress. She's willing to abandon her father and her religion to resolve it and join a community she can relate with more.

***Quotation 2:***

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be ashamed to be my father's child?  
But though I am a daughter to his blood,  
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,  
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.16-21)

***Explanation:***

Jessica can't wait to elope with Lorenzo, but *why*? As literary critic Janet Adelman points out in *Blood Relations*, "marriage appears to occur to her largely as a way to escape" from being her father's daughter (71). Later, when Jessica declares "I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian" (3.5.3), we can see that Jessica really is ashamed of being the Jewish daughter of Shylock. Check out ["Race" quote #9](https://www.shmoop.com/merchant-of-venice/race-quotes-3.html) for more on this.

Jessica is ashamed to be her father's "child" because 1) Shylock is Jewish, which makes her Jewish, and 2) Shylock's has rude "manners" (read: he's not gentle or gentile). We also notice that, in Jessica's mind, marrying a gentile (a non-Jew) is synonymous with her own conversion from Jew to Christian. (This concept is from 1 Corinthians 7:14: "The unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.")

Jessica chooses Lorenzo, and a Christian life, over her father and her Jewish background. She recognizes that it's a sin to be ashamed of her father, but she makes a choice that she thinks is truer to her nature. As her Jewish father's nature is so dissimilar to hers, it looks like her only choice is to become a Christian, walking away from being her father's child.

***Quotation 3:***

JESSICA  
I am sorry thou wilt leave my father so.  
Our house is hell and thou, a merry devil,  
Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness.  
But fare thee well. There is a ducat for thee,  
And, Lancelet, soon at supper shalt thou see  
Lorenzo, who is thy new master's guest.  
Give him this letter, do it secretly.  
And so farewell. I would not have my father  
See me in talk with thee. (2.3.1-9)

***Explanation:***

Jessica seems to be lacking in familial love toward her father. Rather than chastise Lancelot for his betrayal, she calls her house hell, and in the same speech plots to betray her father by secretly meeting Lorenzo, her Christian lover.