



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	KING LEAR	HAMLET	MACBETH	OTHELLO	ROMEO AND JULIET	JULIUS CAESAR	CORIOLANUS
CYMBELINE	TITUS ANDRONICUS	TIMON OF ATHENS	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	KING JOHN		
HENRY IV, PART 1	HENRY IV, PART 2	HENRY V	HENRY VI, PART 1	HENRY VI, PART 2	HENRY VI, PART 3	RICHARD III	
HENRY VIII	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	AS YOU LIKE IT	THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST			
MEASURE FOR MEASURE	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM				
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE	THE TEMPEST	TWELFTH NIGHT	THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA			
THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN	THE WINTER'S TALE	LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON	THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO	A LOVER'S COMPLAINT			
THE RAPE OF LUCRECE	THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM	VENUS AND ADONIS	THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE	SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS			

[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)[Comedies >](#)[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)[COMEDIES](#)[A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM](#)

[ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL](#)[AS YOU LIKE IT](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST](#)[MEASURE FOR MEASURE](#)[MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING](#)[PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE](#)[THE COMEDY OF ERRORS](#)**THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**[CHARACTER](#)[MAJOR CHARACTERS](#)[MOTIFS](#)[PLOT OVERVIEW](#)[SUMMARY](#)[SYMBOLS](#)[THEMES](#)[THE MERCHANT OF VENICE](#)[THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR](#)[THE TAMING OF THE SHREW](#)[THE TEMPEST](#)[THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF  
VERONA](#)[THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN](#)[THE WINTER'S TALE](#)[TWELFTH NIGHT](#)

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# *The Merchant of Venice*

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## Symbols

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:31 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:31 AM** ]

## The Three Caskets

The contest for Portia's hand, in which suitors from various countries choose among a gold, a silver, and a lead casket, resembles the cultural and legal system of Venice in some respects. Like the Venice of the play, the casket contest presents the same opportunities and the same rules to men of various nations, ethnicities, and religions. Also like Venice, the hidden bias of the casket test is fundamentally Christian. To win Portia, Bassanio must ignore the gold casket, which bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" (II.vii.5), and the silver casket, which says, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" (II.vii.7). The correct casket is lead and warns that the person who chooses it must give and risk everything he has. The contest combines a number of Christian teachings, such as the idea that desire is an unreliable guide and should be resisted, and the idea that human beings do not deserve God's grace but receive it in spite of themselves. Christianity teaches that appearances are often deceiving, and that people should not trust the evidence provided by the senses—hence the humble appearance of the lead casket. Faith and charity are the central values of Christianity, and these values are evoked by the lead casket's injunction to give all and risk all, as one does in making a leap of faith. Portia's father has presented marriage as one in which the proper suitor risks and gives everything for the spouse, in the hope of a divine recompense he can never truly deserve. The contest

[HENRY V](#)[HENRY VI, PART 1](#)[HENRY VI, PART 2](#)[HENRY VI, PART 3](#)[HENRY VIII](#)[KING JOHN](#)[RICHARD II](#)[RICHARD III](#)

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## HISTORIES

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### LOST PLAYS

[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO](#)

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## POEMS

[A LOVER'S COMPLAINT](#)[SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS](#)[THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM](#)[THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE](#)[THE RAPE OF LUCRECE](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)

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## TRAGEDIES

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certainly suits Bassanio, who knows he does not deserve his good fortune but is willing to risk everything on a gamble.

## The Pound of Flesh

The pound of flesh that Shylock seeks lends itself to multiple interpretations: it emerges most as a metaphor for two of the play's closest relationships, but also calls attention to Shylock's inflexible adherence to the law. The fact that Bassanio's debt is to be paid with Antonio's flesh is significant, showing how their friendship is so binding it has made them almost one. Shylock's determination is strengthened by Jessica's departure, as if he were seeking recompense for the loss of his own flesh and blood by collecting it from his enemy. Lastly, the pound of flesh is a constant reminder of the rigidity of Shylock's world, where numerical calculations are used to evaluate even the most serious of situations. Shylock never explicitly demands that Antonio die, but asks instead, in his numerical mind, for a pound in exchange for his three thousand ducats. Where the other characters measure their emotions with long metaphors and words, Shylock measures everything in far more prosaic and numerical quantities.

## Leah's Ring

The ring given to Shylock in his bachelor days by a woman named Leah, who is most likely Shylock's wife and Jessica's mother, gets only a brief mention in the play, but is still an object of great importance. When told that Jessica has stolen it and traded it for a monkey, Shylock very poignantly laments its loss: "I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (III.i.101–102). The lost ring allows us to see Shylock in an uncharacteristically vulnerable position and to view him as a human being capable of feeling something more than anger. Although Shylock and Tubal discuss the ring for no more than five lines, the ring stands as an important symbol of Shylock's humanity, his ability to love, and his ability to grieve.

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## Motifs

[KING LEAR](#)[MACBETH](#)[OTHELLO](#)[ROMEO AND JULIET](#)[SITEMAP.XML](#)[TIMON OF ATHENS](#)[TITUS ANDRONICUS](#)[TROILUS AND CRESSIDA](#)

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[RECENT SITE ACTIVITY](#)posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:29 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:29 AM** ]

## The Law

*The Merchant of Venice* depends heavily upon laws and rules—the laws of the state of Venice and the rules stipulated in contracts and wills. Laws and rules can be manipulated for cruel or wanton purposes, but they are also capable of producing good when executed by the right people. Portia’s virtual imprisonment by the game of caskets seems, at first, like a questionable rule at best, but her likening of the game to a lottery system is belied by the fact that, in the end, it works perfectly. The game keeps a host of suitors at bay, and of the three who try to choose the correct casket to win Portia’s hand, only the man of Portia’s desires succeeds. By the time Bassanio picks the correct chest, the choice seems like a more efficient indicator of human nature than any person could ever provide. A similar phenomenon occurs with Venetian law. Until Portia’s arrival, Shylock is the law’s strictest adherent, and it seems as if the city’s adherence to contracts will result in tragedy. However, when Portia arrives and manipulates the law most skillfully of all, the outcome is the happiest ending of all, at least to an Elizabethan audience: Antonio is rescued and Shylock forced to abandon his religion. The fact that the trial is such a close call does, however, raise the fearful specter of how the law can be misused. Without the proper guidance, the law can be wielded to do horrible things.

## Cross-dressing

Twice in the play, daring escapes are executed with the help of cross-dressing. Jessica escapes the tedium of Shylock’s house by dressing as a page, while Portia and Nerissa rescue Antonio by posing as officers of the Venetian court. This device was not only familiar to Renaissance drama, but essential to its performance: women were banned from the stage and their parts were performed by prepubescent boys. Shakespeare was a great fan of the potentials of cross-dressing and used the device often, especially in his comedies. But Portia reveals that the donning of men’s clothes is more than mere comedy. She says that she has studied a “thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks,” implying that male authority is a kind of performance that can be imitated successfully (III.iv.77). She feels confident that she can outwit any male competitor, declaring, “I’ll prove the

prettier fellow of the two, / And wear my dagger with the braver grace” (III.iv.64–65). In short, by assuming the clothes of the opposite sex, Portia enables herself to assume the power and position denied to her as a woman.

## Filial Piety

Like Shakespeare’s other comedies, *The Merchant of Venice* seems to endorse the behavior of characters who treat filial piety lightly, even though the heroine, Portia, sets the opposite example by obeying her father’s will. Launcelot greets his blind, long lost father by giving the old man confusing directions and telling the old man that his beloved son Launcelot is dead. This moment of impertinence can be excused as essential to the comedy of the play, but it sets the stage for Jessica’s far more complex hatred of her father. Jessica can list no specific complaints when she explains her desire to leave Shylock’s house, and in the one scene in which she appears with Shylock, he fusses over her in a way that some might see as tender. Jessica’s desire to leave is made clearer when the other characters note how separate she has become from her father, but her behavior after departing seems questionable at best. Most notably, she trades her father’s ring, given to him by her dead mother, for a monkey. The frivolity of this exchange, in which an heirloom is tossed away for the silliest of objects, makes for quite a disturbing image of the esteem in which *The Merchant of Venice*’s children hold their parents, and puts us, at least temporarily, in Shylock’s corner.

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## Themes

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:27 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:27 AM** ]

## Race

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Judaism and Christianity aren't just religions – they're constructed as racial (and even national) identities as well. In its portrayal of a bloodthirsty Jewish moneylender, the play famously dramatizes 16th century racial stereotypes that are deeply unsettling, especially for modern audiences. While there's no doubt the play depicts anti-Semitism, literary critics are divided over the question of whether or not the play itself endorses

racism.

## Wealth

Money is a very big deal in this play. (Big surprise there, right? The plot revolves around a Venetian *merchant* who can't repay a loan to a hated moneylender.) In much of *The Merchant of Venice*, the characters' attitudes toward wealth, mercantilism, and usury (lending money with interest) function as a way to differentiate between Christians and Jews. The Christians in the play are portrayed as generous and even careless with their fortunes. The money-grubbing Shylock, on the other hand, is accused of caring more for his ducats than human relationships. At the same time, there's textual evidence to suggest that Shakespeare calls these stereotypes into question.

## Friendship

"To you, Antonio, / I owe the most, in money and in love" (1.1.4). So says Bassanio as he prepares to court his future wife. Like *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice* is interested in the dynamics of male friendship, a bond that's often valued above all other relationships (especially heterosexual romance and marriage). Antonio loves Bassanio enough to give his life for him – indeed it seems that Bassanio's pursuit of a wife is the cause of Antonio's deep melancholy, which may suggest that his affection for his friend is romantic in nature. In the end, though, *The Merchant of Venice* is a Shakespearean comedy, which means that Bassanio's marriage to Portia replaces his bromance with Antonio.

## Marriage

These days we tend to associate marriage with romantic love, but in Shakespeare's day that wasn't necessarily the case. Marriage is portrayed in several different ways in *The Merchant of Venice*: as a risky business venture, a mythological quest, a chance for an unhappy daughter to escape her father's home, a way for a father to transmit his wealth to the man of his choosing, and even as an opportunity for two men to become more secure in their friendship. What's even more striking about marriage is that, even though it becomes the most important relationship by the end of the play, it's pitted against the bonds of male friendship throughout.

## Justice

Because Venice's economic stability depends on foreign businessmen like Shylock, the city has laws in place to protect their legal rights. Although the law is on his side when the Jewish moneylender goes to court and demands his "pound of flesh," Shylock is expected to show mercy. Instead, he insists on getting his pound of flesh. Throughout the play, Judaism is associated with the Mosaic code (from Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament), with its strict emphasis on justice and following the letter of the law. Christianity, on the other hand, is associated with the New Testament's emphasis on God's mercy and offer of salvation.

## Love

Love in *The Merchant of Venice* comes in a variety of forms. There's love between family members, between friends, and of course, between lovers. Still, love is more notable for its absence than its presence in the play. Love often goes hand in hand with betrayal. Bassanio says he "loves" Portia, but he courts her for her money. At times, the same seems true of Lorenzo's interest in Jessica. Women seem happy to give love, but they do so with a shred of cynicism. Antonio clearly loves Bassanio (whether romantically or not), but he ultimately must subordinate this love to Portia's more formal marriage with him. Love is regulated, sacrificed, betrayed, and generally built on rocky foundations in the play.

## Isolation

*The Merchant of Venice* is riddled with characters who feel a deep sense of isolation. The characters clash on a variety of levels, as they come from different backgrounds and life situations and have different points of view. The most potent isolation is caused by religious estrangement. Shylock is isolated because he is Jewish – his religious beliefs and cultural values remain fundamentally at odds with those of his fellow Venetians. Antonio is isolated by his relationship with Bassanio; their interaction seems to be defined and limited by what could be romantic love on Antonio's part. Isolation is a fact of life for the characters, and it proves to be fairly insurmountable, coloring all of the characters' interactions.

## Choices

In *The Merchant of Venice* characters must choose between lovers, friends, and family, personal comfort and societal norms. The explicit choices, like Portia's casket lottery, provide a frame for the entire play. The game to win Portia's hand is explicitly built on chance and the choice of her suitors. Bassanio is faced with choosing correctly or foregoing his chance to ever have a wife again.

There are more abstract choices in the play as well. Antonio must choose between preserving his personal happiness as Bassanio's closest friend and enabling Bassanio to win a woman who will come between them. The greatest choices are often about the way people treat each other. Shylock chooses to doggedly pursue his pound of Antonio's flesh because Antonio, among others, has chosen to treat him like a dog. Antonio chooses, in the end, to deprive Shylock of his livelihood and his religion. He also chooses not to pursue his relationship with Bassanio, instead relegating himself to a minor role in Portia and Bassanio's lives.

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## Major Characters

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:22 AM by alaa hagag [ updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:22 AM ]

### Shylock

Although critics tend to agree that Shylock is *The Merchant of Venice*'s most noteworthy figure, no consensus has been reached on whether to read him as a bloodthirsty bogeyman, a clownish Jewish stereotype, or a tragic figure whose sense of decency has been fractured by the persecution he endures. Certainly, Shylock is the play's antagonist, and he is menacing enough to seriously imperil the happiness of Venice's businessmen and young lovers alike. Shylock is also, however, a creation of circumstance; even in his single-minded pursuit of a pound of flesh, his frequent mentions of the cruelty he has endured at Christian hands make it hard for us to label him a natural born monster. In one of Shakespeare's most famous monologues, for example, Shylock argues that Jews are humans and calls his quest for vengeance the product of lessons taught to him by the cruelty of Venetian citizens. On the other hand, Shylock's coldly calculated attempt to revenge the wrongs done to him by murdering his persecutor, Antonio, prevents us from viewing him in a primarily positive light. Shakespeare gives us unmistakably human moments, but he often steers us against Shylock as well, painting him as a miserly, cruel, and prosaic figure.

### Portia

Quick-witted, wealthy, and beautiful, Portia embodies the virtues that are typical of Shakespeare's heroines—it is no surprise that she emerges as the antidote to Shylock's malice. At the beginning of the play, however, we do not see Portia's potential for initiative and resourcefulness, as she is a near prisoner, feeling herself absolutely bound to follow her father's dying wishes. This opening appearance, however, proves to be a revealing introduction to Portia, who emerges as that rarest of combinations—a free spirit who abides rigidly by rules. Rather than ignoring the stipulations of her father's will, she watches a stream of suitors pass her by, happy to see these particular suitors go, but sad that she has no choice in the matter. When Bassanio arrives, however, Portia proves herself to be highly resourceful, begging the man she loves to stay a while before picking a chest, and

finding loopholes in the will's provision that we never thought possible. Also, in her defeat of Shylock Portia prevails by applying a more rigid standard than Shylock himself, agreeing that his contract very much entitles him to his pound of flesh, but adding that it does not allow for any loss of blood. Anybody can break the rules, but Portia's effectiveness comes from her ability to make the law work for her.

Portia rejects the stuffiness that rigid adherence to the law might otherwise suggest. In her courtroom appearance, she vigorously applies the law, but still flouts convention by appearing disguised as a man. After depriving Bassanio of his ring, she stops the prank before it goes to far, but still takes it far enough to berate Bassanio and Gratiano for their callousness, and she even insinuates that she has been unfaithful.

## Antonio

Although the play's title refers to him, Antonio is a rather lackluster character. He emerges in Act I, scene i as a hopeless depressive, someone who cannot name the source of his melancholy and who, throughout the course of the play, devolves into a self-pitying lump, unable to muster the energy required to defend himself against execution. Antonio never names the cause of his melancholy, but the evidence seems to point to his being in love, despite his denial of this idea in Act I, scene i. The most likely object of his affection is Bassanio, who takes full advantage of the merchant's boundless feelings for him. Antonio has risked the entirety of his fortune on overseas trading ventures, yet he agrees to guarantee the potentially lethal loan Bassanio secures from Shylock. In the context of his unrequited and presumably unconsummated relationship with Bassanio, Antonio's willingness to offer up a pound of his own flesh seems particularly important, signifying a union that grotesquely alludes to the rites of marriage, where two partners become "one flesh."

Further evidence of the nature of Antonio's feelings for Bassanio appears later in the play, when Antonio's proclamations resonate with the hyperbole and self-satisfaction of a doomed lover's declaration: "Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not" (III.iii.35–36). Antonio ends the play as happily as he can, restored to wealth even if not delivered into love. Without a mate, he is indeed the "tainted wether"—or castrated ram—of the flock, and he

will likely return to his favorite pastime of moping about the streets of Venice (IV.i.113). After all, he has effectively disabled himself from pursuing his other hobby—abusing Shylock—by insisting that the Jew convert to Christianity. Although a sixteenth-century audience might have seen this demand as merciful, as Shylock is saving himself from eternal damnation by converting, we are less likely to be convinced. Not only does Antonio’s reputation as an anti-Semite precede him, but the only instance in the play when he breaks out of his doldrums is his “storm” against Shylock (I.iii.132). In this context, Antonio proves that the dominant threads of his character are melancholy and cruelty.

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### Character

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:19 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:19 AM** ]

### Shylock

A Jewish moneylender in Venice. Angered by his mistreatment at the hands of Venice’s Christians, particularly Antonio, Shylock schemes to eke out his revenge by ruthlessly demanding as payment a pound of Antonio’s flesh. Although seen by the rest of the play’s characters as an inhuman monster, Shylock at times diverges from stereotype and reveals himself to be quite human. These contradictions, and his eloquent expressions of hatred, have earned Shylock a place as one of Shakespeare’s most memorable characters.

### Portia

A wealthy heiress from Belmont. Portia’s beauty is matched only by her intelligence. Bound by a clause in her father’s will that forces her to marry whichever suitor chooses correctly among three caskets, Portia is nonetheless able to marry her true love, Bassanio. Far and away the most clever of the play’s characters, it is Portia, in the disguise of a young law clerk, who saves Antonio from Shylock’s knife.

### Antonio

The merchant whose love for his friend Bassanio prompts him to sign Shylock’s contract and almost lose his life. Antonio is something of a mercurial figure, often inexplicably melancholy and, as Shylock points out, possessed of an incorrigible dislike of Jews. Nonetheless, Antonio is beloved of his friends and proves merciful to Shylock, albeit with conditions.

### Bassanio

A gentleman of Venice, and a kinsman and dear friend to Antonio. Bassanio's love for the wealthy Portia leads him to borrow money from Shylock with Antonio as his guarantor. An ineffectual businessman, Bassanio proves himself a worthy suitor, correctly identifying the casket that contains Portia's portrait.

### **Gratiano**

A friend of Bassanio's who accompanies him to Belmont. A coarse and garrulous young man, Gratiano is Shylock's most vocal and insulting critic during the trial. While Bassanio courts Portia, Gratiano falls in love with and eventually weds Portia's lady-in-waiting, Nerissa.

### **Jessica**

Although she is Shylock's daughter, Jessica hates life in her father's house, and elopes with the young Christian gentleman, Lorenzo. The fate of her soul is often in doubt: the play's characters wonder if her marriage can overcome the fact that she was born a Jew, and we wonder if her sale of a ring given to her father by her mother is excessively callous.

### **Lorenzo**

A friend of Bassanio and Antonio, Lorenzo is in love with Shylock's daughter, Jessica. He schemes to help Jessica escape from her father's house, and he eventually elopes with her to Belmont.

### **Nerissa**

Portia's lady-in-waiting and confidante. She marries Gratiano and escorts Portia on Portia's trip to Venice by disguising herself as her law clerk.

### **Launcelot Gobbo**

Bassanio's servant. A comical, clownish figure who is especially adept at making puns, Launcelot leaves Shylock's service in order to work for Bassanio.

### **The prince of Morocco**

A Moorish prince who seeks Portia's hand in marriage. The prince of Morocco asks Portia to ignore his dark countenance and seeks to win her by picking one of the three caskets. Certain that the caskets reflect Portia's beauty and stature, the prince of Morocco picks the gold chest, which proves to be incorrect.

### **The prince of Arragon**

An arrogant Spanish nobleman who also attempts to win Portia's hand by picking a casket. Like the prince of Morocco, however, the prince of Arragon chooses unwisely. He picks the silver casket, which gives him a message calling him an idiot instead of Portia's hand.

### **Salarino**

A Venetian gentleman, and friend to Antonio, Bassanio, and Lorenzo. Salarino escorts the

newlyweds Jessica and Lorenzo to Belmont, and returns with Bassanio and Gratiano for Antonio's trial. He is often almost indistinguishable from his companion Solanio.

### **Solanio**

A Venetian gentleman, and frequent counterpart to Salarino.

### **The duke of Venice**

The ruler of Venice, who presides over Antonio's trial. Although a powerful man, the duke's state is built on respect for the law, and he is unable to help Antonio.

### **Old Gobbo**

Launcelot's father, also a servant in Venice.

### **Tubal**

A Jew in Venice, and one of Shylock's friends.

### **Doctor Bellario**

A wealthy Paduan lawyer and Portia's cousin. Doctor Bellario never appears in the play, but he gives Portia's servant the letters of introduction needed for her to make her appearance in court.

### **Balthasar**

Portia's servant, whom she dispatches to get the appropriate materials from Doctor Bellario.

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### **Summary**

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:15 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:15 AM** ]

In a street of Venice, the merchant Antonio laments that he is sad but knows not why. His friends, Solanio and Salarino try to cheer him up, to no avail. More friends, Lorenzo and Gratiano also try and fail. Antonio's friend, Bassanio, informs him that he intends to seek the wealthy Portia's hand in marriage, yet needs financial backing. Antonio, though reluctant, offers Bassanio 3,000 ducats (money) to help him. At Belmont, Portia's house, she laments to her servant, Nerissa, that she fears a suitor she dislikes will pursue her hand in marriage. Per her late father's will, the suitor must choose the correct of three chests (gold, silver, and lead), and then, if correct, he may marry Portia. She likes none of her six suitors, but wishes Bassanio would come and choose the correct chest. Back in Venice, after much begging, Bassanio

convinces the merchant Shylock the Jew to lend him 3000 ducats, with Antonio putting up his property as the bond. Although Shylock hates Antonio, he lends the money anyway, hoping Antonio will default on the loan. Antonio, though, has confidence one of his ocean vessels will come to port one month before the three month deadline.

The Moroccan prince arrives at Belmont to woo Portia and learns that if he chooses the wrong chest, he must swear to never ask any woman to marry him. Back in Venice, Launcelot Gobbo, a clown and Shylock's servant, tells his father, old Gobbo, that he wishes to leave Shylock and work for Bassanio. Bassanio agrees to it and instructs his servant Leonardo to prepare dinner for him and Shylock. Gratiano then arrives and tells Bassanio he'll help him win over Portia. Shylock's daughter, Jessica, gives a love letter to Launcelot to deliver to Antonio's

Christian friend Lorenzo. In the letter, Lorenzo learns that Jessica will pretend to be a male torchbearer for him at the supper between Antonio and Shylock. Shylock, going to the supper, leaves his house keys with his daughter, Jessica, warning her not to take part in the evening's Christian activities. Later that night, Gratiano, Salerio, and Lorenzo meet outside Shylock's house to get Jessica. After Lorenzo and Jessica unite, they all head to meet Bassanio on Antonio's ship to sail to Portia's. At Portia's house, the Moroccan prince chooses a chest to open. Each has an inscription, and only the correct one contains Portia's picture. He chooses incorrectly (the gold one), and leaves defeated. Salerio assures Solanio that Lorenzo and Jessica were not on the ship with Bassanio and Gratiano, and they are thus missing. Shylock, of course, wants his money and his daughter back. At Portia's house, the Prince of Aragon arrives and chooses the silver chest, also the wrong one. Again, he must swear to never woo any maid in marriage and to never tell a soul which chest he opened.

Solanio and Salerio confirm that Antonio's ship has sunk. They then make fun of Shylock for his predicament of losing his daughters. Shylock then laments of his monetary loss to another Jew, Tubal, yet rejoices that Antonio is sure to default on his loan. At Portia's house, she begs Bassanio to wait in choosing so that she may spend time with him, in case he chooses wrong. He correctly chooses the lead casket, though, and wins Portia's hand in marriage. To seal the union, Portia gives Bassanio a ring, warning that he should never lose it or give it away, lest he risk losing her love for him. Gratiano then announces his intention to wed Nerissa. Next,



Salerio, Lorenzo, and Jessica arrive, informing Bassanio that Antonio lost his ships, and, furthermore, that Shylock is viciously declaring forfeiture of the bond by Antonio. Bassanio leaves for Venice to repay the loan. In Venice, Shylock has Antonio arrested for failure to repay the loan. At Belmont, Portia tells Lorenzo and Jessica to manage her house while she and Nerissa go to a monastery until Bassanio returns. In fact, though, she and Nerissa will disguise themselves as young men and travel to Venice.

At a Venetian court, the Duke presides over the sentencing hearing of Antonio wherein Shylock intends to cut "a pound of flesh from Antonio's breast" since the due date has past and that was the terms of the bond, even though Bassanio offers him 6,000 ducats for repayment. Nerissa and Portia, disguised as a court clerk and doctor of civil law respectively, arrive at the court. Gratiano, Bassanio, the Duke, and Portia try to dissuade Shylock, to no avail. Yet, Portia points out that the deed calls for no blood to be shed and exactly one pound to be taken, lest Shylock be guilty of not following the bond himself. Shylock, realizing this is impossible, recants and simply requests 9,000 ducats. Portia then reveals that Shylock is himself guilty of a crime; namely, conspiring to kill another citizen, i.e. Antonio. As punishment, the Duke and Antonio decide that Shylock must give half his belongings to the court; keep the other half for himself and promise to give all his remaining belongings to his daughter and son-in-law (Lorenzo) upon his death; and become a Christian. With no other choice, Shylock agrees. As Portia (as the doctor of civil law) leaves, Bassanio offers her a monetary gift. Portia turns this down, instead requesting Bassanio's gloves and wedding ring instead. Bassanio, due to his vow, hesitates on the ring, but reluctantly gives it after much prodding by Antonio. Nerissa (disguised as a court clerk), vows to try to get her husband (Gratiano) to give her his wedding ring.

At Belmont, Lorenzo and Jessica share a peaceful night together. The next morning, Bassanio and Portia, and Gratiano and Nerissa reunite. After quarreling over the loss of rings, the women admit of their ruse and return the rings to their husbands. Further, they inform Antonio that three of his ships have come to port full of merchandise. Finally, they give the deed to Jessica and Lorenzo promising to give them Shylock's money and possessions upon his death.

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Squander some of your time in this timeless story and you will be amazed by the profound world of love and controversy...You will never fail to learn from Shakespeare's work.--

Submitted by jing.

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William Shakespeare has always held a fascination for me and one could wonder how easily he could twist and twirl the flow of human lives in his characters. *The Merchant of Venice* is not just a book that talks about the everyday merchant of Venice alone but it brings to mind the actual characteristical weaknesses, strengths, and beauty of the human world. The weakness is characterised by Shylock's greediness and eventual fall, Antonio's love for his friend, and the nonchalant attitude or should I say ignorance to the wickedness of an enemy--failure to be on guard--that almost cost him his life. Shylock's daughter, Bassanio, Antonio, Portia, Nerissa, et al were happy at the end of the play. The beauty of it is the knowledge that one could truly bend life situations as is the case with Portia, who surprises everyone with such an unexpected turn of situation, bending Shylock even when he thought he had bended Antonio to a point of no return. *Merchant* is a great work of art and is a pointer to all those who feel they've got it sorted out because one could be surprised.--Submitted by dolapo.

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### Plot Overview

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:14 AM by alaa hagag [ **updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:14 AM** ]

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, complains to his friends of a melancholy that he cannot explain. His friend Bassanio is desperately in need of money to court Portia, a wealthy heiress who lives in the city of Belmont. Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan in order to travel in style to Portia's estate. Antonio agrees, but is unable to make the loan himself because his own money is all invested in a number of trade ships that are still at sea. Antonio suggests that Bassanio secure the loan from one of the city's moneylenders and name Antonio as the loan's guarantor. In Belmont, Portia expresses sadness over the terms of her father's will, which stipulates that she must marry the man who correctly chooses one of three caskets. None of Portia's current suitors are to her liking, and she and her lady-in-waiting, Nerissa, fondly remember a visit paid some time before by Bassanio.

In Venice, Antonio and Bassanio approach Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan. Shylock

nurses a long-standing grudge against Antonio, who has made a habit of berating Shylock and other Jews for their usury, the practice of loaning money at exorbitant rates of interest, and who undermines their business by offering interest-free loans. Although Antonio refuses to apologize for his behavior, Shylock acts agreeably and offers to lend Bassanio three thousand ducats with no interest. Shylock adds, however, that should the loan go unpaid, Shylock will be entitled to a pound of Antonio's own flesh. Despite Bassanio's warnings, Antonio agrees. In Shylock's own household, his servant Launcelot decides to leave Shylock's service to work for Bassanio, and Shylock's daughter Jessica schemes to elope with Antonio's friend Lorenzo. That night, the streets of Venice fill up with revelers, and Jessica escapes with Lorenzo by dressing as his page. After a night of celebration, Bassanio and his friend Gratiano leave for Belmont, where Bassanio intends to win Portia's hand.

In Belmont, Portia welcomes the prince of Morocco, who has come in an attempt to choose the right casket to marry her. The prince studies the inscriptions on the three caskets and chooses the gold one, which proves to be an incorrect choice. In Venice, Shylock is furious to find that his daughter has run away, but rejoices in the fact that Antonio's ships are rumored to have been wrecked and that he will soon be able to claim his debt. In Belmont, the prince of Arragon also visits Portia. He, too, studies the caskets carefully, but he picks the silver one, which is also incorrect. Bassanio arrives at Portia's estate, and they declare their love for one another. Despite Portia's request that he wait before choosing, Bassanio immediately picks the correct casket, which is made of lead. He and Portia rejoice, and Gratiano confesses that he has fallen in love with Nerissa. The couples decide on a double wedding. Portia gives Bassanio a ring as a token of love, and makes him swear that under no circumstances will he part with it. They are joined, unexpectedly, by Lorenzo and Jessica. The celebration, however, is cut short by the news that Antonio has indeed lost his ships, and that he has forfeited his bond to Shylock. Bassanio and Gratiano immediately travel to Venice to try and save Antonio's life. After they leave, Portia tells Nerissa that they will go to Venice disguised as men.

Shylock ignores the many pleas to spare Antonio's life, and a trial is called to decide the matter. The duke of Venice, who presides over the trial, announces that he has sent for a legal expert, who turns out to be Portia disguised as a young man of law. Portia asks Shylock to show mercy, but he remains inflexible and insists the pound of flesh is rightfully his. Bassanio offers Shylock twice the money due him, but Shylock insists on collecting the bond as it is written. Portia examines the contract and, finding it legally binding, declares that Shylock is entitled to the merchant's flesh. Shylock ecstatically praises her wisdom, but as he is on the verge of collecting his due, Portia reminds him that he must do so without causing Antonio to bleed, as

the contract does not entitle him to any blood. Trapped by this logic, Shylock hastily agrees to take Bassanio's money instead, but Portia insists that Shylock take his bond as written, or nothing at all. Portia informs Shylock that he is guilty of conspiring against the life of a Venetian citizen, which means he must turn over half of his property to the state and the other half to Antonio. The duke spares Shylock's life and takes a fine instead of Shylock's property. Antonio also forgoes his half of Shylock's wealth on two conditions: first, Shylock must convert to Christianity, and second, he must will the entirety of his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica upon his death. Shylock agrees and takes his leave.

Bassanio, who does not see through Portia's disguise, showers the young law clerk with thanks, and is eventually pressured into giving Portia the ring with which he promised never to part. Gratiano gives Nerissa, who is disguised as Portia's clerk, his ring. The two women return to Belmont, where they find Lorenzo and Jessica declaring their love to each other under the moonlight. When Bassanio and Gratiano arrive the next day, their wives accuse them of faithlessly giving their rings to other women. Before the deception goes too far, however, Portia reveals that she was, in fact, the law clerk, and both she and Nerissa reconcile with their husbands. Lorenzo and Jessica are pleased to learn of their inheritance from Shylock, and the joyful news arrives that Antonio's ships have in fact made it back safely. The group celebrates its good fortune.

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1-7 of 7

