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Second edition

The Merchant of Venice

William Shakespeare



Aidan Coleman & Abbie Thomas

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The Merchant of Venice

William Shakespeare



Aidan Coleman & Abbie Thomas

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Tel: +61 3 8571 4950

Fax: +61 3 8571 0257

Email: books@insightpublications.com.au

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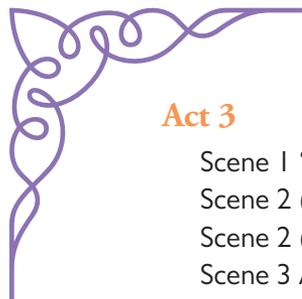
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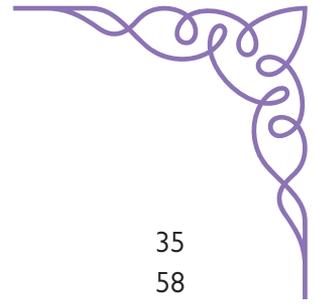
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About the authors

Aidan Coleman BA Dip Ed is the author of two poetry collections, both of which have been shortlisted for national book awards in Australia, and his reviews appear regularly in newspapers and journals. As a high-school English teacher, Aidan received a National Excellence in Teaching Award and an ASG Community Merit Medal. He has taught in the semester-based Shakespeare course at the University of Adelaide, and runs workshops and courses on Shakespeare for high-school teachers.

Abbie Thomas BA (Hons) Dip Ed teaches English at Walford Anglican School for Girls, Adelaide. She has presented curriculum and creative writing workshops at state and national conferences for English teachers. Abbie received a University of Adelaide Excellence in Teaching Award in 2007.

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Introduction

Who was Shakespeare?



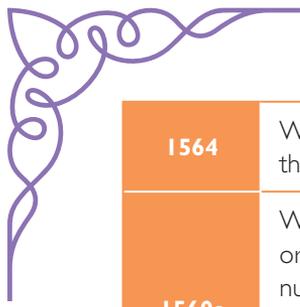
The Chandos Portrait of William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was neither a king nor a lord, and this is the reason we know little about him. While historians and writers made an effort to record the details of the lives of those born into noble families (kings, queens, ladies and lords), they were not generally interested in the important details of other people's lives. In his time Shakespeare was a famous playwright, but perhaps no more famous than some other London playwrights such as Ben Jonson or Christopher Marlowe. Little effort was made to record the details of Shakespeare's life until some 50 years after his death.

Did Shakespeare write Shakespeare?

Nearly all scholars agree that we have enough evidence to confirm that William Shakespeare, the man born in Stratford-upon-Avon, was the author of the plays and poems attributed to him. However, a few other theories exist as to who wrote the plays. Some authors who have been suggested include Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford; Christopher Marlowe (a talented playwright who died in 1593 but who conspiracy theorists claim may have faked his own death); Francis Bacon (a philosopher and scientist); and even Queen Elizabeth I.

There are a number of problems with all of these theories and very little evidence to support them. No-one doubted Shakespeare was the author of the plays and poems until 200 years after his death and these theories are usually based on the argument that Shakespeare was not university-educated.



1564	William Shakespeare was baptised on 26 April 1564; it is likely that he was born three days before this on 23 April (St George's Day).
1560s	<p>William's parents, John and Anne, were possibly both illiterate (they couldn't read or write). His father, John Shakespeare, was a glove maker and was involved in a number of other business activities. He became a member of the town council when Shakespeare was very young.</p> <p>Shakespeare was John and Anne's third child. He had seven brothers and sisters but only five of them survived to adulthood.</p>
1571	It is believed that Shakespeare entered the King's New Grammar School in Stratford around the age of seven. School days would have begun at six in the morning in summer and seven in winter and they would have finished at five in the evening (Monday to Saturday). The school would have been very strict and students could have expected to be beaten for misbehaving or showing any signs of laziness.
1578	Shakespeare probably left school at 14 or 15. His father owed quite a few people money by this time, and, for this reason, William was unable to attend university.
1582	At age 18, he married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children – Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet (Hamnet died when he was only 11).
1590s	<p>We are unsure what Shakespeare did in his early twenties. There are stories of his being employed by a rich landowner in the north of England. It is possible that he joined a travelling company of actors. We do know that by the early 1590s he was a popular playwright in London; in 1594 he invested in the acting company of which he was a member (the Lord Chamberlain's Men), becoming a part-owner.</p> <p>Through the 1590s Shakespeare wrote a number of poems and many of his most popular plays including <i>Richard III</i>, <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>. He acted in some of his own plays and those of other playwrights.</p> <p>In 1596 Shakespeare obtained a coat of arms for his father, which meant that he would be officially regarded as a gentleman. In the following year, Shakespeare bought New Place, the second-largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon.</p>
1600s	<p>The first decade of the 1600s was his most productive period, when he wrote most of his greatest plays, including <i>Hamlet</i>, <i>Othello</i>, <i>Macbeth</i> and <i>King Lear</i>.</p> <p>In 1603 Shakespeare's company became the King's Men and regularly performed at Court before King James from this time. During this decade he bought more properties around London and the Stratford area and became very wealthy.</p>
1613	In 1613 Shakespeare returned to Stratford-upon-Avon but still travelled to London occasionally to look after his business interests.
1616	He died on his 52nd birthday (23 April 1616) and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

Elizabethan England

Shakespeare arrived in London some time between 1585 and 1592. The city had a population of about 200 000 and was growing fast. It was an exciting time to live there as the city was full of foreign merchants and explorers, who were returning with spices and stories of exotic countries. It was also a time when the modern scientific method was being developed and many new discoveries were made, particularly in the areas of anatomy, mathematics and astronomy.

Unlike today, when the people of England vote for a government, England was ruled by a monarch, Elizabeth I, and her advisers. She had been Queen since 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. She was very popular with the people and was celebrated for her knowledge of literature and art.

Elizabethan society was divided into two broad groups: the 'gentle' population who governed the country (including earls, lords, ladies and gentlemen), and the 'base' or 'knaves' who made up most of the population. People were born into a certain class and marriages between people of different classes were reasonably rare. Occasionally the Queen knighted or even ennobled a person of lesser rank. While the 'gentle' were generally wealthy, some businessmen of lower rank were also beginning to make their fortunes during this time.

In the 1500s, virtually everyone believed in a God who created and controlled the universe. Elizabethans believed in a divine order called the Great Chain of Being. In this way of seeing the world, God ruled the universe and below Him were a number of angels. The Queen was the highest earthly rank in the Chain of Being; beneath her were nobles and lesser lords, and below them the rest of the population. This chain



The Darnley Portrait of Elizabeth I, c. 1570



Illustration from 1579 of the Great Chain of Being

extended further to the animal and then the plant kingdoms. Such an idea was used to reinforce the class system: everything had its place in the chain and people believed that upsetting this order in any way would cause chaos. People's class was even made clear through the clothing they wore, which was governed by strict laws.

Elizabethans were quite superstitious. Many of them believed in fairies and witches whom they blamed for unexplained mishaps. Elizabethans would worry if a black cat crossed their path, and avoid walking beneath ladders because this was considered bad luck. It was generally believed that the Earth was the centre of the universe and that, in their motion around the Earth, the planets made musical notes that together formed a perfect harmony. Elizabethans believed that the constellations and other heavenly bodies, including the moon, influenced human events and held clues

for the future. Even Queen Elizabeth I consulted an astrologer before deciding on the date for her coronation.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, England, like most other European countries, was Roman Catholic. Under Queen Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, the country broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed the Protestant Church of England. Although England briefly became Catholic again under Queen Mary, the country remained Protestant from the time of Elizabeth onwards. This meant Elizabeth I, instead of the Pope, ruled over the English Church. English priests were allowed to marry and services were carried out in English rather than Latin.

In the early 1500s there was very little confidence in the English language. Latin, the language of the Roman Catholic Church, was used for scholarship and most serious literature. However, as the century progressed, there emerged a new confidence that the English language could express important thoughts and feelings. A translation of the Bible into English by William Tyndale became a bestseller and was widely distributed, thanks to the reasonably recent technology of the printing press. There was also a rise in patriotism as England became an important world power. In 1588 the Royal Navy won a famous victory over the Spanish Armada, which was regarded as the greatest naval power in the world at the time.



The New Globe Theatre

This period in history is often described as the English Renaissance (rebirth) because it was a time not only of great advances in science, but also of great achievements in art. At the centre of this achievement was the growth of the English theatres. Before 1570, acting companies had toured the country, looking for work where they could find it and performing in marketplaces or the inn yards at local taverns. However, during the latter part of the sixteenth century, a number of theatres were built across London to service a new population that was hungry for entertainment. By the time Shakespeare arrived in London, there were numerous theatres catering to audiences of thousands. If he had arrived in London at a different time, he might never have become the famous playwright we know him as today.

A day at the theatre, London 1599

Imagine you could go back to London on a Saturday afternoon in September 1599. It is a warm sunny day with a slight breeze blowing in from the country. You decide to avoid the crowds flowing over London Bridge, choosing instead to be rowed across the River Thames (pronounced *Temz*) in one of the many water taxis. There are dozens of similar boats making their way across the river from the main city to Southwark (pronounced *Suth-uk*).

Southwark is a poor, overcrowded suburb filled with hastily built houses and flats. This is where immigrants from other parts of England or overseas come to live when they first arrive in London because it's cheap and no-one asks questions. It is full of workshops and young apprentices and you notice a large number of beggars. It is also the location of five of London's prisons, including that most notorious prison: the Clink.



A panorama of London by Claes Van Visscher, 1616

More importantly, Southwark is London's entertainment district. This is largely because it is outside the control of the city officials and their strict laws. The streets are packed with bowling alleys, brothels and taverns, where you can drink, or gamble illegally on dice, backgammon or cards. Here you can see all sorts of professional entertainers, from acrobats and clowns to musicians and puppeteers. You can also see some sickeningly violent entertainment. In the bear-baiting rings you are likely to see a bear or bull being attacked by vicious dogs. But you haven't crossed the river to see any of these things. You are here to see a play.

As you near the theatre, it is the smells you notice: roasting meats and pies mingle with the ever-present stench of horse dung, human sweat and sewage. Then you turn a corner, and there it is, standing 30 metres high: the Globe Theatre. The building is almost round in shape and white, crisscrossed with timbers. Above the brown thatched roof a white flag ripples in the breeze.

Today's play is *The Merchant of Venice*. It's a few years old now but still very popular. You've heard that it has already been performed before the Queen last summer. It costs just a penny to enter. This is about a tenth of the average worker's daily wage, which makes it cheaper than a movie today. As you pass beneath the entrance you read the words *Totus mundus agit histrionem*: the whole world is a playhouse.



Interior of the New Globe Theatre

Inside, three tiers of gallery seating wrap around the stage. If you pay another penny, you can buy yourself a seat in one of the lower tiers, or for sixpence you can purchase one of the best seats in the upper galleries. This is where the upper classes sit: the gentlemen, lords and ladies.

The stage is raised about 1.5 metres above the ground. Like the seats in the galleries, the performance area is covered. The ceiling, which they call the heavens, is painted with stars. You notice there are very few props of any sort and no backdrops or scenery: just a curtain at the back of the stage and, above this, three balcony areas that face the audience. These are the most expensive seats in the house, where people sit to be seen.

The Globe is now almost full with 3000 noisy people. You find a place off to the side of the stage. You'll have to stand for two or three hours but you've done that before at plenty of concerts. There are no toilets, and you will need to keep a careful eye on your bag.

The audience around you are poorer Londoners, the groundlings. You'll find they're a lot like a crowd at the football but rougher. They will eat, drink and talk throughout the performance and will shout out or boo if they don't like what's happening.

When the actors come on you'll find they speak very quickly, but you'll be able to hear them clearly where you are. If you look very closely you may even notice something strange about the female characters. All of the parts are played by men, and female characters, such as Portia and Nerissa, are played by boys whose voices have not yet broken. Theatre companies are considered too dangerous for women, and they won't be permitted onstage for another 60 years.

Anyway, it's almost 2 o'clock and the performance is about to begin ...



Dates and sources

It is believed that *The Merchant of Venice* was written sometime around 1596–1597 and probably first performed in 1597. Quarto versions of the play, the equivalent of a modern-day paperback, first appeared in 1600. At first there was some confusion as to whether the play was a history or a comedy. One early version described it as *The Comicall History of the Merchant of Venice*; another called it *The most excellent history of the Merchant of Venice* with the subtitle: ‘With the extreme cruelty of Shylock the Jew towards the said Merchant, in cutting a just pound of his flesh: and the obtaining of Portia by the choice of three chests.’

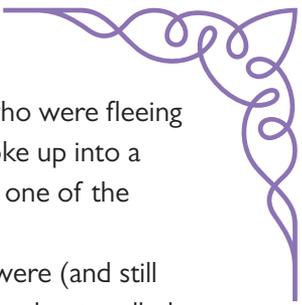
It is highly likely Shakespeare borrowed ideas from folk tales and myths when writing his play. Many scholars believe Shakespeare based *The Merchant of Venice* on Ser Giovanni of Florence’s tale ‘Giannetto and the Lady of Belmont’, published in 1558 in the collection *Il Pecorone*, which translates literally as ‘the big sheep’: that is, a blockhead. The tale tells of a young man named Giannetto who visits the port of Belmont in a ship supplied by his friend Ansaldo. Here he meets a beautiful widow, but to win her Gianetto has to borrow money from Ansaldo. Other features of Shakespeare’s script can also be found in this story. Ansaldo borrows from a Jewish moneylender and the complication of the pound of flesh occurs as it does in Shakespeare’s play. The tale also includes the lady dressing as a lawyer and the plot involving the rings.

It is likely that Shakespeare would have also sourced material from the *Gesta Romanorum*. This medieval tale (published in London in 1577) contains the idea of using a gold, silver and lead casket challenge to discern suitability in marriage – a plot line that runs throughout *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare was probably also influenced by his contemporary Christopher Marlowe’s play *The Jew of Malta*, with its bloodthirsty protagonist Barabas. This was written a few years before *The Merchant of Venice* and was still being performed as Shakespeare wrote his play. A few years earlier the Jewish physician, Roderigo Lopez, was hanged for trying to poison Queen Elizabeth. Such political excitement no doubt gave Jews a villainous public profile – an idea that both Shakespeare and Marlowe exploited to varying degrees in their plays.

Settings

Venice

Over half of *The Merchant of Venice* is set in the northern Italian city-state of Venice. The city consisted of a number of islands in the centre of a lagoon and



was founded in the final years of the Roman Empire by refugees who were fleeing from barbarian invaders. As the Roman Empire dissolved, Italy broke up into a number of smaller states. During the Middle Ages, Venice became one of the most powerful and wealthy city-states in Italy.

Because it was built in the middle of a lagoon, Venice's streets were (and still are) canals and most Venetians moved about the city in long, narrow boats called gondolas. Not surprisingly, Venetian wealth and military power was due primarily to its large fleet of ships. Venice dominated the trade between the Middle East and Europe, mainly in luxury items such as silks and spices. Through its naval power, Venice also added to its territory in mainland Italy a number of islands, including Corfu, Crete and Cyprus, and significant territory in the Balkans.

Venice was a republic, which meant it was governed by the people rather than by a monarch. In reality, a rich aristocratic class held power and they elected a Duke (called the Doge), often for life. After 1229, a Senate of 60 members assisted the Doge in running the Republic. Venetian law was considered to be fairly liberal or tolerant compared with that of other European nations. While the majority of Venetians were practising Roman Catholics, heretics (people who deviated from the orthodox faith) were rarely persecuted. In the minds of many Europeans, Venice was associated with luxury and decadence. It was already famous in Shakespeare's time for its courtesans (prostitutes) and for massive spending on art and architecture. Venice was also quick to adopt the printing press; by the late fifteenth century it was a leader in European publishing, and the paperback was invented in its publishing houses.

Signs of Venice's decline were already apparent in Shakespeare's day. The ongoing war with the Ottoman Empire proved very costly, and Venice's problems were compounded by various international developments, including Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Americas (1492) and Portugal's discovery of a sea route to India (1498). This, together with the rising naval power of Holland and England, broke Venice's monopoly on trade. Venice's decline continued and by the end of the seventeenth century it was only a second-rate power.

Belmont

Those scenes not set in Venice are set in the house and gardens of Portia's home in Belmont, two days' journey by sea from Venice. Unlike Venice, Belmont is a fictitious place. The word Belmont means 'beautiful mountain' and this is in keeping with its air of elegance and sophistication. Belmont, ruled by the female character, Portia, serves as a contrast to the male-dominated (patriarchal) society of Venice. Belmont is also a place of romantic love.

a. Alternating between speaking to one character and then another

[Context: While speaking to Launcelot, Shylock breaks off to call his daughter, Jessica.]

SHYLOCK Well, thou shalt see, thy eyes shall be thy judge
The difference of old Shylock and Bassanio –
What, Jessica! – thou shalt not gormandise
As thou hast done with me – What, Jessica! –
And sleep and snore, and rend apparel out –
Why, Jessica, I say! (Act 2 Scene 5)

b. Becoming sidetracked during a conversation

[Context: Solanio tells Salerio that Antonio may have ships wrecked at sea.]

SOLANIO But it is true – without any slips of prolixity or crossing the plain highway
of talk – that the good Antonio, the honest Antonio – O that I had a title
good enough to keep his name company! (Act 3 Scene 1)

c. Interrupting another character's dialogue

[Context: Shylock has just been informed by Tubal that Antonio may have lost his ships at sea.]

TUBAL Yes, other men have ill luck too. Antonio, as I heard in Genoa –
SHYLOCK What, what, what? Ill luck, ill luck? –
TUBAL Hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis. (Act 3 Scene 1)

Language features

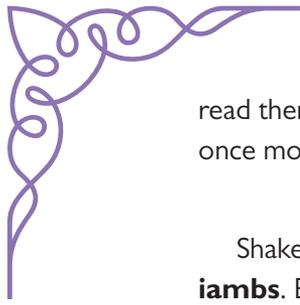
a. Blank verse and iambic pentameter

Most of Shakespeare's plays are written in **blank verse**, which is unrhymed poetry written in a regular rhythm or metre known as **iambic pentameter**. Most of *The Merchant of Venice* is written in blank verse, so we will start with this in order to understand the rhythm of the text. For example:

[Context: Antonio comments on the futility of trying to reason with Shylock in court.]

ANTONIO I pray you, think you question with the Jew:
You may as well go stand upon the beach,
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well use question with the wolf
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb ... (Act 4 Scene 1)

Set out like a poem (verse) rather than a novel (prose), these lines have one noticeable feature, besides the fact that they do not rhyme. Take a moment to



read them aloud. Can you hear the rhythm in the words? Read the lines aloud once more. Can you hear the regular heartbeat repeating itself in each line?

te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM ...

Shakespeare generally uses ten beats per line, divided into what are called **iamb**s. Each iamb contains one unstressed beat and one stressed beat (te-DUM). As each line has five iambs, this creates the rhythm called **iambic pentameter** ('penta' means 'five', as in pentagon, which is a five-sided shape).

This pattern is made clearer below, where the CAPITALISED letters are a stressed or strong beat. They should be emphasised a little more than the weaker beats:

ANTONIO I PRAY you, THINK you QUEST-ion WITH the JEW

Not only does Shakespeare's iambic pentameter (five te-DUMs per line) work **across** words ('I PRAY you, THINK', as written above) and **within** words (as in 'QUEST-ion'), but also **across speakers**.

[Context: Jessica and Lorenzo are alone together at Portia's home in Belmont.]

JESSICA

In SUCH a NIGHT

Did THIS-be FEAR-ful-LY o'er-TRIP the DEW,
And SAW the LI-on's SHA-dow ERE him-SELF
And RAN dis-MAY'D a-WAY.

LORENZO

In SUCH a NIGHT

Stood DI-do WITH a WIL-low IN her HAND
Up-ON the WILD sea-BANKS, and WAFT her LOVE
To COME a-GAIN to CARTH-age.

(Act 5 Scene 1)

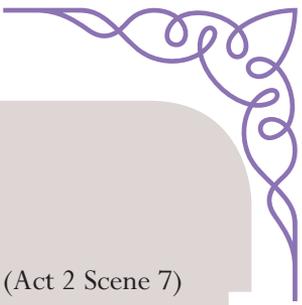
Shakespeare emphasises the intimacy between Jessica and Lorenzo by having him complete her iambic pentameter. Those reading the parts of these characters should speak immediately after each other to complete the rhythm of the line. In this way, the heart of the play does not stop beating.

You will not necessarily be able to pick this rhythm straight away, but the more you read Shakespeare, the more you will develop a feel for iambic pentameter.

b. Rhyme

Even though most of the play is in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), there are some instances in *The Merchant of Venice* where rhyme is used, as in the poems of the casket scrolls.

When the Prince of Morocco discovers he has been unsuccessful in his choice of the gold casket, he reads aloud the scroll he finds.



*All that glisters is not gold;
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms enfold.*

(Act 2 Scene 7)

You will notice that instead of the iambic pentameter of ten beats per line (te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM), the casket scrolls are written in a shorter, quicker rhythm. This is a type of **trochaic tetrameter**. A trochee has two beats, like an iamb, but in reverse order: DUM-te (GIL-ded TOMBS do WORMS en-FOLD); yet rather than having eight beats per line, most have only seven (ALL that GLIS-ters IS not GOLD). This distinctive rhythm works to set it apart from the rest of the language of the play. You will also notice that these scrolls are composed of a repeated 'AA' rhyme scheme ('gold', 'told' etc.), which seems to reinforce their rather didactic (instructional) tone.

c. Prose

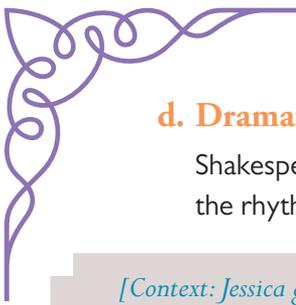
While most of Shakespeare's plays are written in verse (or poetry), he sometimes chooses to have his characters speak in prose. This is the sort of writing found in novels; it is how we naturally speak and think, and it does not necessarily have a consistent rhythm.

[Context: Launcelot's father, Old Gobbo, visits his son with a present for Shylock.]

GOBBO Master young man, you, I pray you, which is the way to master Jew's?
LAUNCELOT *[Aside]* O heavens, this is my true-begotten father, who, being more than sand-blind, high-gravel blind, knows me not: I will try confusions with him.
GOBBO Master young gentleman, I pray you, which is the way to master Jew's?

(Act 2 Scene 2)

Prose often indicates that a character is of a lower class than the main characters. Here, Launcelot and his father Gobbo are clearly of a lower class than Bassanio and Antonio. However, there are times in the play when Portia and Nerissa (Portia's maid) speak to each other in prose – perhaps suggesting they are friends and there is no need to speak formally with one another. Prose lends itself more naturally to comedy and this scene between Launcelot and his father is certainly presented as comic. But prose can be used for serious purposes too: Shylock's famous 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' speech in Act 3 Scene 1 is delivered in prose and this takes nothing away from its power and feeling. Shylock then uses verse in the court scene in Act 4 Scene 1 because it is a formal setting.



d. Dramatic pauses

Shakespeare sometimes leaves a line of iambic pentameter incomplete, breaking the rhythm of the text.

[Context: Jessica gives Launcelot a letter to give to her lover Lorenzo.]

JESSICA Give him this letter – do it secretly.
 And so farewell: I would not have my father
 See me in talk with thee. (Act 2 Scene 3)

These irregular lines are constructed on purpose by Shakespeare to highlight aspects such as dramatic tension. Leaving the line with fewer than the usual ten beats allows time for the characters to pause or perhaps to do something during the moment of silence. Here it allows Jessica to show that she is pressed for time and must act quickly when giving Launcelot the letter for Lorenzo. Alternatively, it might also suggest that she is incapable of speaking in depth about her father, and perhaps finds it too difficult to face up to the fact that she later plans to leave her religion and rob her own father upon her departure.

[Context: Shylock is preparing to take a pound of Antonio's flesh.]

SHYLOCK Most rightful judge!
PORTIA And you must cut this flesh from off his breast:
 The law allows it, and the court awards it. (Act 4 Scene 1)

Shylock's short line 'Most rightful judge!' contains a six beat pause before Portia instructs him where to cut off the flesh. Dramatically, this would give Shylock a chance to further sharpen the knife that he already has in his hand. This pause further emphasises Shylock's menace towards Antonio and builds tension for the audience.

e. Contractions and accents

Shakespeare frequently uses **contractions** in order to maintain the rhythm of the verse. Contractions are shortened words. You use contractions such as don't (do not) and haven't (have not) in everyday speech. In each of these examples, an apostrophe indicates that something is missing, that the word has been shortened.

'tis (it is) o'er (over) 'scape (escape)

At other times, Shakespeare *adds* a syllable or a beat to a word to make it fit the iambic pentameter. This is indicated in the text by an accent mark to create an extra syllable.

placèd [PLAC-ed] (two beats instead of one)
nourishèd [nour-ISH-ed] (three beats instead of two)

Important vocabulary

Shakespeare's works include an immense vocabulary; some scholars have estimated that his plays and poems make use of up to 15 000 different words. You can enjoy Shakespeare without understanding every word, but it is still a good idea to learn the words that are used regularly throughout the play. Some of the words like 'heinous' and 'valiant' are still used today, but others like 'ere' or 'wherefore' are not used often. You might like to begin a vocabulary list of your own. Here are some examples of words that occur frequently throughout *The Merchant of Venice*.

Anon: Soon
Aught: Anything
Ay (pronounced eye): Yes
Bond: A contract; the conditions of a loan
Ducat: Venetian gold coin
Ere (pronounced air): Before
Fi: An expression of annoyance, disapproval or disgust
Hazard: Risk
Prodigal: Someone who has been wasteful and extravagant
Suitor: Someone bringing a request (a suit), often a proposal of marriage
Thou: You
Thy: Your
Usury: Charging interest for a loan
Wherefore: Why
Woo: Win over or persuade (in matters of love)



The characters

VENETIAN CHRISTIANS

ANTONIO: wealthy merchant

BASSANIO: gentleman and suitor of Portia

GRATIANO: friend of Bassanio

SALERIO and **SOLANIO:** merchants and friends of Antonio

LORENZO: friend of Bassanio who elopes with Jessica

LAUNCELOT: servant of Shylock who leaves to work for Bassanio

OLD GOBBO: Launcelot's blind father

THE DUKE OF VENICE: the Doge of Venice and the judge who presides over the court case between Shylock and Antonio

LEONARDO: servant to Bassanio

VENETIAN JEWS

SHYLOCK: Jewish money-lender and Jessica's father

JESSICA: Shylock's daughter who elopes with Lorenzo

TUBAL: friend and business associate of Shylock

CHRISTIANS IN BELMONT

PORTIA: rich lady of Belmont; later disguised as the male lawyer Balthazar

NERISSA: close friend and maid to Portia; later disguised as a male clerk

BALTHAZAR and **STEPHANO:** servants to Portia

OTHER CHARACTERS

THE PRINCE OF MOROCCO: suitor from Morocco

THE PRINCE OF ARRAGON: suitor from Spain

Magnificoes of Venice, Officers of the Court of Justice, Gaoler, Servants, Musicians and Attendants

Act summaries



Act 1

In Venice, Bassanio wants to woo the rich and beautiful Portia, but he is in debt. He asks his close friend, the merchant Antonio, to lend him 3000 ducats. Antonio's wealth is tied up in his trading ships but he agrees to help. They go to the Jewish moneylender Shylock who eventually agrees to lend the money on the condition that if the loan is not repaid by the due date Antonio must allow Shylock to take a pound of his flesh. Antonio consents to this, confident his ships will return a month before he has to repay the money.

Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia is tired of receiving unappealing suitors who come to take part in the casket challenge set up by her late father. Of the gold, silver and lead caskets, a suitor must choose the one containing Portia's picture to win her hand in marriage. Many men come to try their luck and Portia ridicules them all. Portia's maid, Nerissa, reminds Portia of her interest in the Venetian, Bassanio, who had once visited Belmont.

Act 2

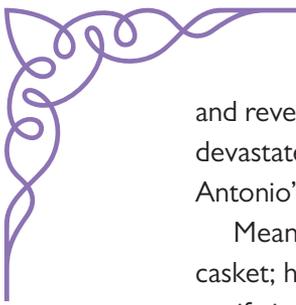
In Venice, Shylock's servant Launcelot debates with himself whether he should run away from his master; Bassanio later accepts Launcelot as his servant. Bassanio allows his friend Gratiano to accompany him on his mission to Belmont on the condition that he behaves himself.

At their house, Jessica, Shylock's daughter, is sorry to have Launcelot leave. She has made plans to marry her lover, the Christian Lorenzo, and to run away with him. She disguises herself as a boy so that she can join Lorenzo at the masque and steals money and jewels from her father before leaving. Shylock later discovers that his daughter and his ducats are gone and calls on the Duke for justice.

Back in Belmont, a new suitor, the Prince of Morocco, is unsuccessful in his choice of the gold casket and, soon after, the Prince of Arragon arrives and also fails by selecting the silver one. A servant tells Portia that a Venetian suitor has set sail for Belmont; Nerissa says that she hopes it is Bassanio.

Act 3

Antonio's friends, Salerio and Solanio, cross paths with Shylock, who warns them that Antonio should look to his bond. Enraged by their insults and his loss, Shylock questions their racist assumptions and asserts his right to revenge. Shylock's friend, Tubal, later tells Shylock that the search for his daughter has been unsuccessful



and reveals a rumour that Antonio's ships may have been wrecked. Shylock, devastated by the loss of his daughter and his money, is delighted to hear of Antonio's suspected misfortune.

Meanwhile, a nervous Portia looks on as Bassanio correctly chooses the lead casket; he then asks her to be his wife. Gratiano exclaims that he, too, has found a wife in Nerissa, Portia's maid. A servant arrives with the news that Antonio's ships have been lost and that Shylock will therefore take a pound of Antonio's flesh. After marrying, Portia gives Bassanio a ring and tells him to never part with it. Nerissa does the same with Gratiano.

Leaving Lorenzo and Jessica in charge of her household, Portia tells Bassanio she and Nerissa will live in a monastery until their husbands return. Instead, she and Nerissa disguise themselves as men of the law and go to visit Portia's wise relative Bellario who will help her prepare to defend Antonio.

Act 4

In the courtroom, the Duke asks Shylock to show mercy to Antonio but Shylock insists that the law be upheld and that he receive his pound of flesh. The Duke is about to close the case when Nerissa, disguised as a clerk, presents a letter from Bellario about the young lawyer Balthazar (Portia). In her disguise as a male lawyer, Portia implores Shylock to be merciful and encourages him to take the money offered by Bassanio. Shylock refuses and insists that the original contract be honoured.

As Shylock sharpens his knife to take Antonio's pound of flesh, Portia turns the law onto Shylock, telling him that if he spills one drop of the merchant's blood he will lose all his wealth and property. When Shylock attempts to settle, Portia forbids him any money, explaining he is now condemned to death for attempting to take the life of a Venetian citizen. Antonio demands that Shylock's property and money go to Lorenzo and Jessica, and that Shylock become a Christian. Shylock accepts these conditions and leaves, saying he is not well. Bassanio offers Portia anything she desires for saving his friend. Portia says she wants his ring, which he parts with reluctantly. Nerissa tells Portia she will try the same trick with Gratiano.

Act 5

It is a beautiful moonlit night and Jessica and Lorenzo are enjoying the garden at Belmont. Bassanio introduces Portia to Antonio and Nerissa quarrels with Gratiano about his missing ring. Portia and Nerissa then confess the truth to Bassanio and Gratiano, and Portia gives Antonio a letter to say that his ships were not wrecked after all.

Quick questions!



QUESTIONS

Spend a few minutes answering these questions in pairs or as a class.

- 1 From whom does Bassanio ask to borrow money?
- 2 Whom does Bassanio love and where does she live?
- 3 From whom do Bassanio and Antonio borrow money?
- 4 What are the conditions of the loan?
- 5 What are the conditions of Portia's father's will?
- 6 Of what are the three caskets made?
- 7 Who are the unsuccessful suitors in the casket lottery?
- 8 What is the name of Shylock's servant?
- 9 Who is Shylock's daughter?
- 10 Whom does Shylock's daughter love and plan to marry?
- 11 What terrible event happens to Shylock in Act 2?
- 12 Which casket does Bassanio choose?
- 13 Whom does Portia leave in charge of her household?
- 14 Whom does Portia visit to prepare her case to defend Antonio?
- 15 As whom do Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves when they go to court?
- 16 What legal loophole does Portia present to Shylock during the trial?
- 17 What does Antonio tell Shylock he must do upon losing the court case?
- 18 How does Shylock react to these conditions?
- 19 What does Portia ask from Bassanio when he offers her anything she chooses for saving Antonio?
- 20 What does the letter that Portia gives Antonio at the end of the play reveal?





Freeze-frames

The recommended time allocation for this task (preparation and performance) is approximately 50–60 minutes in total.

Present the play in five freeze-frames (one for each act) in groups of five to seven students.

Instructions

- Read carefully through the summary for each act.
- Work out how you will present the action of each act in a single ‘frozen’ pose.
- You may choose to represent a character, an event or even an idea. You may strike a pose where you are doing two things at once.
- Your teacher will tell you to present Act 1 and then instruct you to CHANGE and then FREEZE for your representation of Act 2. This will continue until you have represented all five acts.
- You shouldn’t take longer than 15 seconds between acts, so make sure you practise your changeovers before you present your freeze-frames to the class.
- Make sure you can explain what you represent, who you are or what you are doing when you present your freeze-frames to the class.

Optional

- Use a digital camera to photograph your five freeze-frames. Print the photographs and write a caption below each photograph explaining which act is being presented. These can be displayed in your classroom.
- Alternatively, print your photographs but do not label them. Display them in your classroom and ask students from other groups to organise your photographs into what they think is the correct order of the five-act play.

Act 1

Act 1 Scene 1

CHARACTERS

Antonio
Bassanio
Salerio
Gratiano
Solanio
Lorenzo

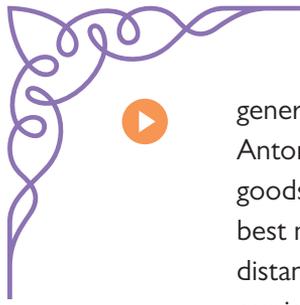
IN A NUTSHELL

The merchant Antonio is depressed and his friends, Salerio and Solanio, try to figure out the reason for this. They depart when Bassanio arrives with Lorenzo and Gratiano, leaving them to try to lift Antonio's spirits. When Lorenzo and Gratiano also leave, Bassanio puts forward a plan he hopes will remedy his desperate financial situation; this involves borrowing more money from Antonio. After Antonio guarantees his support, Bassanio reveals that he wishes to woo a beautiful and wealthy lady called Portia. He is convinced of Portia's love for him and wishes to travel to Belmont to win her heart. Although Antonio's finances are stretched, he assures Bassanio that he is willing to borrow money to help him.

Before you read

- You might find the opening dialogue of *The Merchant of Venice* difficult, but you don't have to understand every word. In short, Antonio is feeling depressed and he is unsure why this is. His friends suggest he is worried about the safe return of his ships as they could easily get wrecked, thus bankrupting him. Antonio insists that he is not concerned (or depressed) about merchandise, and he also dismisses the suggestion that he is in love. If you only take these details from the opening 60 lines, you are off to a good start. Shakespeare gives his audience some time to tune in to the language before revealing too much of importance.
- Students often notice that many of Shakespeare's characters do not seem to have any sort of employment. Many of the main characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, such as Bassanio, Gratiano and Portia, would be defined as the 'gentle' of society: they are the upper-class gentlemen and ladies. These people





generally lived off the money they inherited and rarely worked for a living. Antonio, Solanio and Salerio are all merchants, and make their living by buying goods and selling them at a profit. In Shakespeare's time, ships offered the best method for large quantities of merchandise to be transported over long distances. In an age before insurance, this sort of dangerous transportation carried huge financial risk.

- When another literary text is referred to indirectly in literature we call this **allusion**. *The Merchant of Venice* contains a number of allusions to classical mythology (that is, the mythology of Rome and ancient Greece). In this scene, Bassanio compares Portia's hair with a golden fleece and says that 'many Jasons come in quest of her'. This is an allusion to the story of Jason and the Argonauts who came from Colchis, near the Black Sea, and went on a quest to find the Golden Fleece.



In sooth:	In truth or truly
Argosies:	Merchant ships
Signiors:	Sirs (gentlemen)
Burghers:	Citizens
Ague:	Fever
Estate:	Someone's personal wealth
Kinsman:	Relative
Peevish:	Irritable
Prodigal:	Someone who has been wasteful and extravagant (in their youth)
Shaft:	Arrow
Suitor:	Someone bringing a request (a suit), often a proposal of marriage

A street in Venice.

[Enter ANTONIO, SALERIO and SOLANIO]

ANTONIO In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.
 It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
 But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
 What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
 I am to learn;
 And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
 That I have much ado to know myself.

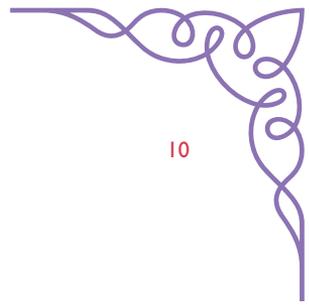
SALERIO Your mind is tossing on the ocean,

5



6

Want-wit: A person lacking in intelligence.



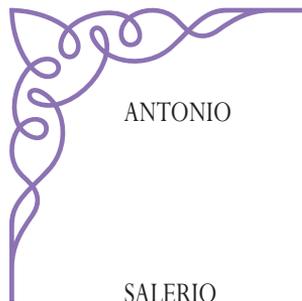
There, where your argosies with portly sail,
 Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
 Or, as it were, the pageants of the sea,
 Do overpeer the petty traffickers,
 That curtsy to them, do them reverence,
 As they fly by them with their woven wings. 10

SOLANIO Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth, 15
 The better part of my affections would
 Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
 Plucking the grass, to know where sits the wind,
 Peering in maps for ports and piers and roads,
 And every object that might make me fear 20
 Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt
 Would make me sad.

SALERIO My wind cooling my broth
 Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
 What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
 I should not see the sandy hour-glass run 25
 But I should think of shallows and of flats,
 And see my wealthy Andrew docked in sand,
 Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs
 To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
 And see the holy edifice of stone 30
 And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
 Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
 Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
 Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
 And, in a word, but even now worth this, 35
 And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought
 To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
 That such a thing bechanced would make me sad?
 But tell not me: I know, Antonio
 Is sad to think upon his merchandise. 40



- 9–14 **Where your argosies ... with their woven wings:** Where your large merchant ships, like the gentleman of the seas, or floats in a parade ('pageants'), look down upon ('overpeer') the smaller boats ('petty traffickers') that appear to 'bow and curtsy' (in the way they bob and dip), as they sail by them.
- 16 **The better part of my affections:** Most of my concerns.
- 17–18 **I should be still ... where sits the wind:** I would be tossing grass into the air to see which way the wind is blowing.
- 22 **Broth:** Soup.
- 27 **Andrew:** An anglicised (English-language) version of the name of a large Spanish ship that was captured by the English in 1596.
- 28–29 **Vailing her high-top ... To kiss her burial:** An image relating to the ship running aground.
- 30 **Holy edifice:** Altar.



ANTONIO Believe me, no: I thank my fortune for it,
My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
Upon the fortune of this present year.
Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad. 45

SALERIO Why, then you are in love.

ANTONIO Fie, fie!

SALERIO Not in love neither? Then let us say you are sad,
Because you are not merry; and 'twere as easy
For you to laugh and leap and say you are merry,
Because you are not sad. Now, by two-headed Janus, 50
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time:
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes
And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper,
And other of such vinegar aspect
That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile, 55
Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable.

[Enter BASSANIO, LORENZO and GRATIANO]

SOLANIO Here comes Bassanio, your most noble kinsman,
Gratiano and Lorenzo. Fare ye well;
We leave you now with better company.

SALERIO I would have stayed till I had made you merry, 60
If worthier friends had not prevented me.

ANTONIO Your worth is very dear in my regard.
I take it, your own business calls on you
And you embrace the occasion to depart.

SALERIO Good morrow, my good lords. 65

BASSANIO Good signiors both, when shall we laugh? Say, when?
You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?

SALERIO We'll make our leisures to attend on yours.

[Exit SALERIO and SOLANIO]

LORENZO My Lord Bassanio, since you have found Antonio, 70
We two will leave you; but at dinner-time,
I pray you, have in mind where we must meet.

BASSANIO I will not fail you.

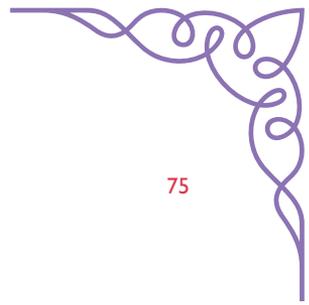
43 **My whole estate:** All my wealth.

46 **Fie, fie:** Nonsense.

50–56 **Now, by two-headed Janus ... the jest be laughable:** Solanio swears by Janus (the two-faced god of gates and doors) that there are some happy men who will look on and laugh like a parrot at the bagpipes, which were thought to sound sad. And there are other sad men of such sour appearance ('vinegar aspect') that they will not even smile at the sort of joke ('jest') Nestor would laugh at. Nestor is the oldest (and possibly the wisest) hero in *The Iliad* (an ancient Greek poem composed by Homer).

68 **We'll make our leisures to attend on yours:** We'll wait around for you.





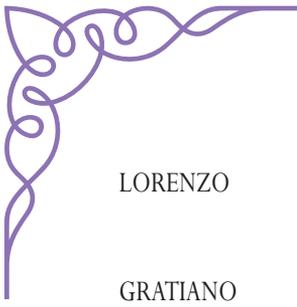
GRATIANO You look not well, Signior Antonio.
 You have too much respect upon the world:
 They lose it that do buy it with much care. 75
 Believe me, you are marvellously changed.

ANTONIO I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano:
 A stage where every man must play a part,
 And mine a sad one.

GRATIANO Let me play the fool:
 With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come, 80
 And let my liver rather heat with wine
 Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
 Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
 Sleep when he wakes and creep into the jaundice 85
 By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,
 I love thee, and it is my love that speaks:
 There are a sort of men whose visages
 Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,
 And do a wilful stillness entertain, 90
 With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
 Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit,
 As who should say 'I am Sir Oracle,
 And when I ope my lips let no dog bark!'
 O my Antonio, I do know of these 95
 That therefore only are reputed wise
 For saying nothing; when, I am very sure,
 If they should speak, would almost damn those ears,
 Which, hearing them, would call their brothers fools.
 I'll tell thee more of this another time. 100
 But fish not, with this melancholy bait,
 For this fool gudgeon, this opinion.



-
- 74–75 You have too much ... with much care:** You have too much concern for serious things, and those who worry too much about worldly matters make themselves unhappy.
 - 84 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster:** A grandsire is a grandfather. Alabaster is the stone cut for church monuments.
 - 85 Jaundice:** A symptom of passion.
 - 88–94 There are a sort of men ... my lips let no dog bark:** Gratiano suggests that some men's faces ('visages') develop the sort of white scum found on the surfaces of still ponds, and put on a wise appearance. When these men are delivering their wisdom, they cannot tolerate a barking dog (dogs proverbially barked at a person who was at a disadvantage). The ancient Greeks believed that the gods spoke through 'oracles'.
 - 95–99 I do know of these ... would call their brothers fools:** Gratiano asserts that if these serious men would speak more often, everyone would realise how foolish they really are.
 - 101–02 But fish not ... this opinion:** Do not try to 'fish' for men with the 'bait' of being sad. The gudgeon is a small European fish that is easy to catch and therefore thought to be gullible.



Come, good Lorenzo. Fare ye well awhile:
 I'll end my exhortation after dinner.
 LORENZO Well, we will leave you then till dinner-time: 105
 I must be one of these same dumb wise men,
 For Gratiano never lets me speak.
 GRATIANO Well, keep me company but two years more,
 Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue.
 ANTONIO Fare you well: I'll grow a talker for this gear. 110
 GRATIANO Thanks, i'faith; for silence is only commendable
 In a neat's tongue dried and a maid not vendible.

[Exit GRATIANO and LORENZO]

ANTONIO Is that anything now?
 BASSANIO Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all
 Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of 115
 chaff: you shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you have
 them, they are not worth the search.
 ANTONIO Well, tell me now what lady is the same
 To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage,
 That you today promised to tell me of? 120
 BASSANIO 'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,
 How much I have disabled mine estate,
 By something showing a more swelling port
 Than my faint means would grant continuance:
 Nor do I now make moan to be abridged 125
 From such a noble rate; but my chief care
 Is to come fairly off from the great debts
 Wherein my time something too prodigal
 Hath left me gaged. To you, Antonio,
 I owe the most, in money and in love, 130
 And from your love I have a warranty
 To unburden all my plots and purposes
 How to get clear of all the debts I owe.
 ANTONIO I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it;
 And if it stand, as you yourself still do, 135
 Within the eye of honour, be assured,
 My purse, my person, my extremest means,
 Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

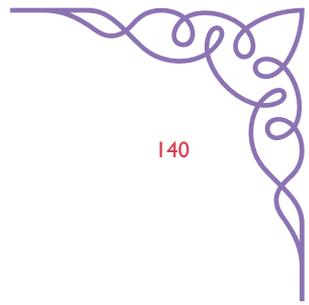


111–12 For silence is only ... a maid not vendible: Silence is only to be commended in an oxtongue or a woman who refuses to marry.

115–16 Two bushels of chaff: Two bushels would be a large quantity of corn. The chaff or husk (the outer layers surrounding the corncob) is worthless.

122–29 How much I have disabled ... Hath left me gaged: Bassanio laments that he has lived well beyond his finances and so has ruined his future income. But he claims to not be complaining about his situation but expressing his desire to repay his debts.

136 Within the eye of honour: If it cannot be seen as dishonourable.



BASSANIO In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft,
 I shot his fellow of the self-same flight 140
 The self-same way with more advised watch,
 To find the other forth; and by adventuring both
 I oft found both. I urge this childhood proof,
 Because what follows is pure innocence.
 I owe you much, and, like a willful youth, 145
 That which I owe is lost; but if you please
 To shoot another arrow that self way
 Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
 (As I will watch the aim), or to find both
 Or bring your latter hazard back again 150
 And thankfully rest debtor for the first.

ANTONIO You know me well, and herein spend but time
 To wind about my love with circumstance;
 And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
 In making question of my uttermost, 155
 Than if you had made waste of all I have.
 Then do but say to me what I should do
 That in your knowledge may by me be done,
 And I am prest unto it. Therefore, speak.

BASSANIO In Belmont is a lady richly left, 160
 And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
 Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes
 I did receive fair speechless messages.
 Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
 To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia; 165
 Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
 For the four winds blow in from every coast
 Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand, 170
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.

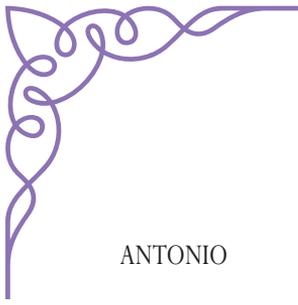


139–51 In my school-days ... debtor for the first: Bassanio explains that in his youth, when he lost an arrow (shaft) he would fire another the same way, keeping careful watch as to where it landed, and, in this way, find both arrows. He uses this as an analogy to point out that though he has lost plenty of Antonio's money, he can win it back through his scheme. Many of Shakespeare's audience, familiar with archery, may have found Bassanio's analogy unconvincing.

152–56 You know me well ... waste of all I have: Antonio interrupts to point out his love for Bassanio, implying that Bassanio doesn't need to introduce his request in such a manner. Antonio claims to feel more wronged in Bassanio questioning the depth of his friendship than if Bassanio had wasted all of his money.

164–65 Nothing undervalued ... Brutus' Portia: She is no less valuable than the wife of the honourable Roman politician Brutus. This Portia is briefly portrayed in the play *Julius Caesar*, which Shakespeare probably wrote shortly after *The Merchant of Venice*.

168–71 Her sunny locks ... come in her quest of her: See **Before you read**.



ANTONIO

O my Antonio, had I but the means
 To hold a rival place with one of them,
 I have a mind presages me such thrift,
 That I should questionless be fortunate. 175

Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;
 Neither have I money nor commodity
 To raise a present sum. Therefore go forth;
 Try what my credit can in Venice do:
 That shall be racked, even to the uttermost, 180
 To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.
 Go, presently inquire, and so will I,
 Where money is; and I no question make
 To have it of my trust or for my sake.

[All exit]



172–75 Had I but the means ... questionless be fortunate: Bassanio thinks that if he had the funds to go to Belmont and put on an impressive display of wealth, he would win Portia and her fortune ('thrift' = financial profit).

177 Commodity: Merchandise (security for the loan).

179 Credit: Financial status.

179–81 Try what my credit ... furnish thee to Belmont: Antonio promises to stretch his credit (borrowing power) to the limit in order for Bassanio to woo Portia ('racked' = stretched).



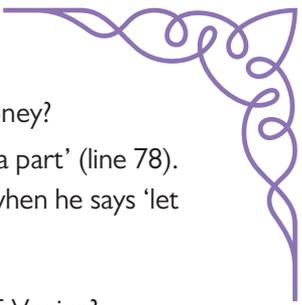
QUESTIONS

- 1 What do Salerio and Solanio think is bothering Antonio?
- 2 What is Bassanio's opinion of Gratiano (especially of his conversation)?
- 3 What is Bassanio like at managing his finances? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 4 Why does Bassanio need to borrow more money?
- 5 Re-read Bassanio's speech beginning 'In Belmont is a lady ...' (lines 160–75). What qualities of Portia does Bassanio particularly praise?
- 6 Why is Antonio unable to lend Bassanio the money he needs straight away?
- 7 What does Antonio propose to do to help Bassanio?
- 8 What do we know about Antonio from this scene?



EXTEND

- 1 What does Salerio mean when he says 'your mind is tossing on the ocean' (line 8)? What poetic device is he using here?
- 2 What does Bassanio mean when he says 'Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing' (line 114)?
- 3 Why is Antonio not worried about his business interests (lines 41–45)?
- 4 How does the venture Bassanio is proposing compare with the strategy he would employ to seek a lost arrow when he was younger (lines 139–51)? What literary or rhetorical device is he using here?

- 
- 5 Is there any evidence that Bassanio is interested in Portia's money?
 - 6 Antonio sees the world as 'a stage where every man must play a part' (line 78). Is this in any way ironic? How does Gratiano extend this irony when he says 'let me play the fool' (line 79)?



Based on the opening scene, what is your impression of the city of Venice?

Introducing similes, metaphors and conceits

If you have ever called someone hot, a pig, a gun, a dog or even a legend, then you have used a **metaphor**. A metaphor is not literally true but it makes a powerful comparison that is true in a deeper sense. If, for example, you call your brother a *pig*, you know that he is not literally a pig, but you might be communicating something about his manners or perhaps how much he eats. If you describe a shot on the soccer pitch as a *rocket*, you know it's not literally a rocket, but you are commenting on the shot's speed and power. At the beginning of the play, Salerio says to Antonio 'Your mind is tossing on the ocean' (line 8). Obviously this is not literally true; but it is a powerful statement of what it might be like for a merchant who could lose all his wealth at sea.

Similes work in much the same way, but whereas a metaphor is a direct statement of equivalence (my brother *is* a pig), similes make clear that one thing is being compared to another (my brother *is like* a pig). Similes make the nature of the comparison clear but are less direct than metaphors. In the previous scene, Bassanio uses a simile to describe Portia's hair that hangs 'on her temples like a golden fleece' (line 169).

Conceits are extended metaphors, which were very popular with poets and playwrights in Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare regularly employs them in his plays and sonnets. The metaphysical poets, like John Donne, who began writing towards the end of Shakespeare's career, filled their poetry with conceits, and the device remains popular with contemporary poets and songwriters. The Ben Lee song 'Cigarettes Will Kill You' is a good example. The song compares a bad relationship to cookery: 'You throw me in a pan / You cook me in a can ... You love to watch me bake / You serve me up with cake'. This extended metaphor or conceit is explored throughout the entire song.

When Bassanio compares Portia's hair to a 'golden fleece', two lines later he extends this simile by saying 'many Jasons come in quest of her' (line 171). Here Bassanio is referring to Jason and the Argonauts, from classical mythology, who went on a quest to find the Golden Fleece: he thus extends a simile into a conceit. Similarly, earlier in the scene, Antonio compares 'the world' to 'a stage where every man must play a part' (line 78) and he then extends this to a conceit by saying his part is a sad one (line 79).



Act 1 Scene 2

CHARACTERS

Portia
Nerissa
Servant

IN A NUTSHELL



The setting shifts to Belmont, where Portia and her servant, Nerissa, discuss Portia's situation. Before his death, Portia's father left a will specifying that she must marry the man who chooses correctly from one of three caskets. As Nerissa lists all of the men who wish to marry Portia (the suitors), Portia explains why she finds each of them unappealing. Nerissa recalls a time when the Venetian, Bassanio, came to visit and Portia admits to liking him. A servant announces that the Prince of Morocco will soon arrive.

Before you read

- The will left by Portia's father plays an important role in *The Merchant of Venice*. Any man wishing to marry Portia, and in doing so claim her vast fortune, must choose from three caskets the one containing her portrait. The three caskets are gold, silver and lead and each bears an inscription in the form of a poem or riddle. This is why Nerissa says: 'who chooses his [Portia's father] meaning chooses you' (lines 30–31). The stakes are high because all of the suitors have to swear that, if unsuccessful, they will never marry. It is important to remember how drastic this penalty would be for any nobleman intending to father an heir to continue the family line.
- When Portia dismisses Falconbridge as a potential husband, her first reason is the language barrier between them. She complains that she only has a little English ('a pennyworth') and, although she finds Falconbridge attractive, she compares their attempts at communication to mimes or 'dumb-shows'. She goes on to remark how 'oddly' he is dressed or 'suited' and comments that he got his 'doublet' (a tunic) in Italy, his 'round hose' (trousers) in France and his 'bonnet' (hat) in Germany. This paints the baron Falconbridge as comical through clashing styles of dress.



By my troth: I tell the truth
Aught: Anything
Superfluity: Excess
Divine: Priest



Virtuous:	Full of goodness (virtue)
Colt:	Young male horse
Requite:	Pay back
Wooer:	Someone looking to persuade (in matters of love)

Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

[Enter PORTIA and NERISSA]

PORTIA By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.

NERISSA You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are; and yet, for aught I see, they are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean: superfluity 5 comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer.

PORTIA Good sentences and well pronounced.

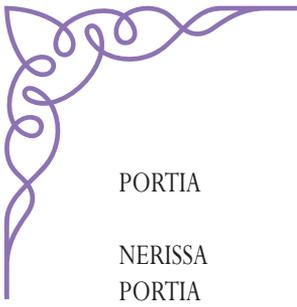
NERISSA They would be better, if well followed.

PORTIA If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good 10 divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree: such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple. But this reasoning is not in 15 the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one nor refuse none?

NERISSA Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good 20 inspirations. Therefore the lottery, that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will, no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly but one



- 2-4 **You would be ... that starve with nothing:** Nerissa points out that Portia really would be weary (or sad) if her miseries were as great as her wealth, but observes that people with great wealth are often as miserable as those who are poor and starving.
- 5 **It is no mean happiness; therefore, to be seated in the mean:** Nerissa puns on the word 'mean', meaning, firstly, slight and then average. She reasons that people of middling income (neither rich or poor) are probably the happiest.
- 5-6 **Superfluity comes sooner ... competency lives longer:** Those who have excessive wealth age faster than those who have average wealth.
- 7 **Well pronounced:** Well delivered.
- 13-15 **The brain may devise ... good counsel the cripple:** Portia states that the brain may give counsel or set rules in place, which a passionate youthful nature will leap over ('meshes' = nets used in hunting).



who shall rightly love. But what warmth is there in your affection towards any of these princely suitors that are already come? 25

PORTIA I pray thee, over-name them, and as thou namest them, I will describe them; and, according to my description, level at my affection.

NERISSA First, there is the Neapolitan prince.

PORTIA Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I am much afraid my lady his mother played false with a smith. 30

NERISSA Then there is the County Palatine.

PORTIA He doth nothing but frown, as who should say 'If you will not have me, choose'. He hears merry tales and smiles not. I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher when he grows old, being so full of unmannerly sadness in his youth. I had rather be married to a death's-head with a bone in his mouth than to either of these. God defend me from these two! 35

NERISSA How say you by the French lord, Monsieur Le Bon?

PORTIA God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man. In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker but he! Why, he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan's, a better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine; he is every man in no man. If a throstle sing, he falls straight a-capering: he will fence with his own shadow. If I should marry him, I should marry twenty husbands. If he would despise me I would forgive him, for if he love me to madness, I shall never requite him. 40 45

NERISSA What say you then to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

PORTIA You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him. He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but, alas, who can converse with a dumb-show? How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany and his behaviour everywhere. 50

NERISSA What think you of the Scottish lord, his neighbour?

PORTIA That he hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore he would pay him again when he was able. I think the Frenchman became his surety and sealed under for another. 55



26 **Over-name them:** Run through their names again.

30–32 **And he makes it a great ... played false with a smith:** The Neapolitan Prince is proud that he can shoe his own horse but this only makes Portia suspicious that his mother had an affair with a blacksmith, making his father a commoner, rather than a noble. While Portia is of course joking, she is being very snobbish in saying this ('appropriation' = taking something for your own use).

43 **Throstle:** A bird commonly known as a thrush.

43–44 **Falls straight a-capering:** Immediately begins dancing.

55–58 **That he hath a neighbourly ... under for another:** Portia jokes that he is generous because he promised to pay back a blow he received from the English suitor and that the French suitor undersigned this imaginary bond.

NERISSA How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew? 60
 PORTIA Very vilely in the morning, when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon, when he is drunk. When he is best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast. And the worst fall that ever fell, I hope I shall make shift to go without him.

NERISSA If he should offer to choose, and choose the right casket, you should 65
 PORTIA refuse to perform your father's will, if you should refuse to accept him. Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee, set a deep glass of Rhenish wine on the contrary casket, for if the devil be within and that temptation without, I know he will choose it. I will do anything, Nerissa, ere I'll be married to a sponge. 70

NERISSA You need not fear, lady, the having any of these lords. They have acquainted me with their determinations, which is, indeed, to return to their home and to trouble you with no more suit, unless you may be won by some other sort than your father's imposition depending on the caskets. 75

PORTIA If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will. I am glad this parcel of wooers are so reasonable, for there is not one among them but I dote on his very absence, and I pray God grant them a fair departure.

NERISSA Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar 80
 PORTIA and a soldier, that came hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat? Yes, yes, it was Bassanio; as I think so was he called.

NERISSA True, madam. He, of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady.

PORTIA I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise. 85

[Enter a servingman]

– How now! what news?
 SERVANT The four strangers seek for you, madam, to take their leave: and there is a forerunner come from a fifth, the Prince of Morocco, who brings word the prince his master will be here to-night.

63–64 And the worst fall ... to go without him: If the worst scenario should come about (presumably the Duke choosing to risk the lottery), Portia hopes he will choose incorrectly.

70 Sponge: A drunk, someone who soaks up alcohol.

73 Suit: Offer of marriage.

76–77 If I live to be ... my father's will: Portia puns on the 'will' (legal document) overriding her own will (desire). Sibylla, from classical mythology, was granted an extremely long life by the god Apollo. Diana is the goddess of virginity or hunting in classical mythology.

87–88 There is a forerunner come from a fifth: A fifth suitor's messenger has arrived, shortly before his master.

If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good a heart as I can bid the other four farewell, I should be glad of his approach. If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me. Come, Nerissa. – Sirrah, go before. – Whiles we shut the gates upon one wooer, another knocks at the door.

[All exit]



91–93 If he have the condition of a saint ... shrive me than wive me: If he is saintly, Portia would rather that he hear her confess her sins than marry her. The devil was often depicted as black in medieval paintings and Portia plays on this in a way modern audiences may find offensive.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Portia say is her condition at the beginning of this scene?
- 2 How does Nerissa feel about the lottery Portia’s father devised?
- 3 Draw up and complete the table below to summarise Portia’s complaints about her suitors.

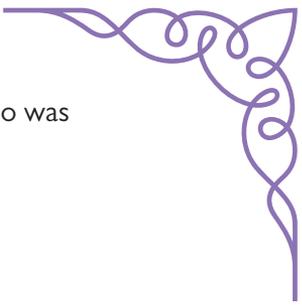
Suitor	Portia’s complaint (summarise in your own words)	Any positives (put a cross if none)
the Neapolitan prince		
Count Palatine		
Monsieur Le Bon		
Baron Falconbridge		
the Scottish lord		
the Duke of Saxony’s nephew		

- 4 How does Portia feel about the suitors in general?
- 5 What does she think of Bassanio?
- 6 Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to portray all of Portia’s suitors in such unflattering terms? What might his dramatic purpose be in doing this?



EXTEND

- 1 How do Portia’s opening words ‘I am awearied of this great world’ (line 1) echo the opening of the previous scene?
- 2 What do you think Portia means when she says of Falconbridge, the English Lord, that he got ‘his behaviour [from] everywhere’ (line 53)?
- 3 What do you think Portia means when she says of the French suitor, Monsieur Le Bon, ‘He is every man in no man’ (line 43)?

- 
- 4 What part of Portia's line 'Yes, yes it was Bassanio; as I think so was he called' (line 82):
 - a suggests excitement and desire for Bassanio?
 - b suggests she is guarded about revealing her true feelings?

Michael Radford: DVD Chapter 5 (At Belmont)



- 1 **Mise en scène** is a French term that literally translates to 'placing on the stage'. To study *mise en scène* means to consider the way cinematic elements such as costume and the setting appear in the frame of the film. How does Radford use *mise en scène* to convey that Portia is 'richly left'?
- 2 In contrast to Venice, the scenes in Belmont are filled with light and the sound of birdsong. What atmosphere does this create?
- 3 How does Radford use the visual prop of the portrait to suggest that Portia's father plays a powerful part in her life, despite his death?
- 4 How does Nerissa deliver the line when she attempts to convince Portia of the wisdom of her father? Do you think the actor playing the part of Nerissa conveys scepticism or does she appear convinced?
- 5 When Portia and Nerissa describe the suitors they are literally above them looking down. How is this direction appropriate in conveying their attitude towards the suitors?
- 6 How do costume, actions and diegetic sound contribute to making the suitors unappealing? (Diegetic sound is the sound contained in the world of the film, e.g. characters talking or moving things around.)



For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe ...

The Diaspora and the Jews

The next scene introduces the most famous character in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, who is a Jew. You will quickly come to notice that Shylock is an outsider, persecuted and hated by almost all the other characters in the play. Jews were second-class citizens in Renaissance Venice and, wherever they resided – Europe, North Africa or the Middle East – they were treated with varying degrees of hostility.

The Jewish kingdoms of Judea and Israel were conquered by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC and became part of the Roman Empire in the first century BC. During this time, Jewish communities were established throughout the Roman Empire (in the Middle East, Europe and North Africa). The word Diaspora was a term coined to describe the Jewish communities living in exile from their homeland in Palestine. These





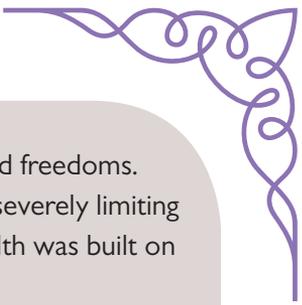
communities always lived in tension with the prevailing Greek (Hellenistic) thought and culture, which often viewed the Jewish religion with disdain. At times the Jews living in the Diaspora enjoyed relative freedom, but at other times they were persecuted by local leaders and were victims of mob violence and popular riots.

In 66 AD a Jewish revolt broke out against Roman rule in Palestine. This was brutally suppressed by Roman soldiers who marched into Jerusalem, demolished the Temple that was the centre of Jewish worship and massacred or sold into slavery the members of its civilian population. Another Jewish revolt followed in 131 AD and this time the Roman Army laid waste to all Judea, massacred or starved almost a million Jews and sold the remainder of the population into slavery. The great numbers of refugees created by this conflict further swelled the Diaspora.

In the fourth century AD, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This added further tension for the Jews: Christianity had grown out of Judaism – Jesus and his original followers were in fact all practising Jews – and the Jewish religion's refusal to embrace Jesus Christ as their saviour (or God's Messiah) became a source of tension and often a cause for hostility. Many Christians ridiculed the Jews as 'Christ-killers'. Because of the Jews' strict observance of religious practices, which locals found strange and incomprehensible, and their tendency to live apart from the local community, they were often viewed with suspicion.

In medieval times many Jews were involved in finance, including banking and money lending (usury). The chief reason for this was that Christians were prohibited from charging interest for lending money, while Jews were not. During this time, the Jews were excluded from most professions in towns and cities by the powerful trade guilds. But, as usury was essential for investment in major projects and for wealth-creating ventures, such as trade, the authorities usually permitted it. Throughout Europe the Jews generally bore the burden of heavy taxation, which was meant to negate any sort of profit they made from charging high rates of interest. This caused the Jews, in turn, to charge even higher rates of interest, further fuelling public resentment. When riots broke out, Jewish property was often the first to be looted and, in more extreme cases, citizens murdered the Jews to whom they owed money.

The Jewish plight became worse during the Crusades. These were a series of European campaigns led by the Catholic Church to reclaim territories lost since the rise of Islam. These campaigns often coincided with popular riots and violence against local Jewish communities, which led to theft and widespread murder. Local authorities were often powerless to offer protection and, in some cases, even condoned the violence. The later Crusades coincided with the Black Death (the great plague of the fourteenth century) and rumours circulated that Jews had caused it by poisoning wells. It was common by the late Middle Ages for the Jewish population of a city to live in a ghetto.



This arrangement offered Jews some level of protection but also curtailed freedoms. At night the gates of the ghetto were locked and guarded by Christians, severely limiting the freedom of movement of the Jewish community. Venice, whose wealth was built on trade, had a particularly sizeable Jewish ghetto.

The greatest tragedy in Jewish history occurred during World War II, when Jewish people from Germany and Nazi-occupied territories were rounded up and sent to concentration camps, where they were used as slave labour and killed in large groups with nerve gas. This event, known as the Holocaust, claimed the lives of six million Jews, and always plays on a director's mind when staging a production of *The Merchant of Venice* today.

Act 1 Scene 3

CHARACTERS

Shylock
Antonio
Bassanio

IN A NUTSHELL

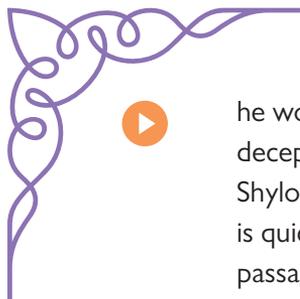


The action returns to Venice where Bassanio and the wealthy Jew, Shylock, discuss the possibility of a loan that Antonio will be responsible for repaying. In an aside, Shylock reveals his hatred for Antonio and his desire to harm him. When Antonio arrives, the two of them debate the morality of lending money. Shylock points out Antonio's unfair treatment of him, but although Antonio does not soften in his attitude, Shylock agrees to make the loan, with the condition that if Antonio cannot repay it then Shylock will take a pound of his flesh. Despite Bassanio's reluctance, Antonio consents to these terms and the men arrange to meet later that day to formalise the agreement.

Before you read

- This scene is filled with terms relating to usury. Antonio is described as 'sufficient', meaning that he is able to repay the loan. Both parties make an agreement ('a bond'), with the condition being that if Antonio fails to repay ('forfeits') the loan, Shylock will take a pound of his flesh.
- Shylock tells a story from the Old Testament about Jacob and Laban. While Jacob (a Jew) was looking after Laban's flocks, he struck a deal with him that





he would keep every dark and spotted lamb and goat as his wages. Jacob then deceptively manipulated the animals' breeding so that he became wealthy. Shylock uses this story as justification for how he makes money, but Antonio is quick to argue that a moral or ethical conclusion cannot be drawn from the passage. Shylock's argument causes Antonio to scornfully remark to Bassanio that 'the devil can cite scripture for his purposes' (line 87).



Ducats:	Venetian gold coins
Imputation:	Suggestion
Argosy:	Merchant ship
Rialto:	The main business district of Venice
Thrift:	Being wise with money
Fulsome:	Fat; abundant or lustful
Usance / Userances:	Interest
Go to:	Get moving
Notary:	Witness or observer

Venice. A public place.

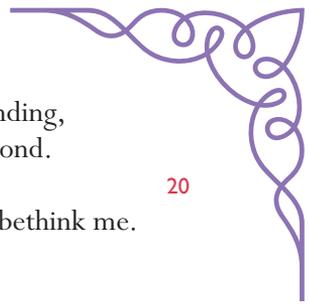
[Enter BASSANIO and SHYLOCK]

SHYLOCK Three thousand ducats; well.
 BASSANIO Ay, sir, for three months.
 SHYLOCK For three months; well.
 BASSANIO For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.
 SHYLOCK Antonio shall become bound; well. 5
 BASSANIO May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?
 SHYLOCK Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound.
 BASSANIO Your answer to that.
 SHYLOCK Antonio is a good man.
 BASSANIO Have you heard any imputation to the contrary? 10
 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. Yet his means are in supposition:
 he hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies. I understand,
 moreover, upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for
 England, and other ventures he hath squandered abroad. But ships 15
 are but boards, sailors but men; there be land-rats and water-rats,
 water-thieves and land-thieves, I mean pirates, and then there is the



12 **In supposition:** Tied up in other investments.

15–18 **But ships are but boards ... waters, winds and rocks:** Shylock points out that as Antonio is a merchant, he might not be able to repay the loan if his ships come to grief. He lists the many dangers of the sea: rats, 'pirates' (a pun on rats), rocks and dangerous storms.



peril of waters, winds and rocks. The man is, notwithstanding, sufficient. Three thousand ducats, I think I may take his bond.

BASSANIO Be assured you may. 20

SHYLOCK I will be assured I may; and, that I may be assured, I will bethink me. May I speak with Antonio?

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. What news on the Rialto? Who is he comes here? 25

[Enter ANTONIO]

BASSANIO This is Signior Antonio.

SHYLOCK [Aside] How like a fawning publican he looks! 30

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. 35

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! 40

BASSANIO Shylock, do you hear?

SHYLOCK I am debating of my present store, And, by the near guess of my memory, I cannot instantly raise up the gross Of full three thousand ducats. What of that? 45

Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe, Will furnish me. But soft, how many months Do you desire?

[To ANTONIO] – Rest you fair, good signior; Your worship was the last man in our mouths.



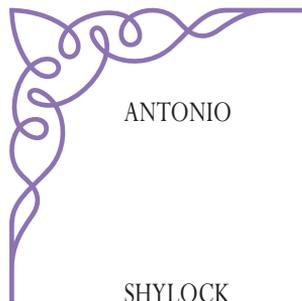
24–25 **Yes, to smell pork ... conjured the devil into:** Shylock is referring to Matthew’s Gospel in the New Testament in which Jesus cast evil spirits into a herd of pigs. Jews and Muslims are forbidden to eat any pork product.

30 **Fawning publican:** A slimy (or crawling) tax collector.

33–34 **He lends out money ... with us in Venice:** Shylock complains that when Antonio lends out money without charging interest, he lowers the rate of interest that the Jews can charge.

35 **If I can catch him once upon the hip:** If I can get him at a disadvantage (a wrestling term).

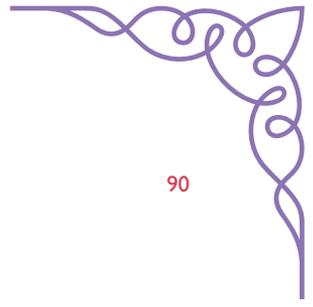
44 **I cannot instantly raise up the gross:** Shylock states that he cannot access that kind of money straight away.



ANTONIO	Shylock, although I neither lend nor borrow By taking nor by giving of excess, Yet, to supply the ripe wants of my friend, I'll break a custom. Is he yet possessed How much ye would?	50
SHYLOCK	Ay, ay, three thousand ducats.	
ANTONIO	And for three months.	55
SHYLOCK	I had forgot; three months; you told me so. Well then, your bond; and let me see; but hear you, Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow Upon advantage.	
ANTONIO	I do never use it.	
SHYLOCK	When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep – This Jacob from our holy Abram was, As his wise mother wrought in his behalf, The third possessor; ay, he was the third –	60
ANTONIO	And what of him? Did he take interest?	
SHYLOCK	No, not take interest, not, as you would say, Directly interest: mark what Jacob did. When Laban and himself were compromised That all the eanlings which were streaked and pied Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes, being rank, In the end of autumn turned to the rams; And, when the work of generation was Between these woolly breeders in the act, The skilful shepherd peeled me certain wands, And, in the doing of the deed of kind, He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes, Who then conceiving did in eaning time Fall parti-coloured lambs, and those were Jacob's. This was a way to thrive, and he was blest: And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.	65 70 75
ANTONIO	This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for; A thing not in his power to bring to pass, But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven. Was this inserted to make interest good? Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?	80
SHYLOCK	I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast: But note me, signior.	85
ANTONIO	Mark you this, Bassanio, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.	



82 But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven: Antonio does not think anyone can draw a moral or ethical conclusion from this passage, because it was a special case where Jacob was instructed to act by God.



An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart. 90

SHYLOCK O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!
Three thousand ducats; 'tis a good round sum.
Three months from twelve; then, let me see; the rate –

ANTONIO Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?

SHYLOCK Signior Antonio, many a time and oft 95
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances.
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, 100
And spit 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; 105
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 110
A cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or
Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath and whispering humbleness,
Say this:
'Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last; 115
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. 120
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 125
Exact the penalty.

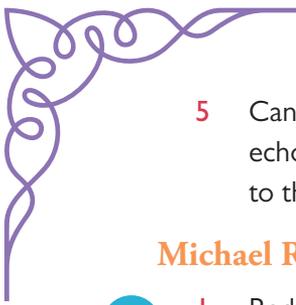


94 **Beholding to you:** Indebted to you.

101 **Jewish gaberdine:** Jewish coat or cloak (gaberdine is a type of fabric).

106–09 **You, that did void ... What should I say to you:** Shylock points out that Antonio has spat at him and kicked him like a dog. He questions why, considering this, he should lend him money.

112 **In a bondman's key:** In the tone of a slave.

- 
- 5 Can you think of any way in which details from Scene 2 are paralleled or echoed in Scene 3? Think, in particular, of Portia's situation and her reaction to the Prince of Morocco.

Michael Radford: DVD Chapter 8 (Negotiations with Shylock)



- 1 Radford sets this scene in the marketplace of Venice, where things are bought and sold. Why do you think he chooses to set Antonio's request for a loan from Shylock in a butcher's stall?
- 2 List the ways in which the *mise en scène* of this scene contrasts with the previous scene set in Belmont.
- 3 In what ways do visual images and props foreshadow the events of the courtroom trial?

A word about soliloquies and asides

You are probably familiar with television soap operas, with their predictable plots and abundance of plastic surgery. You might have noticed that the characters on these sorts of shows sometimes express their thoughts aloud to themselves when nobody else is around! Actually, this is not as strange as it sounds – Shakespeare had his characters doing this hundreds of years ago; it is known as a **soliloquy** (*so-li-lo-kwee*).

A soliloquy involves a character talking when he or she is alone. Shakespeare uses this device to help the audience understand the mind of the character who is speaking and their motives for what they are doing or planning to do. We talk to ourselves all the time (try thinking without language!) and soliloquies reflect this. The device was used by some playwrights before Shakespeare but he is generally considered the first writer to genuinely capture the inner workings of the human mind, especially in his later plays such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. *The Merchant of Venice* contains only a few soliloquies. One example occurs in Act 2 Scene 2, when Launcelot appears onstage alone and debates whether or not he should leave his employer, Shylock.

Similar in some ways to soliloquies, **asides** are often indicated by [*Aside*] in the stage directions. Where soliloquies are quite lengthy and are delivered with no-one else on the stage, asides are usually quite brief and allow a character to reveal his or her thoughts without the other characters onstage being aware that he or she is speaking. In Act 1 Scene 3, Shylock's aside (lines 30–41) gives the audience insight into his real motivations, allowing them to understand his hatred for Antonio. Shakespeare uses another aside in Act 3, which allows the audience to understand Portia's fear that she will lose Bassanio if he chooses the wrong casket.

Act 2

Act 2 Scene 1

CHARACTERS

Prince of Morocco
Portia



IN A NUTSHELL

The Prince of Morocco arrives at Belmont to try his luck in the casket lottery with the hope of winning Portia as his wife. Portia explains to Morocco that if he is unsuccessful he will never be able to marry. He accepts this condition and is told he must wait until after dinner to choose a casket.

Before you read

- In Act 1 we were introduced to Shylock, an outsider in Venice because of his race and religion. Here we see another outsider, the Prince of Morocco, whose culture and skin colour set him apart from ‘the locals’ at Belmont. It is worthwhile observing throughout the play how the Venetian characters and those at Belmont treat people who are different from themselves.
- Think back to Act 1 Scene 2 when Portia discusses her suitors with Nerissa in an amusing and scathing fashion. Now you are about to see her speak formally and politely to the Prince of Morocco. This shows us that Portia is an intelligent woman who knows how to behave in different social situations. Less generous readers might see her as hypocritical.

V

Mislike:	Dislike
Livery:	Uniform, costume
Valiant:	Brave
Clime:	Country
Hue:	Colour
Yield:	Give



Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

[Enter the PRINCE OF MOROCCO and his attendants; PORTIA, NERISSA and others attending]

MOROCCO Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles, 5
And let us make incision for your love,
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
Hath feared the valiant. By my love I swear
The best-regarded virgins of our clime 10
Have loved it too. I would not change this hue,
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.

PORTIA In terms of choice I am not solely led
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.
Besides, the lott'ry of my destiny 15
Bars me the right of voluntary choosing.
But if my father had not scanted me
And hedged me by his wit, to yield myself
His wife who wins me by that means I told you,
Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair 20
As any comer I have looked on yet
For my affection.

MOROCCO Even for that I thank you:
Therefore, I pray you, lead me to the caskets

- 
-
- 2–3 **The shadowed livery of ... and near bred:** Morocco says that his skin is darker (or more tanned) because he lives closer to the sun.
- 5 **Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles:** Where Phoebus, the god of the sun from classical mythology, barely thaws the ice.
- 6–7 **Make incision ... blood is reddest, his or mine:** Cut ourselves to show who has the reddest blood. The reddest blood would suggest the most courage. Morocco is asserting that he has more courage than any European.
- 8–9 **This aspect of mine / Hath feared the valiant:** My appearance ('aspect') has frightened brave people.
- 13–14 **I am not solely led / By nice direction of a maiden's eyes:** Portia says that she would not base her choice on physical attraction alone.
- 16 **Bars:** Denies.
- 17, 18 **Scanted, hedged:** Restricted.



A word about malapropisms and puns

In the Australian comedy *Kath and Kim*, the characters often use the wrong words to communicate what they wish to say. In one episode, instead of saying, 'I want to be *affluent*, Mum', Kim says, 'I want to be *effluent*.' Affluent means rich, while effluent means sewage or industrial waste. The result of replacing a word with one that sounds similar but means something completely different can be humorous, and is known as a **malapropism**.

The term malapropism comes from the name Mrs Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's humorous play *The Rivals* (1775). In this play, Mrs Malaprop says things like 'He is the very *pineapple* [she means 'pinnacle'] of politeness'. Shakespeare's characters were using malapropisms many years before they were given this name. Perhaps the best-known example is Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

In Act 2 Scene 2 of *The Merchant of Venice*, Launcelot and his father, Old Gobbo, use many malapropisms. Take the following example from Old Gobbo: 'He hath a great infection, sir, as one would say, to serve' (Act 2 Scene 2, line 91). Here Gobbo intends to say 'affection', which means liking or desire, rather than 'infection', which implies illness. The audience understands his mistake even though Gobbo is unaware of it, and this creates humour.

Like malapropisms, **puns** are created through words of similar sounds having different meanings. A pun is an intentional play on words. It may play on the fact that a word has a double meaning ('lie' as in lying down or 'lie' as in not telling the truth) or it may play on the fact that two words sound similar, such as 'made' (meaning created) and 'marred' (meaning ruined). While characters are ignorant of the malapropisms they create, puns are deliberate; and while malapropisms can reveal a character's lack of insight or intelligence, puns in Shakespeare's works are synonymous with (or go hand in hand with) wit and intelligence. It is interesting that, while he is prone to malapropisms, Launcelot enjoys playing verbal games and punning on words (see, in particular, Act 3 Scene 5).

A particularly frequent pun in *The Merchant of Venice* is on 'gentile' (meaning non-Jewish), 'gentle' (meaning well-born and honourable or refined) and 'Jew'. The Christians of the play tend to view 'Jew' as the opposite to 'gentile' but also as opposite to 'gentle'. Gratiano is, for example, being racist when he remarks: 'A gentle and no Jew' (Act 2 Scene 6, line 51).

Act 2 Scene 2



CHARACTERS

Launcelot
Gobbo
Bassanio
Gratiano
Leonardo



IN A NUTSHELL

Shylock's servant, Launcelot, has a comical argument between his 'conscience' and 'the devil' about whether he should leave Shylock's household. Shylock hasn't been a good employer and Launcelot wants to work for Bassanio. Shortly after, Launcelot meets his blind father, Old Gobbo, and, playing a trick, tells him his son (Launcelot himself) is dead. Bassanio later offers Launcelot employment. Gratiano asks Bassanio if he can come to Belmont and Bassanio agrees on the condition that he doesn't cause trouble.

Before you read

- Launcelot's soliloquy is best read aloud. The parts in quotation marks are spoken by Launcelot's conscience (his good angel) and the fiend (or devil). The speech constitutes a comic debate between the two, and most productions have Launcelot affecting silly or amusing voices. While the fiend tells Launcelot to ignore his duty and run away, his conscience counsels him to stay with Shylock. Because Launcelot sees Shylock as the devil, he ends up following the advice of the fiend.
- This scene, in particular Launcelot's soliloquy, is comical and relies on an understanding of word play (puns and malapropisms) in order to engage with Launcelot and Gobbo's humour.
- You will notice that Bassanio tells Gratiano that his wild behaviour, although not appropriate for his romantic quest to Belmont, is perfectly acceptable, in fact to be encouraged, at their 'boys' night out' (the masque).



Serve:	Assist
Fiend:	Devil
Take heed:	Listen
Via:	Go away
Marry:	By the Virgin Mary
Ergo:	Therefore
Beseech:	Request
Anon:	At once
Proverb:	Well-known saying



Venice. A street.

[Enter LAUNCELOT]

LAUNCELOT Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me, saying to me ‘Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot,’ or ‘good Gobbo,’ or ‘good Launcelot Gobbo, use your legs, take the start, run away.’ My conscience says ‘No; take heed, honest Launcelot; take heed, honest Gobbo,’ or, as 5
aforesaid, ‘honest Launcelot Gobbo; do not run; scorn running with thy heels.’ Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack: ‘Vial!’ says the fiend; ‘away!’ says the fiend; ‘for the heavens, rouse up a brave mind,’ says the fiend, ‘and run.’ Well, my conscience, hanging about the neck of my heart, says very wisely to me, ‘My honest friend Launcelot, 10
being an honest man’s son,’ or rather an honest woman’s son; for, indeed, my father did something smack, something grow to, he had a kind of taste; well, my conscience says ‘Launcelot, budge not.’ ‘Budge,’ says the fiend. ‘Budge not!’ says my conscience. ‘Conscience,’ say I, ‘you counsel well; – Fiend,’ say I, ‘you counsel well.’ To be ruled 15
by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master, who, God bless the mark, is a kind of devil; and, to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend, who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation; and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer 20
to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel. I will run, fiend; my heels are at your command; I will run.

[Enter OLD GOBBO, with a basket]

GOBBO Master young man, you, I pray you, which is the way to master Jew’s?
LAUNCELOT [Aside] O heavens, this is my true-begotten father, who, being more than sand-blind, high-gravel blind, knows me not. I will try confusions 25
with him.
GOBBO Master young gentleman, I pray you, which is the way to master Jew’s?
LAUNCELOT Turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but, at the next turning of all, on your left; marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Jew’s house. 30
GOBBO By God’s sonties, ’twill be a hard way to hit. Can you tell me

1 **This Jew my master:** Launcelot works for Shylock.

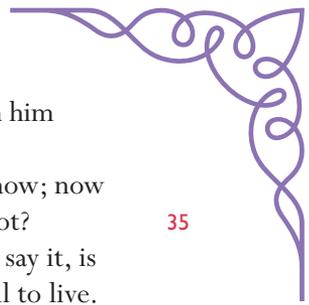
2 **The fiend is at mine elbow:** The devil is at my side (trying to corrupt me).

11–13 **For, indeed, my father ... he had a kind of taste:** Launcelot suggests that his father was dishonest by being sexually unfaithful.

24 **True-begotten:** The father begets the son so this is either a malapropism or an intentional joke.

24–25 **Being more than sand-blind ... knows me not:** [My father], being almost fully blind, doesn’t recognise me.

31 **By God’s sonties, ’twill be a hard way to hit:** Gobbo swears by the saints that this will be a difficult place to find (‘sonties’ = saints).



whether one Launcelot, that dwells with him, dwell with him or no?

LAUNCELOT Talk you of young Master Launcelot? *[Aside]* Mark me now; now will I raise the waters. Talk you of young Master Launcelot? 35

GOBBO No master, sir, but a poor man's son. His father, though I say it, is an honest exceeding poor man and, God be thanked, well to live.

LAUNCELOT Well, let his father be what a' will, we talk of young Master Launcelot.

GOBBO Your worship's friend and Launcelot, sir.

LAUNCELOT But I pray you, ergo, old man, ergo, I beseech you, talk you of young Master Launcelot? 40

GOBBO Of Launcelot, an't please your mastership.

LAUNCELOT Ergo, Master Launcelot. Talk not of Master Launcelot, father; for the young gentleman, according to Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three and such branches of learning, is indeed 45
deceased, or, as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven.

GOBBO Marry, God forbid! The boy was the very staff of my age, my very prop.

LAUNCELOT Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post, a staff or a prop? Do you know me, father?

GOBBO Alack the day, I know you not, young gentleman, but, I pray you, tell 50
me, is my boy, God rest his soul, alive or dead?

LAUNCELOT Do you not know me, father?

GOBBO Alack, sir, I am sand-blind; I know you not.

LAUNCELOT Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes, you might fail of the knowing me; it is a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I will tell 55
you news of your son. *[He kneels]* Give me your blessing. Truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long; a man's son may, but at the length truth will out.

GOBBO Pray you, sir, stand up: I am sure you are not Launcelot my boy.

LAUNCELOT Pray you, let's have no more fooling about it, but give me your 60
blessing. I am Launcelot, your boy that was, your son that is, your child that shall be.

GOBBO I cannot think you are my son.

LAUNCELOT I know not what I shall think of that: but I am Launcelot, the Jew's man, and I am sure Margery your wife is my mother. 65

GOBBO Her name is Margery, indeed. I'll be sworn, if thou be Launcelot, thou art mine own flesh and blood. Lord worshipped might he be!



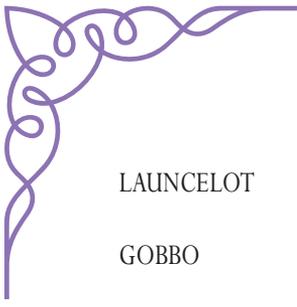
34–35 **Now will I raise the waters:** Now I will make him cry.

43–45 **Talk not of Master ... branches of learning:** Because Launcelot's father is blind and can't see him, Launcelot pretends that he (Launcelot) is dead. The word 'father' here could mean any man. The Sisters Three are the Fates from classical mythology: three goddesses who control human destiny.

48 **Cudgel:** Short stick used as a weapon.

48 **Hovel-post:** Supporting beam used in small houses.

64 **I know not what I shall think of that:** Launcelot jokes with the audience that Gobbo, his father, is suggesting that Launcelot's mother was sexually unfaithful. He deliberately misunderstands his father.



What a beard hast thou got! Thou hast got more hair on thy chin than Dobbin my fill-horse has on his tail.

LAUNCELOT It should seem, then, that Dobbin's tail grows backward. I am sure 70
he had more hair of his tail than I have of my face when I last saw him.

GOBBO Lord, how art thou changed! How dost thou and thy master agree?
I have brought him a present. How 'gree you now?

LAUNCELOT Well, well; but, for mine own part, as I have set up my rest to run
away, so I will not rest till I have run some ground. My master's a 75
very Jew. Give him a present! Give him a halter. I am famished in
his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs. Father,
I am glad you are come: give me your present to one Master Bassanio,
who, indeed, gives rare new liveries. If I serve not him, I will run as
far as God has any ground. O rare fortune! Here comes the man: to him, 80
father; for I am a Jew, if I serve the Jew any longer.

[Enter BASSANIO, with LEONARDO and other followers]

BASSANIO You may do so, but let it be so hasted that supper be ready at the
farthest by five of the clock. – See these letters delivered; put the liveries
to making, and desire Gratiano to come anon to my lodging.

[Exit servant]

LAUNCELOT To him, father. 85

GOBBO God bless your worship –

BASSANIO Gramercy. Wouldst thou aught with me?

GOBBO Here's my son, sir, a poor boy –

LAUNCELOT Not a poor boy, sir, but the rich Jew's man; that would, sir, as my
father shall specify – 90

GOBBO He hath a great infection, sir, as one would say, to serve –

LAUNCELOT Indeed, the short and the long is, I serve the Jew, and have a desire,
as my father shall specify –

GOBBO His master and he, saving your worship's reverence, are scarce
cater-cousins – 95

LAUNCELOT To be brief, the very truth is that the Jew, having done me wrong,
doth cause me, as my father, being, I hope, an old man, shall fruitify
unto you –



69 **Dobbin my fill-horse:** The name of a specific horse that pulls a cart.

76–77 **Give him a present ... I have with my ribs:** Launcelot calls for his master, Shylock, to be hanged because he (Launcelot) is underfed to the point of starvation ('halter' = noose).

79 **Gives rare new liveries:** Liveries were uniforms. It seems that Bassanio is employing lots of servants (an entourage) to make himself appear impressive when he goes to Belmont; Launcelot has obviously heard about this.

87 **Gramercy:** Many thanks.

94–95 **Scarce cater-cousins:** Hardly good friends.

97–98 **Shall fruitify unto you:** A malapropism: he means notify.

GOBBO I have here a dish of doves that I would bestow upon your worship,
and my suit is – 100

LAUNCELOT In very brief, the suit is impertinent to myself, as your worship shall
know by this honest old man; and, though I say it, though old man,
yet poor man, my father.

BASSANIO One speak for both. What would you?

LAUNCELOT Serve you, sir. 105

GOBBO That is the very defect of the matter, sir.

BASSANIO I know thee well; thou hast obtained thy suit.
Shylock thy master spoke with me this day,
And hath preferred thee, if it be preferment
To leave a rich Jew's service, to become 110
The follower of so poor a gentleman.

LAUNCELOT The old proverb is very well parted between my master Shylock
and you, sir: you have the grace of God, sir, and he hath enough.

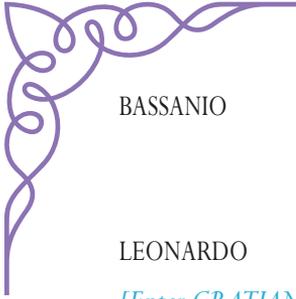
BASSANIO Thou speak'st it well. Go, father, with thy son.
Take leave of thy old master and inquire 115
My lodging out – Give him a livery
More guarded than his fellows'. See it done.

LAUNCELOT Father, in. I cannot get a service, no. I have ne'er a tongue in my head.
Well, if any man in Italy have a fairer table which doth offer to swear 120
upon a book, I shall have good fortune. Go to, here's a simple line of
life: here's a small trifle of wives. Alas, fifteen wives is nothing; eleven
widows and nine maids is a simple coming-in for one man: and then
to 'scape drowning thrice, and to be in peril of my life with the edge
of a feather-bed. Here are simple scapes. Well, if Fortune be a woman,
she's a good wench for this gear. Father, come; I'll take my leave of 125
the Jew in the twinkling.

[Exit LAUNCELOT and OLD GOBBO]



- 99 **Bestow:** Give.
- 100 **Suit:** Request.
- 101 **The suit is impertinent to myself:** Impertinent means disrespectful. Gobbo confuses this with pertinent, meaning relevant; another example of malapropism.
- 117 **More guarded:** More richly decorated or braided.
- 118 **A service:** A job.
- 118 **I have ne'er a tongue in my head:** I'm not good at speaking.
- 119–20 **Well, if any man ... have good fortune:** Launcelot is probably looking at the palm of his hand while saying this and pretending to be a fortune-teller ('table' = palm of the hand; 'to swear upon a book' = to swear a legal oath on the Bible).
- 120–24 **Go to, here's a simple line ... are simple scapes:** Launcelot continues to pretend to read his palm and predicts a future that involves a lot of womanising and various escapes, which include surviving three times from being drowned.
- 124–25 **Well, if Fortune ... good wench for this gear:** Fortune is portrayed as a woman, or more specifically, a goddess in classical mythology. Launcelot reflects that she is a good woman ('wench') for this business ('gear').



BASSANIO I pray thee, good Leonardo, think on this.
 These things being bought and orderly bestowed,
 Return in haste, for I do feast tonight
 My best-esteemed acquaintance. Hie thee, go. 130

LEONARDO My best endeavours shall be done herein.

[Enter GRATIANO]

GRATIANO Where is your master?
 LEONARDO Yonder, sir, he walks.

[Exit LEONARDO]

GRATIANO Signior Bassanio!
 BASSANIO Gratiano! 135

GRATIANO I have a suit to you.
 BASSANIO You have obtained it.

GRATIANO You must not deny me. I must go with you to Belmont.
 BASSANIO Why then you must. But hear thee, Gratiano:
 Thou art too wild, too rude and bold of voice. 140
 Parts that become thee happily enough
 And in such eyes as ours appear not faults;
 But where thou art not known, why, there they show
 Something too liberal. Pray thee, take pain
 To allay with some cold drops of modesty 145
 Thy skipping spirit, lest through thy wild behaviour
 I be misconstrued in the place I go to,
 And lose my hopes.

GRATIANO Signior Bassanio, hear me:
 If I do not put on a sober habit,
 Talk with respect and swear but now and then, 150
 Wear prayer books in my pocket, look demurely,
 Nay more, while grace is saying, hood mine eyes
 Thus with my hat, and sigh and say 'amen',
 Use all the observance of civility,
 Like one well studied in a sad ostent 155
 To please his grandam, never trust me more.



141–44 **Parts that become thee happily ... Something too liberal:** Bassanio tells Gratiano that the qualities that make him fun to hang out with in Venice could be held against him in other situations ('liberal' = extravagant).

144–46 **Pray thee, take pain ... Thy skipping spirit:** Bassanio pleads with Gratiano to keep his more boisterous side in check ('allay' = cool, calm down).

147 **Misconstrued:** Misunderstood.

149 **Sober habit:** Serious appearance.

151 **Demurely:** Shy, modest manner.

154 **Observance of civility:** Behave in the right way.

155 **Sad ostent:** Grave or serious appearance.

BASSANIO Well, we shall see your bearing.
 GRATIANO Nay, but I bar tonight. You shall not gauge me
 By what we do tonight.

BASSANIO No, that were pity.
 I would entreat you rather to put on
 Your boldest suit of mirth, for we have friends
 That purpose merriment. But fare you well;
 I have some business.

GRATIANO And I must to Lorenzo and the rest:
 But we will visit you at supper-time.

160

165

[All exit]



158–59 **Nay, but I bar tonight ... what we do tonight:** Do not include what we do tonight in judging me.

161 **Boldest suit of mirth:** Great happiness.

162 **Purpose merriment:** Intend to have fun.



QUESTIONS

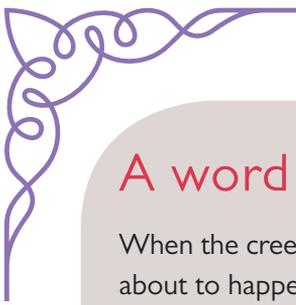
- 1 What is Launcelot's moral dilemma in this scene?
- 2 What do lines 76–77 ('I am famished in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs') tell us about Launcelot's experience of Shylock as a master?
- 3 What favour does Gratiano ask of Bassanio? What is Bassanio's response?
- 4 How does the use of malapropism in this scene enhance your understanding of the characters of Launcelot and his father?



EXTEND

- 1 In this scene we see, in the form of a harmless prank, a son deceiving his father. How does the scene foreshadow events in another father–child relationship in the play? Hint: read the Act 2 summary on page 17.
- 2 This is a short, light-hearted scene. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to structure his play so that more serious plots are interspersed with lighter, humorous ones?
- 3 Copy and complete the table below on malapropisms.

Character	Malapropism	Real / Intended Meaning
Launcelot		The very devil <i>incarnate</i>
	He hath a great <i>infection</i> (line 91)	
Gobbo		<i>effect</i> of the matter



A word about foreshadowing

When the creepy music starts in a movie you know something frightening or terrible is about to happen. It's like the music is sending out a warning or a signal. In a similar way, authors give us hints or warnings about what will happen later in the text and this is known as **foreshadowing**.

For example, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the appearance of rats in the central character's apartment creates a feeling of unease about the future and even hints at events later in the novel when rats are used to torture him. In Frank Darabont's film *The Shawshank Redemption*, the evil prison warden crushes a cigarette beneath his foot a moment before he has a prisoner shot. Likewise, in TS Eliot's poem 'Journey of the Magi' the three wise men, on their way to visit the newborn Jesus, see 'three trees on the low sky' – an image that foreshadows Jesus' death on the cross between two criminals.

Act 2 Scene 2 shows the deception and mistreatment of old Gobbo by his son, Launcelot, and this foreshadows the far more serious deception and mistreatment of Shylock by his daughter, Jessica, in the coming scenes. Look for more foreshadowing in Act 2 Scene 3.

Act 2 Scene 3

CHARACTERS

Jessica
Launcelot



IN A NUTSHELL

Shylock's daughter, Jessica, is sad to see Launcelot leave, but she has a plan of her own. She gives a letter to Launcelot to give to Lorenzo, who is staying with Bassanio. Lorenzo is a Christian and Jessica intends to marry him.

Before you read

- Jessica and Launcelot have no doubt formed a close friendship through living with the difficult Shylock, and their affection is clear in this scene.
- When Jessica speaks alone onstage at the end of this scene her speech is called a *soliloquy* (see **A word about soliloquies and asides** on page 44). Soliloquies often reveal important personal thoughts and feelings of a character.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does line 2 ('Our house is hell') tell us about Jessica's life with her father? What poetic device is used here?
- 2 Whom does Jessica love and plan to marry?
- 3 When Launcelot says 'Tears exhibit my tongue' (line 10) he means to say inhibit (prevent). What literary device is Shakespeare using here?



EXTEND

- 1 Do lines 2–3 give any insight into why Jessica is unhappy living with Shylock?
- 2 Is there a word Jessica uses that makes her appear melodramatic or contradicts her complaint in line 2? Explain your answer.



What a wit-snapper are you!

Shakespeare's clowns

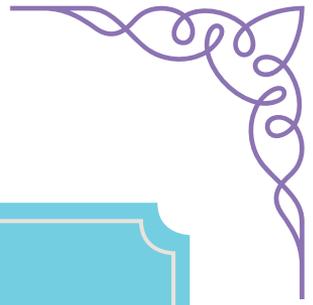
The principal comic actor was among the stars of any company in Shakespeare's time and very popular with the audience. It is likely *The Merchant of Venice* was first performed around 1597. At the time, the main comic actor in Shakespeare's company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men) was William Kemp, a man renowned for a slapstick approach to comedy. It is impossible for us to know what Kemp's performance would have looked like but Shakespeare probably had his talents in mind when he wrote the part of Launcelot. Kemp left the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599, and, for a bet, famously Morris-danced almost 150 km from London to Norwich the following year. He later wrote about this event in the book *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder*. By the 1590s, Kemp's more physical style of comedy had become unfashionable in the theatres and audiences were ready for a new kind of comic actor.

Shakespeare's company replaced William Kemp with Robert Armin, and it is likely that he played the part of Launcelot in subsequent productions of the play. While Kemp was renowned for dancing and physical comedy, Armin had a famous singing voice, more suited to the later comic roles Shakespeare wrote, such as Feste in *Twelfth Night*. We can assume Armin's portrayal of Launcelot would have been very different from Kemp's.



Illustration from Kemps Nine Daies Wonder of William Kemp dancing from London to Norwich

Act 2 Scene 4



CHARACTERS	IN A NUTSHELL
Lorenzo Launcelot Gratiano Solanio Salerio	<i>Launcelot gives Lorenzo a letter from Jessica explaining how she plans to flee with money and jewels stolen from her father. Lorenzo decides to fetch Jessica then bring her back to the party disguised as a boy so that she can be a torchbearer.</i>

Before you read

- A child going against his or her parent’s wishes is a universal and timeless theme and always makes for an interesting and exciting story: think of Romeo and Juliet who go behind the backs of their feuding parents to get married. Here we learn of Jessica deceiving her father, a Jew, to elope (run away) with Lorenzo, a Christian.

V	Hand: Handwriting
	Sup: Eat
	Masque: Masked ball
	Page’s suit: Costume of young male servant
	Issue: Child

Venice. A street.

[Enter GRATIANO, LORENZO, SALERIO, and SOLANIO]

LORENZO Nay, we will slink away in supper-time,
 Disguise us at my lodging and return,
 All in an hour.

GRATIANO We have not made good preparation.

SALERIO We have not spoke us yet of torchbearers.

SOLANIO ’Tis vile, unless it may be quaintly ordered,
 And better in my mind not undertook.

LORENZO ’Tis now but four o’clock. We have two hours
 To furnish us.

5

[Enter LAUNCELOT, with a letter]



- 6 **Quaintly ordered:** Organised elegantly.
- 9 **Furnish us:** Get ready.



LAUNCELOT Friend Launcelot, what's the news? 10
 LORENZO And it shall please you to break up this, it shall seem to signify.
 LORENZO I know the hand. In faith, 'tis a fair hand;
 And whiter than the paper it writ on
 Is the fair hand that writ.

GRATIANO Love-news, in faith.

LAUNCELOT By your leave, sir. 15
 LORENZO Whither goest thou?
 LAUNCELOT Marry, sir, to bid my old master the Jew to sup tonight
 with my new master the Christian.
 LORENZO Hold here, take this. Tell gentle Jessica
 I will not fail her; speak it privately. 20

[Exit LAUNCELOT]

Go, gentlemen;
 Will you prepare you for this masque tonight?
 I am provided of a torch-bearer.

SOLANIO Ay, marry, I'll be gone about it straight.
 SOLANIO And so will I.

LORENZO Meet me and Gratiano 25
 At Gratiano's lodging some hour hence.

SALERIO 'Tis good we do so.

[Exit SALERIO and SOLANIO]

GRATIANO Was not that letter from fair Jessica?
 LORENZO I must needs tell thee all. She hath directed 30
 How I shall take her from her father's house,
 What gold and jewels she is furnished with,
 What page's suit she hath in readiness.
 If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,
 It will be for his gentle daughter's sake;
 And never dare misfortune cross her foot, 35
 Unless she do it under this excuse,
 That she is issue to a faithless Jew.
 Come, go with me: peruse this as thou goest.
 Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer.

[All exit]



-
- 11 **Break up:** Open.
- 12–14 **In faith, 'tis a fair hand ... hand that writ:** The hand means, firstly, the style of writing and, secondly, her literal hand, making this a pun. The Elizabethans believed fair skin to be beautiful. Here, Lorenzo is not only praising Jessica's beauty but also hinting at her moral purity. We might disagree with Lorenzo about this.
- 31–32 **What gold and jewels ... she hath in readiness:** In the letter, Jessica informs Lorenzo of what she is stealing and of her page-boy disguise.
- 38 **Peruse this:** Study this (letter) closely.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Jessica's letter to Lorenzo say?
- 2 What does Jessica plan to take with her when she leaves her home?



EXTEND

- 1 This scene contains acts of deception. Comment on the way Shakespeare uses costume in this scene to portray this idea.
- 2 Lorenzo states, 'If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's sake' (lines 33–34). Is this comment in any way ironic considering Jessica's actions?

A word about personification

You may remember that a metaphor is not literally true but makes a powerful comparison that is true in a deeper sense. For example, 'my brother is a pig'.

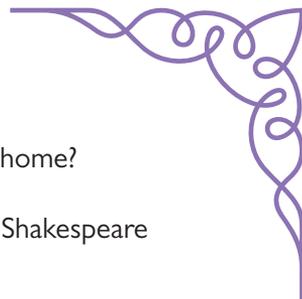
Personification is a special kind of metaphor where human feelings or qualities are attributed to unconscious or inanimate things. Personification is often used by poets; for example, Australian poet Jemal Sharah writes in her poem 'Motorbike Accident': 'the road // slapped up like a violent hand'. Here, Sharah gives the inanimate or lifeless road the human feature of a hand. As well, the action of slapping someone perfectly captures the shock and the shattering impact of coming off a motorbike at high speed. The poet Kevin Hart begins his poem 'Storm' with the following lines:

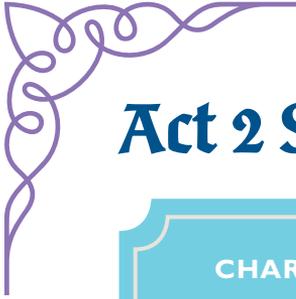
My garden falls quiet, falls into the darkest of moods,
Not wanting me around this afternoon.

Here Hart attributes the human quality of mood, more specifically bad temper, to a non-human garden. There is more than one example of personification in the following passage from the English poet Craig Raine's poem 'Karma'. See if you can find them.

... a naughty wind has blown
The dress of each tulip
over its head.

We often use personification in everyday speech; perhaps you have heard such phrases as 'a lonely road', 'a biting wind' or 'a welcoming fire' and never considered the metaphorical strangeness of these expressions. In Act 2 Scene 5, Shylock uses personification when discussing his house. Look out for more personification in later scenes, particularly in descriptions of the sea and moon.





Act 2 Scene 5

CHARACTERS

Shylock
Launcelot
Jessica



IN A NUTSHELL

Shylock is invited to Antonio's for supper but doesn't want to go because, being a Jew, he does not want to eat with Christians. However, he decides to go out of spite, and warns Jessica to lock up their house and beware of any festivities in the street. Launcelot tells Jessica to look out for Lorenzo when he comes.

Before you read

- It is interesting to realise that Shylock, who is a solitary character in this play, is never alone onstage at any time. This scene foreshadows his becoming even more of a lone figure when he is confronted with the loss of his daughter, Jessica.
- You might notice some similarities that Shakespeare has created between the characters of Jessica and Portia. Both have domineering fathers and neither has a mother.
- It is clear that Launcelot has already told Shylock of his decision to work for Bassanio. Shylock hints that Launcelot might not find his new employer as generous as he has been. Towards the end of the scene, Shylock reflects on some of Launcelot's bad qualities and expresses his hope that Launcelot will speed Bassanio's bankruptcy.



Gormandise:	Over-eat
Prodigal:	Someone who has been wasteful and extravagant
Masque:	A show or party
Casement:	Window
Foppery:	Foolishness; stupidity
Sirrah:	A term used to address people of a lower rank
Patch:	Fool; clown

Venice. Before Shylock's house.

[Enter SHYLOCK and LAUNCELOT]

SHYLOCK Well, thou shalt see, thy eyes shall be thy judge,
The difference of old Shylock and Bassanio. —
What, Jessica! — thou shalt not gormandise,
As thou hast done with me — What, Jessica! —
And sleep and snore, and rend apparel out —
Why, Jessica, I say!

5

LAUNCELOT Why, Jessica!
SHYLOCK Who bids thee call? I do not bid thee call.
LAUNCELOT Your worship was wont to tell me that I could do nothing without bidding.

[Enter JESSICA]

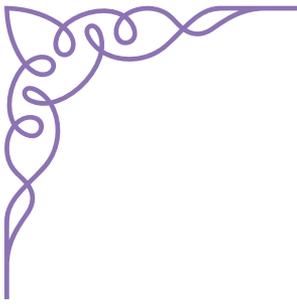
JESSICA Call you? What is your will?
SHYLOCK I am bid forth to supper, Jessica: 10
There are my keys. But wherefore should I go?
I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon
The prodigal Christian. Jessica, my girl,
Look to my house. I am right loath to go. 15
There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest,
For I did dream of money-bags tonight.
LAUNCELOT I beseech you, sir, go. My young master doth expect your reproach.
SHYLOCK So do I his.
LAUNCELOT An they have conspired together, I will not say you shall see a masque; 20
but if you do, then it was not for nothing that my nose fell a-bleeding
on Black-Monday last at six o'clock i' the morning, falling out that
year on Ash-Wednesday was four year, in the afternoon.
SHYLOCK What, are there masques? Hear you me, Jessica:
Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum 25
And the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,
Clamber not you up to the casements then,
Nor thrust your head into the public street

8 **Your worship was wont ... nothing without bidding:** Given Launcelot is leaving Shylock's service, this line may be delivered sarcastically. Launcelot is saying that Shylock was accustomed to ('wont to') restricting him from doing anything without strict command. Launcelot may be implying that this is no longer the case.

15 **I am right loath to go:** I really don't want to go.

16-17 **There is some ill a-brewing ... money-bags tonight:** Shylock has a feeling that something is wrong and that his dream of money is some kind of bad omen.

20-23 **I will not say you shall ... in the afternoon:** After almost letting the plan slip, Launcelot covers up by talking nonsense. He may also be mocking Shylock's belief in omens. 'Black-Monday' and 'Ash-Wednesday' are holy days.



To gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces;
 But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements: 30
 Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter
 My sober house. By Jacob's staff, I swear,
 I have no mind of feasting forth tonight:
 But I will go. Go you before me, sirrah;
 Say I will come.

LAUNCELOT I will go before, sir. 35
 Mistress, look out at window, for all this:
 There will come a Christian by,
 will be worth a Jewess' eye.

[Exit LAUNCELOT]

SHYLOCK What says that fool of Hagar's offspring, ha? 40
 JESSICA His words were 'Farewell mistress', nothing else.

SHYLOCK The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder,
 Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day
 More than the wild-cat. Drones hive not with me;
 Therefore I part with him, and part with him
 To one that would have him help to waste 45
 His borrowed purse. Well, Jessica, go in.
 Perhaps I will return immediately.
 Do as I bid you; shut doors after you.
 Fast bind, fast find;
 A proverb never stale in thrifty mind. 50

[Exit SHYLOCK]

JESSICA Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost,
 I have a father, you a daughter, lost.

[Exit]



-
- 29 **Varnished faces:** Shylock could be describing make-up or possibly carnival masks.
 - 39 **Hagar's offspring:** Hagar was the Egyptian (and therefore non-Jewish) mother of Abraham's first child. This child was called Ishmael and his descendants didn't continue practising the Jewish faith.
 - 49–50 **Fast bind, fast find ... never stale in thrifty mind:** An old saying that Shylock believes is always useful ('never stale') to a clever mind engaged in making profit ('thrifty mind'). The proverb is a pun, with 'fast' meaning both quick and to bind something or secure it. This saying advises the hearer to protect their possessions, and is ironic given Jessica's imminent departure.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What are Shylock's instructions to Jessica before leaving the house?
- 2 Shylock says Launcelot is 'a huge feeder' and 'snail-slow in profit' (lines 41–42). What does he mean by these statements?



- 3 Shylock is reluctant to go out, as shown when he says ‘But wherefore should I go? / I am not bid for love; they flatter me / But yet I’ll go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian’ (lines 11–14). What does this tell us about his feelings towards Christians?
- 4 What does Launcelot tell Jessica about Lorenzo?
- 5 Find and quote an example of personification in one of Shylock’s speeches.



- 1 Think back to Act 2 Scene 2, when Launcelot made the claim he could ‘tell every finger I have with my ribs’ (line 77). Here Shylock describes Launcelot as ‘a huge feeder’, which contradicts Launcelot’s previous comment. How does this show us that Shylock has different opinions about what is generous and what is excessive?
- 2 When Launcelot says ‘My young master doth expect your reproach’, he means ‘approach’ (line 18). What literary device is Shakespeare using here? How does this statement carry an extra meaning for the audience, or how is it ironic?
- 3 Consider the kind of atmosphere Shylock creates within his own home using key words and phrases. Copy and complete the table shown below.

Shylock’s phrases	Atmosphere created
‘Lock up my doors’ (line 25)	Secure Suspicious
‘Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter my sober house’ (line 31)	
‘But stop my house’s ears’ (line 30)	Oppressive
‘Do as I bid you, shut doors after you’ (line 48)	

- 4 Re-read Jessica’s final rhyming couplet. Do you think there is any suggestion in these lines that she is apprehensive about marrying Lorenzo?



Shylock’s line, ‘I did dream of money bags tonight’ (line 17), shows us he is apprehensive about leaving his home to dine with Christians. Bearing in mind what we know is about to happen, how is this an example of foreshadowing? Hint: refer to the Act 2 summary on page 17.



Michael Radford: DVD Chapters 9 and 10 (Bassanio's preparations and Jessica's plans)



Note: in Radford's film, the sequence of events in Act 2 differs from the order in the play. Chapter 9 is the second half of Scene 2; Chapter 10 combines Scenes 3 and 5.

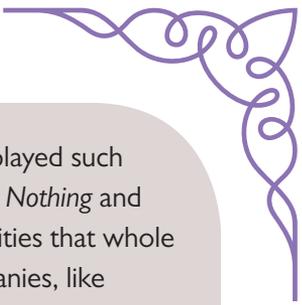
- 1 In this scene, when Bassanio is organising an expedition to woo Portia in Belmont, we see him kissing a costume and reclining on his couch. What do these actions tell us about his character?
- 2 What diegetic and non-diegetic elements contribute to the atmosphere of frivolity and excess? (Diegetic sound is the sound contained in the world of the film, e.g. characters talking or moving things around, or music heard by the characters. Non-diegetic sound can only be heard by the film audience.)
- 3 What diegetic and non-diegetic elements does Radford use to create an atmosphere of foreboding in Shylock's home?
- 4 How does the atmosphere of Shylock's home contrast with the previous scene?
- 5 How is Jessica's isolation emphasised in this scene? What cinematic techniques, including the character's actions, contribute to this?
- 6 Comment on the timing of lightning in this scene. How does this create a further sense of foreboding?
- 7 How do intimate domestic details, such as Jessica helping Shylock into his coat, contribute to the pathos (sadness) of this scene?
- 8 List three diegetic sounds used in this scene and comment on how they contribute to the atmosphere of Shylock's home.
- 9 Describe the final shot of Shylock departing. What visual elements emphasise the emotional distance between Shylock and his daughter?



To see me thus transformèd to a boy ...

Female characters and boy actors

Women did not appear on the English stage until 1661. This was mainly because the theatre was considered too dangerous and disreputable for women to work in. Theatre companies in Shakespeare's day avoided this problem by using boy actors, whose voices had not yet broken, to play the parts of female characters. These boy actors would do their apprenticeship and generally stay with the company after their voices broke playing male characters in the same plays.



The boy actors would have to be very accomplished and would have played such demanding roles as Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Rosalind in *As You Like It*. It is testament to the strength of their acting abilities that whole companies of boy actors not only existed but also gave other adult companies, like Shakespeare's, fierce competition. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare jokes about this competition through the group of players who visit Elsinore in Act 2 of the play. In Scene 2, Rosencrantz informs Hamlet that this adult company is now on the road having been driven out of the city by the popularity of a company of boy actors.

Many of Shakespeare's comedies include the plot device of female characters disguising themselves as boys. This obviously made the actor's job easier but also added an extra layer of irony and comedy for the audience, who knew they were watching a boy playing the part of a woman pretending to be a boy. Not only does Jessica dress as a boy in this play, but later, Portia and Nerissa also dress up as a Doctor of the Law and his clerk.

Act 2 Scene 6

CHARACTERS

Gratiano
Lorenzo
Jessica
Antonio
Salerio

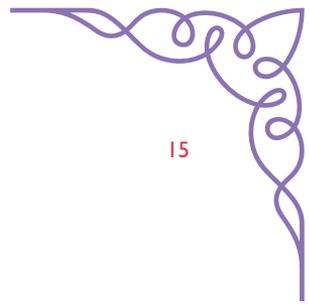


IN A NUTSHELL

Gratiano and Salerio are waiting for Lorenzo outside Shylock's house. Lorenzo arrives and calls up to Jessica. Jessica appears with a casket of her father's money and jewels, which she gives to Lorenzo. She is embarrassed to be seen by Lorenzo because she is dressed as a boy. After they leave, Antonio arrives and tells Gratiano that the masque has been cancelled because the wind has changed and Bassanio's ship can now set sail for Belmont.

Before you read

- You will notice the contrasting behaviour of the Venetian Christians when compared with Shylock's behaviour in the previous scene. These men discuss the pleasure of chasing after things that they want, while Shylock's concern is locking up the things he holds dear.



How like a younker or a prodigal
 The scarfèd bark puts from her native bay,
 Hugged and embraced by the strumpet wind!
 How like the prodigal doth she return,
 With over-weathered ribs and ragged sails,
 Lean, rent and beggared by the strumpet wind.

15

SALERIO Here comes Lorenzo; more of this hereafter.

20

[Enter LORENZO]

LORENZO Sweet friends, your patience for my long abode;
 Not I, but my affairs, have made you wait.
 When you shall please to play the thieves for wives,
 I'll watch as long for you then. Approach;
 Here dwells my father Jew. Ho! Who's within?

25

[Enter JESSICA, above, in boy's clothes]

JESSICA Who are you? Tell me, for more certainty,
 Albeit I'll swear that I do know your tongue.

LORENZO Lorenzo, and thy love.

JESSICA Lorenzo, certain, and my love indeed,
 For who love I so much? And now who knows
 But you, Lorenzo, whether I am yours?

30

LORENZO Heaven and thy thoughts are witness that thou art.

JESSICA Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains.
 I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me,
 For I am much ashamed of my exchange.

35

But love is blind and lovers cannot see
 The pretty follies that themselves commit;
 For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
 To see me thus transformèd to a boy.

LORENZO Descend, for you must be my torchbearer.

40

JESSICA What, must I hold a candle to my shames?
 They in themselves, good-sooth, are too too light.
 Why, 'tis an office of discovery, love.
 And I should be obscured.

LORENZO So are you, sweet,
 Even in the lovely garnish of a boy.

45

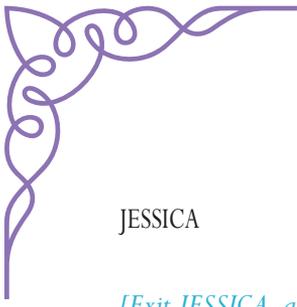


15–19 The scarfèd bark puts ... by the strumpet wind: The ship (decorated with flags) puts out to sea with the aid of the wind but returns to port in a far worse state. By 'strumpet wind' Gratiano means the wind is sluttish or free flowing.

23–24 When you shall please ... I'll watch as long for you then: When either of you do the same thing as I am doing tonight, I'll wait around a similar length of time for you.

43–44 Why, 'tis an office ... I should be obscured: The job or 'office' of torchbearing is to light things up, although Jessica is disguised ('obscured').

45 Garnish: Disguise.



JESSICA But come at once;
 For the close night doth play the runaway,
 And we are stayed for at Bassanio's feast.
 I will make fast the doors, and gild myself
 With some more ducats, and be with you straight. 50

[Exit JESSICA, above]

GRATIANO Now, by my hood, a gentle and no Jew.
 LORENZO Beshrew me but I love her heartily.
 For she is wise, if I can judge of her,
 And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true,
 And true she is, as she hath proved herself, 55
 And therefore, like herself, wise, fair and true,
 Shall she be placèd in my constant soul.

[Enter JESSICA, below]

What, art thou come? On, gentlemen, away!
 Our masquing mates by this time for us stay.

[Exit with JESSICA and SALERIO]

[Enter ANTONIO]

ANTONIO Who's there? 60
 GRATIANO Signior Antonio!
 ANTONIO Fie, fie, Gratiano! Where are all the rest?
 'Tis nine o'clock: our friends all stay for you.
 No masque tonight. The wind is come about;
 Bassanio presently will go aboard. 65
 I have sent twenty out to seek for you.
 GRATIANO I am glad on't. I desire no more delight
 Than to be under sail and gone tonight.

[All exit]



49–50 **I will make fast the doors ... be with you straight:** I will secure the doors and return quickly with more money ('gild' = decorate with gold).

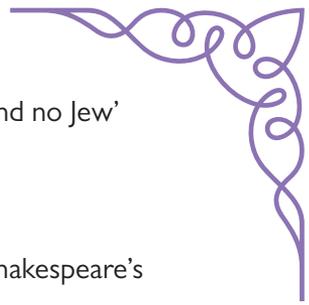
52 **Beshrew me:** Curse me.

64 **The wind is come about:** The wind has changed direction.



QUESTIONS

- 1 Who are Gratiano and Salerio waiting for?
- 2 What does Jessica take from her home before she leaves with Lorenzo?
- 3 At the close of this scene, Antonio tells Gratiano of a change of plan. What is it?
- 4 Why is Jessica dressed as a boy?



- 5 When Gratiano says of Jessica, 'Now by my hood, a gentle and no Jew' (line 51), what impresses him about her behaviour?
- 6 Quote an example of personification from this scene.



EXTEND

- 1 Considering female roles were originally played by males in Shakespeare's time, comment on the irony of Jessica's lines:
 - a 'But love is blind' (line 36)
 - b 'Cupid himself would blush / To see me thus transformèd to a boy' (lines 38–39).
- 2 In what way is it ironic that Jessica is embarrassed about her appearance, given her recent behaviour?



DISCUSS

- 1 Gratiano tells his friends that 'All things that are, / Are with more spirit chased than enjoyed' (lines 12–13). Can you think of a time in your life when the feeling of anticipation turned out to be better than the experience itself?
- 2 Do you think Jessica's actions in this scene are justified? Based solely on this scene, do you think Shakespeare presents Jessica's plight sympathetically?

Introducing dramatic irony

Imagine your friend is making fun of someone and does not know (but you do) that your teacher is standing right behind them! How would you feel? Tense? Like diving across in slow motion and shouting, 'Nooooo!?' This is what **dramatic irony** is all about. Sometimes while viewing a play we are placed in the position of knowing more than the characters onstage. This creates dramatic tension between the characters' limited knowledge and our greater knowledge.

Shakespeare's tragedies, such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*, contain a great deal of dramatic irony. We (the audience) often know things that the characters don't and this can create a sense of tension, as well as a desire to stop the characters from saying or doing things that might lead to harm. From the time Shylock delivers his aside in Act 1 Scene 3, the audience is aware of his malice and deadly intentions in a way that Bassanio and Antonio are not. Likewise, in the previous scenes, the audience knows Jessica is going to run away. That Shylock does not know this creates not only tension but possibly a sense of sadness as well.

Sometimes, though, dramatic irony can be harmless or even humorous. The television show *The Simpsons* often employs this kind of humorous irony. For example, in the 'Brother from Another Planet' episode, we know that Homer has been told to pick up





Bart. While he struggles to remember what he has forgotten to do, the family dog, Santa's Little Helper, makes the barking sound 'Bart, Bart!' and Maggie's burp sounds just like the word 'Bart'. Meanwhile, the television screen that Homer is watching flashes the word 'BART' for a retiring football player and fans roll out a banner with the words 'We'll never forget you, Bart' written in huge letters. Finally, in response to all of these reminders, Homer shouts, 'I can't think with all this noise!' Here, the fact that we know what Homer is supposed to be remembering creates comedy.

Much of the humour in *The Merchant of Venice* is created through dramatic irony. We have already seen that the audience is fully aware of the comical malapropisms created unknowingly by the characters. Similarly, in Acts 4 and 5 we know more about Portia and Nerissa's recent actions than Bassanio and Gratiano do, and enjoy seeing them fool their husbands.

Act 2 Scene 7

CHARACTERS

Prince of Morocco
Portia



IN A NUTSHELL

It is time for Morocco to choose a casket in the hope that he will win Portia as his wife. He studies all three closely, beginning with lead but rejects both this and the silver casket. To Portia's immense relief, Morocco chooses the wrong casket, meaning she can remain safe in her Belmont palace until the next suitor calls.

Before you read

- Remember that Morocco first appeared in Act 2 Scene 1, ready to try his luck in the casket lottery. Shakespeare cleverly creates dramatic tension by breaking up the play's structure with contrasting scenes and plotlines following one another.
- Portia's opening words to Morocco, 'Go, draw aside the curtains and discover' (line 1), are strong and commanding. While Portia would be nervous about Morocco choosing the right casket, she remains assertive and seems to direct the scene.



V

Inscription: Written message
Hazard: Risk
Aught: Anything
Graved: Engraved
O'er: Over
Base: Low; common; unworthy
Complexion: Appearance

Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

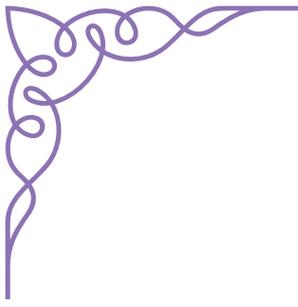
[Flourish of cornets. Enter PORTIA, with the PRINCE OF MOROCCO, and their attendants]

PORTIA	Go, draw aside the curtains and discover The several caskets to this noble Prince. Now make your choice.	
MOROCCO	The first, of gold, who this inscription bears, 'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire;' The second, silver, which this promise carries, 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves;' This third, dull lead, with warning all as blunt, 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' How shall I know if I do choose the right?	5
PORTIA	The one of them contains my picture, Prince: If you choose that, then I am yours withal.	10
MOROCCO	Some god direct my judgement. Let me see: I will survey the inscriptions back again. What says this leaden casket? 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' Must give: for what? For lead? Hazard for lead? This casket threatens. Men that hazard all Do it in hope of fair advantages. A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross; I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead. What says the silver with her virgin hue? 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.' As much as he deserves. Pause there, Morocco, And weigh thy value with an even hand.	15 20 25



18-21 **Men that hazard all ... hazard aught for lead:** Those who risk everything hope to gain worthwhile rewards. I wouldn't risk anything for lead.

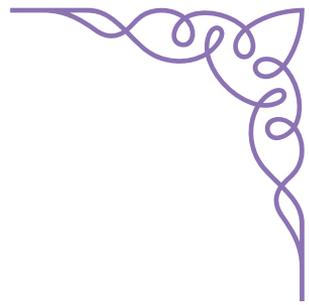
25 **Weigh thy value with an even hand:** Consider these things in an unbiased manner.



If thou be'st rated by thy estimation,
 Thou dost deserve enough; and yet enough
 May not extend so far as to the lady,
 And yet to be afeard of my deserving
 Were but a weak disabling of myself. 30
 As much as I deserve! Why, that's the lady!
 I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,
 In graces and in qualities of breeding;
 But more than these, in love I do deserve.
 What if I strayed no further, but chose here? 35
 Let's see once more this saying graved in gold:
 'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'
 Why, that's the lady! All the world desires her;
 From the four corners of the earth they come,
 To kiss this shrine, this mortal-breathing saint. 40
 The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds
 Of wide Arabia are as thoroughfares now
 For princes to come view fair Portia.
 The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
 Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar 45
 To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,
 As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.
 One of these three contains her heavenly picture.
 Is't like that lead contains her? 'Twere damnation
 To think so base a thought; it were too gross 50
 To rib her cerecloth in the obscure grave.
 Or shall I think in silver she's immured,
 Being ten times undervalued to tried gold?
 O sinful thought! Never so rich a gem
 Was set in worse than gold. They have in England 55
 A coin that bears the figure of an angel
 Stamped in gold, but that's insculped upon;
 But here an angel in a golden bed
 Lies all within. Deliver me the key.
 Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may! 60



-
- 26–30 **If thou be'st rated ... weak disabling of myself:** Morocco considers himself deserving of Portia and thinks he should not show any lack of confidence.
- 41 **Hyrcanian deserts:** Vast, uninhabited deserts in Asia Minor (roughly, modern-day Turkey).
- 44–47 **The watery kingdom ... to see fair Portia:** All sorts of suitors cross the sea, whose waves touch heaven, as if they're only crossing a stream ('brook') to see Portia.
- 49–51 **'Twere damnation ... her cerecloth in the obscure grave:** Morocco thinks it would be insulting to consider that Portia may be contained in a lead casket, even if this casket were her coffin ('cerecloth' = a burial shroud).
- 57 **Insculped upon:** Engraved on the outside.



PORTIA There, take it, prince; and if my form lie there,
 Then I am yours.

[He unlocks the golden casket]

MOROCCO O hell! What have we here?
 A carrion Death, within whose empty eye
 There is a written scroll! I'll read the writing.

65

[Reads]

*All that glisters is not gold;
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms enfold.
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgement old,
Your answer had not been inscrolled.
Fare you well; your suit is cold.*

70

Cold, indeed; and labour lost.
Then, farewell, heat, and welcome, frost.
Portia, adieu. I have too grieved a heart
To take a tedious leave: thus losers part.

75

[Exit with his attendants. Flourish of cornets]

PORTIA A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go.
 Let all of his complexion choose me so.

80

[All exit]



64 **A carrion Death:** A skull.



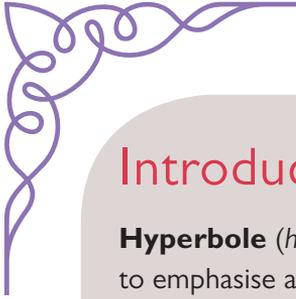
QUESTIONS

- 1 Which casket does Morocco choose?
- 2 What does Portia's closing couplet, 'A gentle riddance ... Let all of his complexion choose me so' (lines 79–80), tell us about her character?
- 3 Find and quote two examples of personification in Morocco's speeches.



EXTEND

- 1 What do you think Shakespeare is saying about the nature of love in the phrase, 'All that glisters is not gold' (line 66)?
- 2 Compare the style of Morocco's speech with that of the message he reads from the gold casket. Look in particular at lines 35–47 in comparison to lines 66–74.



Introducing hyperbole

Hyperbole (*hy-per-bo-lee*) involves the use of a deliberately exaggerated statement to emphasise a point. It is a figure of speech and is not to be taken literally. Imagine something dreadful happens, so you exclaim, ‘*It’s the end of the world!*’ It’s not literally the end of the world, but we know what you mean: you are deliberately exaggerating to let us know that you are upset.

In one episode of the comedy television series *Flight of the Conchords*, one of the characters, Bret, is writing a love song for his girlfriend. The song lists all the things he would do for her to prove his love. The list includes climbing the highest mountain and swimming across the widest river. Jemaine asks if he would actually do this and Bret replies, ‘No. It’s just a metaphor.’ Pop songs, especially love songs, use this sort of over-the-top exaggeration or hyperbole quite often.

You may have noticed that Morocco’s language is packed with hyperbole. In Scene 1 (lines 27–30), Morocco boasts:

I would o’erstare the sternest eyes that look,
Outbrave the heart most daring on the earth,
Pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-bear,
Yea, mock the lion when ’a roars for prey ...

These boasts seem pretty far-fetched. In the previous scene, Morocco’s language is also hyperbolic. Take, for example, his assertion about Portia: ‘All the world desires her’ (line 38). Look out for hyperbole in Act 3 when Bassanio and Portia speak of their love, and again in Act 4 when the Venetians use hyperbole to describe Shylock’s vengeful nature.

Act 2 Scene 8



CHARACTERS

Salerio
Solanio



IN A NUTSHELL

Here Salerio and Solanio explain how Shylock suffered great distress upon discovering that his daughter has fled with his money and jewels. He apparently attempted to have Bassanio's ship searched for Lorenzo and Jessica but it had already left for Belmont. There is also news that a ship has been wrecked and they hope it wasn't Antonio's. They then plan to go and find Antonio to cheer him up.

Before you read

- In the previous scene we saw Morocco lose in the casket lottery, now we are about to hear of Shylock's loss of Jessica and his wealth. Notice how Shakespeare often continues a theme from one scene to the next, even when they involve different characters and plots.
- It is worthwhile considering the reliability of Salerio and Solanio's account of Shylock's behaviour. Given that they are Christian friends of Antonio's, there would be some bias and prejudice in their accounting of Shylock's behaviour.

V

Gondola: Small boat used for transport on the canals of Venice

Amorous: Loving; passionate

Certified: Assured

Reasoned: Talked

Ostents: Expressions

Venice. A street.

[Enter SALERIO and SOLANIO]

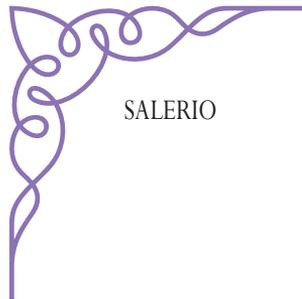
SALERIO Why, man, I saw Bassanio under sail;
 With him is Gratiano gone along,
 And in their ship I am sure Lorenzo is not.

SOLANIO The villain Jew with outcries raised the duke,
 Who went with him to search Bassanio's ship.

5



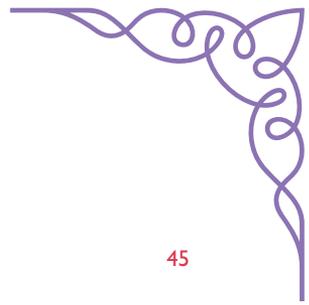
Under sail: Setting off on the sea.



SALERIO	He came too late, the ship was under sail, But there the duke was given to understand That in a gondola were seen together Lorenzo and his amorous Jessica. Besides, Antonio certified the Duke They were not with Bassanio in his ship.	10
SOLANIO	I never heard a passion so confused, So strange, outrageous, and so variable, As the dog Jew did utter in the streets: 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! Justice! The law! My ducats, and my daughter! A sealèd bag, two sealèd bags of ducats, Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter! And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones, Stolen by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl; She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats.'	15 20
SALERIO	Why, all the boys in Venice follow him, Crying, his stones, his daughter, and his ducats.	
SOLANIO	Let good Antonio look he keep his day, Or he shall pay for this.	25
SALERIO	Marry, well remembered. I reasoned with a Frenchman yesterday, Who told me, in the narrow seas that part The French and English, there miscarried A vessel of our country richly fraught. I thought upon Antonio when he told me, And wished in silence that it were not his.	30
SOLANIO	You were best to tell Antonio what you hear; Yet do not suddenly, for it may grieve him.	
SALERIO	A kinder gentleman treads not the earth. I saw Bassanio and Antonio part. Bassanio told him he would make some speed Of his return: he answered, 'Do not so; Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio But stay the very riping of the time.	35 40



-
- 25–26 **Let good Antonio look ... he shall pay for this:** Solanio points out that Antonio will suffer for Shylock's recent misfortune if he cannot repay his debt.
- 29 **Miscarried:** Was wrecked.
- 30 **Richly fraught:** Carrying rich cargo.
- 39–40 **Slubber not business ... stay the very riping of the time:** Antonio advised Bassanio to not hurry back for his sake but to enjoy his courtship.



And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me,
 Let it not enter in your mind of love.
 Be merry, and employ your chiefest thoughts
 To courtship and such fair ostents of love
 As shall conveniently become you there.'

45

And even there, his eye being big with tears,
 Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,
 And with affection wondrous sensible
 He wrung Bassanio's hand; and so they parted.

SOLANIO I think he only loves the world for him.

50

I pray thee, let us go and find him out
 And quicken his embracèd heaviness
 With some delight or other.

SALERIO Do we so.

[All exit]



52 **Embracèd heaviness:** Sad mood.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the cause of Shylock's grief?
- 2 Solanio quotes Shylock as saying, 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!' (lines 15–16).
 - a What is Solanio implying about Shylock's character here?
 - b What tone would an actor employ when delivering these lines?
 - c What seems to be his attitude to Shylock's loss?
- 3 Who is Salerio talking about when he says, 'A kinder gentleman treads not the earth' (line 35)? Can you find anything in the play that contradicts this?
- 4 Find a quote that expresses the depth of Antonio's affection for Bassanio.



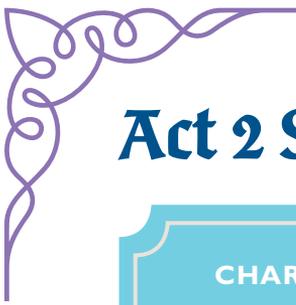
EXTEND

- 1 Shylock is not referred to by name in this scene; instead he is called the 'villain Jew' and the 'dog Jew'. How does this name-calling cause us to sympathise with him?
- 2 Consider the connotations of the name *Shylock*. What words can you find within this name? How might they be relevant to aspects of his character?



DISCUSS

Why do you think Shakespeare has the audience *hear* of Shylock's loss rather than see it acted out by Shylock himself?



Act 2 Scene 9

CHARACTERS

Prince of Arragon
Portia
Servant
Nerissa



IN A NUTSHELL

The Prince of Arragon arrives to take part in Portia's casket challenge. He, like Morocco, dismisses the lead casket and also refuses the golden casket because he believes only ordinary men would pick it. He is unsuccessful in his choice of the silver casket and instead of Portia's portrait he finds a picture of a fool inside. After Arragon has left, a servant announces that a suitor from Venice is believed to be on his way to Belmont. Nerissa hopes it will be Bassanio.

Before you read

- Many elements make *The Merchant of Venice* like a fairytale, the casket plot being the most obvious example. In keeping with the phrase 'third time lucky', we know that Portia's first two suitors have to be unsuitable and unsuccessful so that third suitor can be 'just right'. Can you think of other fairytales in which the best thing is the third of its kind?
- There are many occasions in this play where you might feel the situation is too serious for the play to be a comedy. In the caskets plot, however, there is little doubt that we are intended to laugh at Portia's ridiculous suitors, especially the pompous Prince of Arragon.



Straight:	Immediately
Enjoined:	Bound
Unfold:	Tell
Injunctions:	Conditions
Ere:	Before
Fond:	Foolish
Anon:	Soon

Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

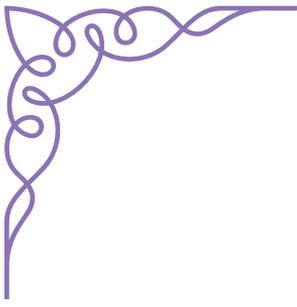
[Enter NERISSA with a servant]

NERISSA Quick, quick, I pray thee; draw the curtain straight:
The Prince of Arragon hath ta'en his oath,
And comes to his election presently.

[Flourish of cornets. Enter the PRINCE OF ARRAGON, PORTIA and their attendants]

PORTIA	Behold, there stand the caskets, noble prince. If you choose that wherein I am contained, Straight shall our nuptial rites be solemnized; But if you fail, without more speech, my lord, You must be gone from hence immediately.	5
ARRAGON	I am enjoined by oath to observe three things: First, never to unfold to anyone Which casket 'twas I chose; next, if I fail Of the right casket, never in my life To woo a maid in way of marriage; Lastly, If I do fail in fortune of my choice, Immediately to leave you and be gone.	10 15
PORTIA	To these injunctions every one doth swear That comes to hazard for my worthless self.	
ARRAGON	And so have I addressed me. Fortune now To my heart's hope! Gold; silver; and base lead. 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' You shall look fairer, ere I give or hazard. What says the golden chest? Ha, let me see. 'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.' What many men desire. That 'many' may be meant By the fool multitude, that choose by show, Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach. Which pries not to the interior but, like the martlet Builds in the weather on the outward wall, Even in the force and road of casualty. I will not choose what many men desire,	20 25 30

- 
-
- 3 **Comes to his election:** Comes to make his choice.
- 6 **Nuptial rites be solemnized:** Marriage ceremony performed.
- 22 **You shall look fairer, ere I give or hazard:** You would have to look better before I would risk everything.
- 26 **The fool multitude:** The foolish common masses, ordinary people.
- 28–30 **Which pries not to the interior ... road of casualty:** The martlet is a small bird that builds its nests on the exteriors of buildings and, in doing so, exposes itself to the unpredictability of the weather. Arragon equates the foolishness of this bird with people who are too concerned by exteriors and choose with their eyes.



Because I will not jump with common spirits
 And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.
 Why, then to thee, thou silver treasure-house. 35
 Tell me once more what title thou dost bear.
 ‘Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.’
 And well said too, for who shall go about
 To cozen fortune and be honourable
 Without the stamp of merit? Let none presume 40
 To wear an undeservèd dignity.
 O, that estates, degrees and offices
 Were not derived corruptly, and that clear honour
 Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!
 How many then should cover that stand bare!
 How many be commanded that command! 45
 How much low peasantry would then be gleaned
 From the true seed of honour! And how much honour
 Picked from the chaff and ruin of the times
 To be new-varnished! Well, but to my choice.
 ‘Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.’ 50
 I will assume desert. Give me a key for this,
 And instantly unlock my fortunes here.

[He opens the silver casket]

PORTIA Too long a pause for that which you find there.
 ARRAGON What’s here? The portrait of a blinking idiot,
 Presenting me a schedule. I will read it. 55
 How much unlike art thou to Portia!
 How much unlike my hopes and my deservings!
 ‘Who chooseth me shall have as much as he deserves.’
 Did I deserve no more than a fool’s head?
 Is that my prize? Are my deserts no better? 60
 PORTIA To offend, and judge, are distinct offices
 And of opposed natures.



32 **Jump with:** Go along with.

38 **Cozen:** Cheat.

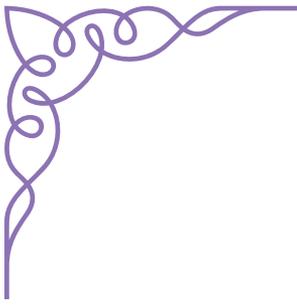
41–43 **O, that estates, degrees ... by the merit of the wearer:** Arragon wishes that possessions, social rank and appointments were not gained corruptly, but justly won by people who deserve to wear these honours.

46–47 **How much low peasantry... From the true seed of honour:** How many peasants would be picked out (‘gleaned’) from the children of the nobility. Arragon suggests that many of the children of the nobility should actually rank as peasants.

47–49 **And how much honour ... To be new-varnished:** And how many of the poorest and lower classes of people are actually worthy of honour.

51 **Desert:** That I deserve.

55 **Schedule:** Scroll.



To signify the approaching of his lord.
 From whom he bringeth sensible regreets,
 To wit, besides commends and courteous breath, 90
 Gifts of rich value. Yet I have not seen
 So likely an ambassador of love.
 A day in April never came so sweet
 To show how costly summer was at hand,
 As this fore-spurrer comes before his lord. 95
 PORTIA No more, I pray thee, I am half afraid
 Thou wilt say anon he is some kin to thee,
 Thou spend'st such high-day wit in praising him.
 Come, come, Nerissa; for I long to see
 Quick Cupid's post that comes so mannerly. 100
 NERISSA Bassanio, lord Love, if thy will it be!

[All exit]



- 89 **Sensible regreets:** Greetings in the form of gifts.
 93–94 **A day in April never ... summer was at hand:** No spring day promising summer has been so sweet.
 95 **Fore-spurrer:** Advance messenger.
 97 **Kin:** Relation
 99–100 **I long to see Quick Cupid's ... so mannerly:** Cupid is the god of love. Portia expresses her wish to see Bassanio's messenger ('mannerly' = courteously).



QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the outcome of the casket lottery for Arragon?
- 2 In lines 31–33 Arragon tells Portia, 'I will not choose what many men desire, / Because I will not jump with common spirits / And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.' What does this statement tell us about Arragon's character?
- 3 Who arrives after Arragon leaves?
- 4 What does the Venetian servant bring with him to Belmont when he arrives ahead of his lord?



EXTEND

- 1 This scene is light in contrast to what precedes and follows it. Why do you think Shakespeare structures the play in this way? Does it work to decrease or increase the dramatic tension of the other scenes?
- 2 Arragon is a place in Spain and therefore a real title. Shakespeare may have considered the sound of this word when he named this character. What word does this name sound like?



DISCUSS

How could 'deceptive appearances' be considered the underlying theme of Act 2?

Act 3

Act 3 Scene 1

CHARACTERS

Shylock
Salerio
Solanio
Tubal
Servant

IN A NUTSHELL

Salerio and Solanio exchange the news of another of Antonio's ships being wrecked. When Shylock enters they mock him for losing his daughter. Shylock confirms Antonio's recent misfortune and threatens that he will be avenged if Antonio fails to repay what he owes. After Salerio and Solanio leave, Shylock has a conversation with another Jew, Tubal, in which he learns more details of Jessica's flight, and of her and Lorenzo's vast spending. The conversation turns to Antonio and the grief-stricken Shylock asserts that in the now-likely event of Antonio being unable to repay the loan he will take his heart.

Before you read

- One purpose of this scene is to provide information to move the plot along. Salerio and Solanio serve a similar function to that of a narrator (or a chorus), revealing important details to the audience.
- This scene includes what is probably the most famous speech of the play (lines 37–50). In this speech, Shylock asserts his right to revenge, and insists that in taking a pound of Antonio's flesh, he is simply mirroring the treatment he has received from Venetian Christians. More importantly, this speech challenges the racist assumptions of Shylock's tormenters.
- Salerio compares Shylock unfavourably to his daughter, Jessica, saying: 'There is more [difference] ... between your bloods than between red wine and Rhenish' (lines 27–28). Rhenish is a white wine from the Rhine Valley in Germany. Here, Salerio uses a literary device called antithesis. **Antithesis** involves the opposition of contrasting ideas in a phrase or sentence. This device is used regularly throughout *The Merchant of Venice*, particularly in the contrast of justice and mercy, Gentile and Jew, and Venice and Belmont.

**V**

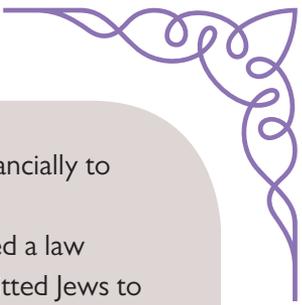
Lading:	Cargo
The Goodwins:	A sandbar in the middle of the English Channel
Withal:	With or in addition to
Prodigal:	Someone who has been wasteful and extravagant
The Rialto:	The main business district of Venice
Thwarted:	Frustrated
Sufferance:	Distress; suffering
Synagogue:	Jewish place of worship

H*The stock of Barrabas ...*

The Jews in England and their depiction in the theatre

The Jews first came to England under the invitation of William the Conqueror in 1070. He believed their financial skills and the capital they provided would be useful for his new kingdom. English Jews were predominantly involved in money-lending and were precluded from most other trades. By the end of the twelfth century they had established communities in many major English towns, including London, Norwich, Winchester, Canterbury, Oxford and Cambridge. English Jews were said to be the King's property and this meant they were under his protection, which was provided, in theory, by local sheriffs.

The Jewish communities enjoyed a time of relative peace for the first 70 years of their settlement, but in 1144 the bloodied corpse of a young boy, William of Norwich, was found in the woods outside the town. As an apprentice to a tanner (a leather-worker) he often visited the houses of Jews and, while a local court found them innocent, rumours spread that the Jews had secretly sacrificed William. This began a popular legend, known as 'blood libel', which alleged that every year, somewhere in Europe, Jews would sacrifice a Christian boy in a gruesome parody of Christ's crucifixion. The Crusades engendered widespread suspicion and sometimes violence against the Jewish population. The worst incident occurred after Richard I's coronation, when a false rumour spread that he had ordered his subjects to massacre the Jewish population, resulting in the deaths of more than a hundred Jews. Jewish communities

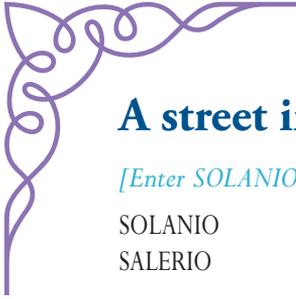


often bore a heavy burden of taxation and were forced to contribute financially to military campaigns, including the Crusades.

When Edward I ascended to the throne in 1272, he immediately passed a law forbidding usury (the lending of money for interest). While Edward permitted Jews to practise farming and other trades, Jewish communities remained locked out of important markets and, unable to adapt quickly enough to gain new skills, many resorted to criminal activities in desperation. In 1290, Edward expelled the remainder of the Jews and, while they were permitted to take all their portable goods, their houses became the property of the Crown. A significant proportion of the Jewish people immigrated to Poland, which was more tolerant at this time. The Jews did not return to England until almost 40 years after Shakespeare's death: Oliver Cromwell extended them an invitation in 1655 during the period when, after the execution of King Charles I, England briefly became a republic.

Critics defending Shakespeare from the charge of being anti-Jewish (anti-Semitic) point out that there were no Jews in England at this time, and therefore the sort of mob violence that could be incited by depicting them in theatres would not have placed any real Jews in danger. There were, however, a group of Marrano Jews living in London at that time who had fled from the Spanish Inquisition. All these Jews were at least outwardly practising Christians. It may have been, however, that behind closed doors, many of them continued adherence to Jewish rituals. In 1594 there was a famous case involving one such Jew, Roderigo Lopez, who as a physician (doctor) to Queen Elizabeth, was accused of plotting to poison her. Some scholars have speculated that his trial and public condemnation may have been a catalyst for Shakespeare's writing of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Shylock was not the first Jew depicted on the English stage. In the early 1590s, a play entitled *Gerontius, the good Jew of Turkey* depicted a noble Jewish character who suffers humiliation and unjust treatment. This play involves a court case that bears some similarities to the one in Shakespeare's play. The most famous depiction of a Jewish character before Shylock is Christopher Marlowe's character, Barabas, in *The Jew of Malta* (1592): a wholly bloodthirsty man who makes it his duty to murder Christians. Marlowe's play was wildly popular and regularly staged and this was surely in the back of Shakespeare's mind when he created the character of Shylock.



A street in Venice.

[Enter SOLANIO and SALERIO]

SOLANIO Now, what news on the Rialto?
SALERIO Why, yet it lives there unchecked that Antonio hath a ship of rich lading wrecked on the narrow seas; the Goodwins, I think they call the place, a very dangerous flat and fatal, where the carcasses of many a tall ship lie buried, as they say, if my gossip report be an honest woman of her word. 5

SOLANIO I would she were as lying a gossip in that as ever knapped ginger or made her neighbours believe she wept for the death of a third husband. But it is true – without any slips of prolixity or crossing the plain highway of talk – that the good Antonio, the honest Antonio – O that I had a title good enough to keep his name company! – 10

SALERIO Come, the full stop.
SOLANIO Ha! What sayest thou? Why, the end is, he hath lost a ship.
SALERIO I would it might prove the end of his losses.
SOLANIO Let me say ‘amen’ betimes, lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew. – 15

[Enter SHYLOCK]

SHYLOCK How now, Shylock! What news among the merchants?
SALERIO You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter’s flight.
SALERIO That’s certain; I, for my part, knew the tailor that made the wings she flew withal.
SOLANIO And Shylock, for his own part, knew the bird was fledged; and then 20 it is the complexion of them all to leave the dam.
SHYLOCK She is damned for it.
SOLANIO That’s certain, if the devil may be her judge.
SHYLOCK My own flesh and blood to rebel!
SOLANIO Out upon it, old carrion! Rebels it at these years? 25
SHYLOCK I say, my daughter is my flesh and blood.
SALERIO There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish. But tell us, do you hear whether Antonio have had any loss at sea or no?



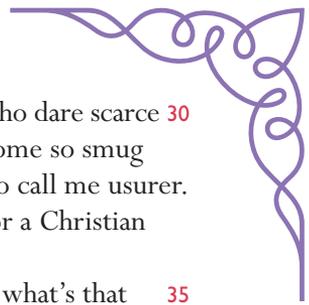
8–9 **Without any slips of prolixity or crossing the plain highway of talk:** Be direct and simple about the situation (prolixity = long-windedness or verbosity).

11 **Come, the full stop:** Get to the point.

14–15 **Let me say ‘amen’ ... likeness of a Jew:** Solanio is suggesting that the approaching Shylock is the devil in disguise and he is saying ‘amen’ for his own protection.

25 **Out upon it ... at these years:** Solanio misunderstands Shylock on purpose. Shylock describes his daughter as his own ‘flesh and blood’, his own child; Solanio interprets his remarks as concerning passionate, sinful desires. He comments that Shylock is too old for these sorts of desires (carrion = a dead and rotting body).

27–28 **There is more difference ... red wine and Rhenish:** see **Before you read** at the beginning of this scene.



SHYLOCK There I have another bad match: a bankrupt, a prodigal, who dare scarce 30
 show his head on the Rialto; a beggar, that was used to come so smug
 upon the mart. Let him look to his bond. He was wont to call me usurer.
 Let him look to his bond. He was wont to lend money for a Christian
 courtesy. Let him look to his bond.

SALERIO Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that 35
 good for?

SHYLOCK To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.
 He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my
 losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,
 cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a 40
 Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions,
 senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same
 weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed
 and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick
 us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, 45
 do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like
 you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,
 what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his
 sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach
 me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. 50

[Enter a servant]

SERVANT Gentlemen, my master Antonio is at his house and desires to speak
 with you both.

SALERIO We have been up and down to seek him.

[Enter TUBAL]

SOLANIO Here comes another of the tribe: a third cannot be matched, unless 55
 the devil himself turn Jew.

[Exit SOLANIO, SALERIO and servant]

SHYLOCK How now, Tubal! What news from Genoa? Hast thou found my daughter?

TUBAL I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her.

SHYLOCK Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone, cost me two thousand
 ducats in Frankfurt! The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I
 never felt it till now: two thousand ducats in that; and other precious, 60



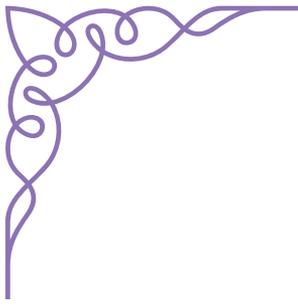
31–32 **That was used to come so smug upon the mart:** Antonio used to be so pleased with himself when he came to the exchange market.

37 **To bait fish withal:** To use as bait to fish with.

54–55 **Here comes another ... himself turn Jew:** Here comes another Jew. Jesus said that where two or more are gathered in his name, he would be present. Solanio's remark plays with or parodies this.

56 **Genoa:** An Italian port-city famous for trade.

59 **Frankfurt:** A wealthy German city.



precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin! No news of them, why, so? And I know not what's spent in the search. Why, thou loss upon loss! The thief gone with so much, and so much to find the thief, and no satisfaction, no revenge; nor no ill luck 65 stirring but what lights on my shoulders, no sighs but of my breathing, no tears but of my shedding.

TUBAL Yes, other men have ill luck too: Antonio, as I heard in Genoa –

SHYLOCK What, what, what? Ill luck, ill luck? –

TUBAL Hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis. 70

SHYLOCK I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true?

TUBAL I spoke with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck.

SHYLOCK I thank thee, good Tubal. Good news, good news! Ha, ha! Heard in Genoa?

TUBAL Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, in one night fourscore ducats.

SHYLOCK Thou stickest a dagger in me: I shall never see my gold again. Fourscore 75 ducats at a sitting! Fourscore ducats!

TUBAL There came divers of Antonio's creditors in my company to Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break.

SHYLOCK I am very glad of it: I'll plague him; I'll torture him. I am glad of it.

TUBAL One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey. 80

SHYLOCK Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

TUBAL But Antonio is certainly undone.

SHYLOCK Nay, that's true, that's very true. Go, Tubal, fee me an officer; bespeak him 85 a fortnight before. I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit; for, were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandise I will. Go, Tubal, and meet me at our synagogue; go, good Tubal; at our synagogue, Tubal.

[All exit]

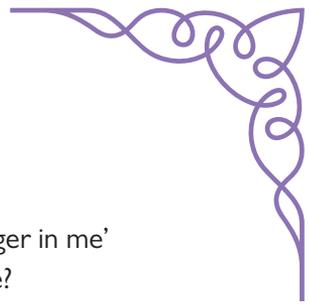


74 **Fourscore ducats:** 80 ducats.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the audience learn about Antonio's misfortune in this scene?
- 2 What opinion do Salerio and Solanio express of Antonio? How does Shakespeare show their concern?
- 3 What is Salerio and Solanio's opinion of Shylock and how do they treat him?
- 4 Read Shylock's speech beginning 'To bait fish withal ...' (lines 37–50), and answer the questions below.
 - a What are Shylock's grievances or complaints against Antonio?
 - b List three things that Shylock says that Jews and Venetians have in common.
 - c Quote the line you find the most moving or emotive.
 - d What action is Shylock attempting to justify in this speech? Does this detract from the power of the speech in your opinion?



- 5 What news does Tubal bring:
 - a about Shylock’s daughter, Jessica?
 - b about Antonio’s situation?
- 6 What does Shylock mean when he says, ‘Thou stickest a dagger in me’ (line 75)? What literary device is Shakespeare employing here?



- 1 What rhetorical and literary devices does Shakespeare employ to demonstrate Salerio and Solanio’s hatred of Shylock? Identify and quote two examples.
- 2 When Shylock asserts that his daughter is ‘damned’ Solanio responds, ‘That’s certain, if the devil is her judge.’ Explain what you think he means by this.
- 3 Read Shylock’s speech beginning ‘To bait fish withal ...’ (lines 37–50), and copy and complete the table below.

Note: rhetorical questions are questions where a reply is not required because the answer is obvious or self-evident, e.g. when your teacher asks, ‘Do you want to miss lunch?’

Technique	Quote(s)	Effect
Comparison (between Jews and Christians)		
Repetition of words and phrases		
Emotive words and phrases		
Rhetorical questions		

- 4 Identify the actions Shylock lists in his speech that do not involve human choice (e.g. pricking causing someone to bleed). Which action in his list does involve a moral choice? What do you think is the significance of this?
- 5 What literary device or devices does Shakespeare employ to communicate Shylock’s excitement at hearing of Antonio’s misfortune?
- 6 How does this scene reflect on Shylock’s daughter, Jessica, and her husband, Lorenzo? How do you think it positions the audience to respond to their characters?
- 7 Why do you think Shakespeare considered prose (rather than poetry) appropriate for this scene?
- 8 Some productions of *The Merchant of Venice* present Salerio and Solanio as showing little genuine concern for Antonio. Can you find evidence in the text to support this interpretation or do you think they are presented as friends who show genuine concern?



Does this scene make you more or less sympathetic towards Shylock? Discuss your reasoning.

Michael Radford: DVD Chapter 14 ('Hath not a Jew eyes?')



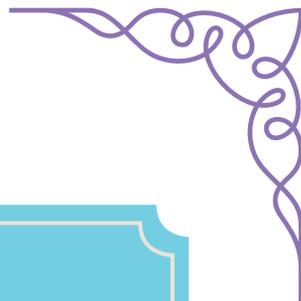
- 1 How would you describe the atmosphere in this scene? What cinematic techniques contribute to this?
- 2 How does Radford contrast the interior world of the Gentiles (Salerio and Solanio) with the exterior shots of the outsider Shylock? Copy and complete the table below.

Character	Film technique used in interior or exterior (e.g. lighting, costume)	Effect of film technique
Jewish Shylock	Exterior – dim pale lighting	Makes Shylock appear solitary, alone, dejected
The Gentiles	Interior –	

- 3 Why do you think Radford chose to have Shylock deliver the most famous speech of the play outside a brothel? Do you think this is effective?
- 4 How does Radford's use of light and colour complement Shylock's speech?
- 5 Radford uses back-and-forth, unstable camera work to shoot this scene. What effect do you think he is aiming to create?
- 6 How would you describe the tone of voice Al Pacino (the actor playing Shylock) uses to deliver his lines?

Note: this scene contains mild nudity.

Act 3 Scene 2 (Part 1)



CHARACTERS

Portia
Bassanio
Narrator (to read
the song)



IN A NUTSHELL

Portia begs Bassanio to delay making his choice because if he chooses incorrectly she will lose his company. Despite this, Bassanio insists that he make his choice immediately because he is tortured until he knows he has won Portia. A song plays while Bassanio makes his choice. He rejects the gold casket because the outward glitter of things often hides evil. After also rejecting the silver, Bassanio chooses the humble lead casket in which he finds Portia's portrait. While the scroll inside instructs Bassanio to claim Portia with a kiss, he instead asks for consent to marry her, which she eagerly gives.

Before you read

- Bassanio insists on taking the love test immediately because he is 'upon the rack'. The rack is a medieval device of torture on which a victim was stretched out. It was used to gather evidence or to extract confessions in extreme cases. When Bassanio uses the rack metaphorically to explain his condition, Portia extends the metaphor by asking what treason he has to confess (treason being disloyalty to the state). In this way, Portia turns Bassanio's metaphor into a **conceit** (an extended metaphor). For more information on conceits see page 29.
- The song Portia orders to be played would have been accompanied by music in the original staging. The song concerns the mystery of romantic love that begins with physical attraction but dismisses this as superficial and short-lived. Some critics have suggested that the song provides Bassanio with a clue for what casket he should choose. The poem inside the casket Bassanio chooses reinforces the importance of looking beyond appearances.



V

- Tarry:** Stay; remain
- Hazard:** Risk
- Forbear:** Stop; avoid
- Amity:** Friendship
- Fancy:** Love; infatuation
- Aught:** Anything
- Surfeit:** Overindulge; feed to excess
- Bereft:** Lacking

Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

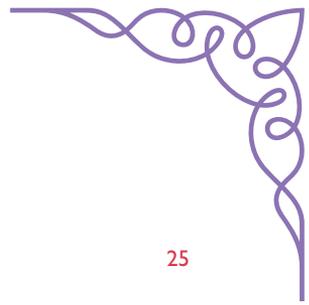
[Enter BASSANIO, PORTIA, GRATIANO, NERISSA and attendants]

PORTIA

I pray you, tarry: pause a day or two
 Before you hazard; for, in choosing wrong,
 I lose your company. Therefore forbear awhile.
 There's something tells me, but it is not love,
 I would not lose you; and you know yourself 5
 Hate counsels not in such a quality.
 But lest you should not understand me well, –
 And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought, –
 I would detain you here some month or two
 Before you venture for me. I could teach you 10
 How to choose right, but I am then forsworn;
 So will I never be. So may you miss me;
 But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin,
 That I had been forsworn. Beshrew your eyes!
 They have o'erlooked me and divided me; 15
 One half of me is yours, the other half yours,
 Mine own, I would say but if mine, then yours,
 And so all yours. O, these naughty times
 Put bars between the owners and their rights.
 And so, though yours, not yours. Prove it so, 20
 Let Fortune go to hell for it, not I.



- 6–10 Hate counsels not ... Before you venture for me:** Portia worries that Bassanio will not choose correctly if he makes his choice immediately, and would like him to wait for a month or two. The phrase 'And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought' is particularly difficult to interpret, and may mean that women must remain silent about their desires.
- 14 Beshrew your eyes:** Curse your eyes.
- 15–16 They have o'erlooked me ... other half yours:** Portia claims that Bassanio's eyes have enchanted (or bewitched) her and divided her, presumably because she sees herself reflected in both eyes. This sort of idea is common in love poetry.
- 18–19 O, these naughty times ... and their rights:** These wicked times prevent individuals possessing what they own.



I speak too long; but 'tis to peize the time,
To eke it and to draw it out in length,
To stay you from election.

BASSANIO Let me choose 25
For as I am, I live upon the rack.

PORTIA Upon the rack, Bassanio! Then confess 25
What treason there is mingled with your love.

BASSANIO None but that ugly treason of mistrust, 30
Which makes me fear the enjoying of my love.
There may as well be amity and life
'Tween snow and fire, as treason and my love.

PORTIA Ay, but I fear you speak upon the rack, 30
Where men enforcèd do speak anything.

BASSANIO Promise me life, and I'll confess the truth.

PORTIA Well then, confess and live.

BASSANIO Confess and love 35
Had been the very sum of my confession.

O happy torment, when my torturer
Doth teach me answers for deliverance!
But let me to my fortune and the caskets.

PORTIA Away, then! I am locked in one of them. 40
If you do love me, you will find me out.
Nerissa and the rest, stand all aloof.

Let music sound while he doth make his choice;
Then, if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,
Fading in music. That the comparison 45

May stand more proper, my eye shall be the stream
And watery death-bed for him. He may win;
And what is music then? Then music is

Even as the flourish when true subjects bow
To a new-crownèd monarch. Such it is 50

As are those dulcet sounds in break of day
That creep into the dreaming bridegroom's ear,
And summon him to marriage. Now he goes,

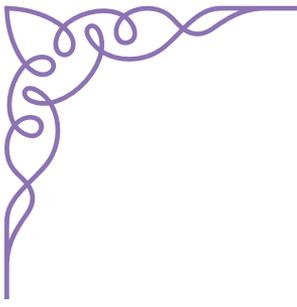


35–38 **Confess and love ... answers for deliverance:** See **Before you read** at the beginning of this scene. After Portia continues the torture conceit by telling Bassanio to 'confess, and live', Bassanio puns on these words with the phrase 'confess and love'. Bassanio then describes himself as 'happy' because the torturer (Portia) teaches him the answers that will deliver him or help him to escape the torture he currently endures.

44 **A swan-like end:** Elizabethans believed that the swan sang just prior to its death (hence the saying 'swan song').

45–47 **That the comparison ... death-bed for him:** Portia suggests that if Bassanio makes the wrong choice, he will drown in the tears she weeps.

51–53 **As are those dulcet sounds ... summon him to marriage:** As those sweet ('dulcet') notes sound, that wake the bridegroom on the morning of his wedding. Waking the bridegroom with music on the morning of the wedding was a tradition in Shakespeare's time.



With no less presence but with much more love
 Than young Alcides, when he did redeem 55
 The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
 To the sea-monster. I stand for sacrifice;
 The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
 With blearèd visages, come forth to view
 The issue of the exploit. Go, Hercules! 60
 Live thou, I live: with much, much more dismay
 I view the fight than thou that makest the fray.

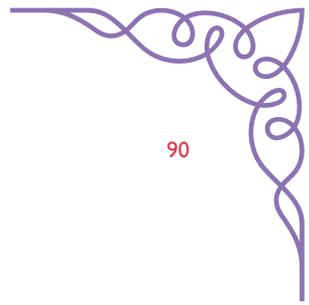
[A song to music, while BASSANIO comments on the caskets to himself]

*Tell me where is fancy bred,
 Or in the heart, or in the head?
 How begot, how nourishèd?* 65
*Reply, reply.
 It is engendered in the eyes,
 With gazing fed; and fancy dies
 In the cradle where it lies.
 Let us all ring fancy's knell 70
 I'll begin it, — Ding, dong, bell.
 Ding, dong, bell.*

BASSANIO So may the outward shows be least themselves.
 The world is still deceived with ornament.
 In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt, 75
 But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,
 Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
 What damned error, but some sober brow
 Will bless it and approve it with a text,
 Hiding the grossness with fair ornament? 80
 There is no vice so simple but assumes
 Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.
 How many cowards, whose hearts are all as false
 As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins
 The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars. 85
 Who, inward searched, have livers white as milk,
 And these assume but valour's excrement
 To render them redoubted. Look on beauty,



-
- 53–57 **Now he goes ... to the sea-monster:** Alcides, or Hercules, rescued Hesione, the King of Troy's daughter, from being sacrificed to a sea monster ('Virgin tribute' = a virgin is being sacrificed).
 - 57–60 **I stand for sacrifice ... of the exploit:** Portia is the sacrifice in this case and commands the other people to step aside ('stand aloof') like the Trojan ('Dardanian') wives, and observe the exploit with tearstained faces ('blearèd visages').
 - 63–72 **Tell me where ... Ding, dong, bell:** See **Before you read** at the beginning of this scene.
 - 74–104 **The world is still deceived ... 'Tween man and man:** The world is still deceived with ornaments; appearances are deceptive.



And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight;
 Which therein works a miracle in nature, 90
 Making them lightest that wear most of it.
 So are those crispèd snaky golden locks
 Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,
 Upon supposed fairness, often known
 To be the dowry of a second head, 95
 The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.
 Thus ornament is but the guiled shore
 To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf
 Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
 The seeming truth which cunning times put on 100
 To entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy gold,
 Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee;
 Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge
 'Tween man and man. But thou, thou meagre lead,
 Which rather threatenest than dost promise aught, 105
 Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence;
 And here choose I; joy be the consequence!
 PORTIA *[Aside]* How all the other passions fleet to air:
 As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embraced despair,
 And shuddering fear, and green-eyed jealousy! 110
 O love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy,
 In measure rein thy joy, scant this excess.
 I feel too much thy blessing: make it less,
 For fear I surfeit.

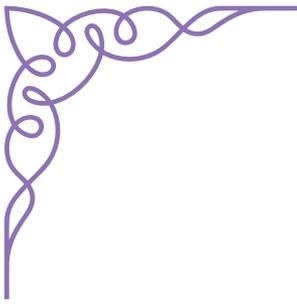
BASSANIO What find I here?

[Opening the lead casket]

Fair Portia's counterfeit! What demi-god 115
 Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
 Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
 Seem they in motion? Here are severed lips,
 Parted with sugar breath: so sweet a bar



-
- 76 **Seasoned:** Made more pleasant.
 - 85 **Hercules:** Hero from classical mythology; **Mars:** The Roman god of war.
 - 86 **Livers white as milk:** Cowards were said to have white livers.
 - 88 **Redoubted:** Feared.
 - 93 **Wanton:** Playful; **Gambols:** Frolics.
 - 96 **Sepulchre:** Tomb.
 - 111 **Allay:** Diminish.
 - 112 **Scant this excess:** Restrain this excess of emotion.
 - 115 **Counterfeit:** Image; **Demi-god:** A lesser god.



Should sunder such sweet friends. Here in her hairs 120
 The painter plays the spider and hath woven
 A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men,
 Faster than gnats in cobwebs; but her eyes,
 How could he see to do them? Having made one,
 Methinks it should have power to steal both his 125
 And leave itself unfurnished. Yet look, how far
 The substance of my praise doth wrong this shadow
 In underprizing it, so far this shadow
 Doth limp behind the substance. Here's the scroll,
 The continent and summary of my fortune. 130

[Reads]

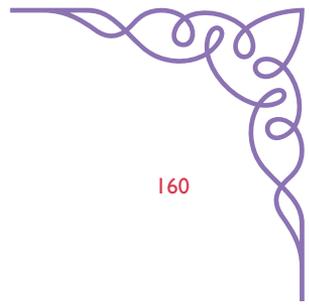
*You that choose not by the view,
 Chance as fair and choose as true!
 Since this fortune falls to you,
 Be content and seek no new.
 If you be well pleased with this 135
 And hold your fortune for your bliss,
 Turn you where your lady is,
 And claim her with a loving kiss.*

A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave.
 I come by note, to give and to receive. 140
 Like one of two contending in a prize,
 That thinks he hath done well in people's eyes,
 Hearing applause and universal shout,
 Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt
 Whether these pearls of praise be his or no; 145
 So, thrice fair lady, stand I, even so,
 As doubtful whether what I see be true,
 Until confirmed, signed, ratified by you.
 PORTIA You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
 Such as I am. Though for myself alone 150
 I would not be ambitious in my wish,
 To wish myself much better; yet, for you
 I would be trebled twenty times myself;
 A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich;
 That only to stand high in your account, 155
 I might in virtue, beauties, livings, friends,
 Exceed account; but the full sum of me



120 **Sunder:** Break apart.

121–29 **The painter plays ... behind the substance:** Bassanio praises Portia's portrait but also notes how inferior it is to the real Portia.



Is sum of something, which, to term in gross,
 Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised,
 Happy in this, she is not yet so old 160
 But she may learn; happier than this,
 She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
 Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,
 As from her lord, her governor, her king. 165
 Myself and what is mine to you and yours
 Is now converted. But now I was the lord
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
 Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now,
 This house, these servants and this same myself 170
 Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring;
 Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
 Let it presage the ruin of your love
 And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
 BASSANIO Madam, you have bereft me of all words, 175
 Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,
 And there is such confusion in my powers,
 As after some oration fairly spoke
 By a beloved prince, there doth appear
 Among the buzzing pleasèd multitude, 180
 Where every something, being blent together,
 Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,
 Expressed and not expressed. But when this ring
 Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence:
 O, then be bold to say Bassanio's dead. 185

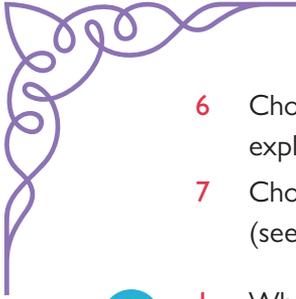


- 158 **Gross:** Coarse or vulgar.
 173 **Presage:** Foretell.
 178 **Oration:** Petition; supplication.
 179–83 **There doth appear ... and not expressed:** Bassanio emphasises the confused joy of his thoughts, and his inability to express them.



QUESTIONS

- 1 Why does Portia want Bassanio to delay making his choice?
- 2 What reason does Bassanio give for making his choice immediately?
- 3 Why does Bassanio choose lead over gold?
- 4 Explain how dramatic irony is employed in this scene. Hint: what knowledge does the audience possess that Bassanio lacks?
- 5 Which of Portia's speeches could be used to argue that she has not told Bassanio which casket to choose? Explain your answer.

- 
- 6 Choose a metaphor or simile from Portia or Bassanio's speeches and explain it.
 - 7 Choose an example of hyperbole from this scene and explain it (see **Introducing hyperbole** on page 76).



EXTEND

- 1 When someone extends a metaphor, we call this a conceit (see **Introducing similes, metaphors and conceits** on page 29). Look at Bassanio's speech after he opens the lead casket (lines 115–30). Find and explain a conceit relating to spiders and flies.
- 2 What does the song (lines 63–72) seem to say about love? Why is the song appropriate to accompany Bassanio's choice?
- 3 The other onstage characters do not hear Bassanio's words but the audience does. What dramatic device does Shakespeare employ in doing this? How does Shakespeare's decision to have Bassanio speaking in this way affect the audience's interpretation of Portia in this scene?
- 4 We know, from earlier scenes, that Portia is aware that Bassanio must choose the lead casket to marry her. While it is clear that she does not tell him directly to choose this casket, she does seem to give some hints. Can you find any clues in either her words at the beginning of this scene, or in the content and rhyme of the song that Portia orders to be played? Does this affect your opinion of Portia?



DISCUSS

Do you think Shakespeare could have built more tension in this scene? How could he have done this? Why do you think he decided against doing this?

Appearances and reality

An underlying message of this play could be: 'don't judge by appearances', or 'appearances can be deceiving'. The casket lottery, designed for suitors who want to try for Portia's hand in marriage, is a very good illustration of this idea. In Act 2, the Prince of Morocco chooses the gold casket because he is deceived by the shiny surface of this precious metal. It turns out that inside there is a skull and a scroll, part of which reads, 'But my outside to behold. / Gilded tombs do worms enfold' (lines 69–70). Morocco has failed to recognise a strategy of the casket lottery: don't be fooled by outward appearances. It can thus be seen that the casket lottery is designed to lead the suitors to discover not Portia, but a deeper understanding of themselves. Here we learn that Morocco is only thinking of himself when he chooses 'what many men desire', as is Arragon in his choice of what men 'deserve'. Neither really considers



Portia when making his selection. Eventually Bassanio is successful in his selection of the ‘meagre’ lead casket, because he recognises the dangers of being superficially persuaded in matters of love, and can see that to make his choice he must use not only his eyes but, more importantly, his head and his heart.

Shakespeare also uses the actions and costumes of his characters to explore the idea that people are not always who they seem to be. Firstly, in the form of a light-hearted prank, the clown Launcelot misleads his father when he tells him that his son (Launcelot himself) is dead. Soon after, in a more serious context, Jessica deceives her Jewish father, Shylock, when she robs him and elopes with a Christian, Lorenzo. It could be said that her costume in this scene (the disguise of a male servant’s clothing) works to symbolically reflect her actions; her appearance, like her actions, is deceptive. Later, in the form of a male lawyer’s disguise, Portia cleverly outwits Shylock to acquit (free) Antonio. Those in the courtroom, in particular Bassanio and Antonio, are highly impressed by the wisdom and skill of this learned young lawyer, and only the audience and Nerissa (dressed as a clerk) know ‘his’ real identity. In a final act of deception, Portia and Nerissa trick their husbands with the rings and, in keeping with the comic aspect of this theme, Bassanio and Gratiano are easily deceived by their wives’ false appearances.

You might also consider how places themselves in this play can present the idea of being one thing, when in fact they are another. Portia’s beautiful Belmont home might be two days by ship from the fast world of Venice, where men like Antonio and Shylock are concerned with the business of loans, trade and contracts, but this world too has its commercial side. In a will set up by her late father, Portia is bound in marriage to her father’s casket lottery, thus showing that there are ‘terms and conditions’ even for those who live in the most romantic of fairytale places.

Act 3 Scene 2 (Part 2)

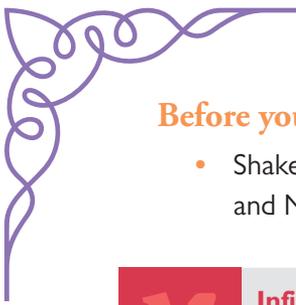
CHARACTERS

Bassanio
Portia
Gratiano
Salerio
Jessica
Nerissa
Lorenzo



IN A NUTSHELL

Nerissa and Gratiano congratulate Bassanio and Portia, and announce their own intention to marry. While they are joking, Lorenzo, Jessica and Salerio arrive with the news that Antonio has lost all his ships and that he is now at the mercy of Shylock. A letter from Antonio confirms this news and requests that Bassanio come to see him before his almost-certain death. Bassanio determines to leave immediately.



Before you read

- Shakespearean comedies often involve multiple couples pairing up. Gratiano and Nerissa are the play's third couple to do this.



Infidel:	Unbeliever or non-Christian
Hither:	Here; to this place
Entreat:	Beg or request
Yond:	Over there
Constitution:	Complexion
Confound:	Confuse
Plies:	Urges

Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

NERISSA	My lord and lady, it is now our time, That have stood by and seen our wishes prosper, To cry, good joy, good joy, my lord and lady!	
GRATIANO	My lord Bassanio and my gentle lady, I wish you all the joy that you can wish; For I am sure you can wish none from me, And when your honours mean to solemnize The bargain of your faith, I do beseech you, Even at that time I may be married too.	190
BASSANIO	With all my heart, so thou canst get a wife.	195
GRATIANO	I thank your lordship, you have got me one. My eyes, my lord, can look as swift as yours: You saw the mistress, I beheld the maid; You loved, I loved for intermission. No more pertains to me, my lord, than you. Your fortune stood upon the casket there, And so did mine too, as the matter falls; For wooing here until I sweat again, And swearing until my very roof was dry With oaths of love, at last, if promise last, I got a promise of this fair one here To have her love, provided that your fortune Achieved her mistress.	200 205
PORTIA	Is this true, Nerissa?	
NERISSA	Madam, it is, so you stand pleased withal.	



- 192 **When your honours mean to solemnize:** When you formally celebrate your marriage.
- 199–200 **For intermission ... than you:** Gratiano claims that he is no more of a time-waster than Bassanio.

BASSANIO And do you, Gratiano, mean good faith? 210
 GRATIANO Yes, faith, my lord.
 BASSANIO Our feast shall be much honoured in your marriage.
 GRATIANO We'll play with them the first boy for a thousand ducats.
 NERISSA What, and stake down?
 GRATIANO No; we shall ne'er win at that sport, and stake down. 215
 But who comes here? Lorenzo and his infidel?
 What, and my old Venetian friend?

[Enter LORENZO, JESSICA, and SALERIO]

BASSANIO Lorenzo and Salerio, welcome hither;
 If that the youth of my new interest here
 Have power to bid you welcome. By your leave, 220
 I bid my very friends and countrymen,
 Sweet Portia, welcome.

PORTIA So do I, my lord.

They are entirely welcome.

LORENZO I thank your honour. For my part, my lord,
 My purpose was not to have seen you here; 225
 But meeting with Salerio by the way,
 He did entreat me, past all saying nay,
 To come with him along.

SALERIO I did, my lord;
 And I have reason for it. Signior Antonio
 Commends him to you.

[Gives BASSANIO a letter]

BASSANIO Ere I ope his letter, 230
 I pray you, tell me how my good friend doth.

SALERIO Not sick, my lord, unless it be in mind;
 Nor well, unless in mind: his letter there
 Will show you his estate.

GRATIANO Nerissa, cheer yond stranger; bid her welcome. — 235
 Your hand, Salerio. What's the news from Venice?
 How doth that royal merchant, good Antonio?
 I know he will be glad of our success;
 We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece.



213 **We'll play with them ... a thousand ducats:** Gratiano proposes a bet on which couple will produce the first boy.

214 **Stake down:** Money on the table (to show the bet is serious). Venice had a famous gambling culture.

215 **No; we shall ne'er win ... stake down:** Gratiano puns on the word 'stake' in a bawdy way. Nerissa means placing a bet but Gratiano means an erection.

229–30 **Signior Antonio / Commends him to you:** Antonio sends his greetings.

239 **We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece:** A classical allusion casting Bassanio and Gratiano in the role of adventurers.



SALERIO
PORTIA

I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost. 240
 There are some shrewd contents in yond same paper,
 That steals the colour from Bassanio's cheek.
 Some dear friend dead; else nothing in the world
 Could turn so much the constitution
 Of any constant man. What, worse and worse! 245
 With leave, Bassanio, I am half yourself,
 And I must freely have the half of anything
 That this same paper brings you.

BASSANIO

O sweet Portia,

Here are a few of the unpleasant'st words 250
 That ever blotted paper. Gentle lady,
 When I did first impart my love to you,
 I freely told you, all the wealth I had
 Ran in my veins, I was a gentleman;
 And then I told you true; and yet, dear lady,
 Rating myself at nothing, you shall see 255
 How much I was a braggart. When I told you
 My state was nothing, I should then have told you
 That I was worse than nothing; for, indeed,
 I have engaged myself to a dear friend,
 Engaged my friend to his mere enemy, 260
 To feed my means. Here is a letter, lady,
 The paper as the body of my friend,
 And every word in it a gaping wound,
 Issuing life-blood. But is it true, Salerio?
 Have all his ventures failed? What, not one hit? 265
 From Tripolis, from Mexico and England,
 From Lisbon, Barbary and India?
 And not one vessel 'scape the dreadful touch
 Of merchant-marring rocks?

SALERIO

Not one, my lord.

Besides, it should appear, that if he had 270
 The present money to discharge the Jew,
 He would not take it. Never did I know
 A creature, that did bear the shape of man,
 So keen and greedy to confound a man.

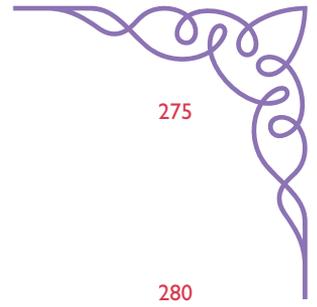


240 **I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost:** Salerio is reminding them that Antonio will lose his life for Bassanio's borrowing.

241 **Shrewd:** Hurtful.

252–56 **I freely told you ... I was a braggart:** Bassanio reminds Portia that he was honest with her about having no money and his only wealth being the blood in his veins (he is a gentleman by birth). Despite this being true, Portia will now see how much Bassanio was bragging because he is actually in debt.

259–61 **I have engaged ... feed my means:** Bassanio explains the bond made with Shylock.



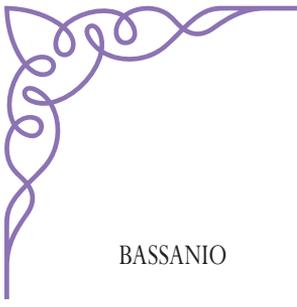
He plies the duke at morning and at night,
 And doth impeach the freedom of the state,
 If they deny him justice. Twenty merchants,
 The duke himself, and the magnificoes
 Of greatest port, have all persuaded with him;
 But none can drive him from the envious plea
 Of forfeiture, of justice and his bond. 275
 280
 JESSICA When I was with him I have heard him swear
 To Tubal and to Chus, his countrymen,
 That he would rather have Antonio's flesh
 Than twenty times the value of the sum 285
 That he did owe him; and I know, my lord,
 If law, authority and power deny not,
 It will go hard with poor Antonio.
 PORTIA Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?
 BASSANIO The dearest friend to me, the kindest man, 290
 The best-conditioned and unwearied spirit
 In doing courtesies, and one in whom
 The ancient Roman honour more appears
 Than any that draws breath in Italy.
 PORTIA What sum owes he the Jew? 295
 BASSANIO For me three thousand ducats.
 PORTIA What, no more?
 Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond;
 Double six thousand, and then treble that,
 Before a friend of this description
 Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault. 300
 First go with me to church and call me wife,
 And then away to Venice to your friend;
 For never shall you lie by Portia's side
 With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold
 To pay the petty debt twenty times over: 305
 When it is paid, bring your true friend along.
 My maid Nerissa and myself meantime
 Will live as maids and widows. Come, away.



275–77 He plies the duke ... deny him justice: Shylock appeals to the duke at every opportunity for the right to take a pound of Antonio's flesh and questions ('impeaches') the justice of Venice if he is denied this.

277–81 Twenty merchants ... justice and his bond: The most important people in Venice have attempted to talk Shylock out of taking revenge but he will not hear it.

292–94 One in whom ... draws breath in Italy: Bassanio praises the good qualities of his friend, Antonio, describing him as being as honourable as an ancient Roman. The Roman virtues, such as honour, were highly regarded in Renaissance Italy and Shakespeare's England.



For you shall hence upon your wedding-day.
 Bid your friends welcome, show a merry cheer; 310
 Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear.
 But let me hear the letter of your friend.

BASSANIO *[Reads]* Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow
 cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and
 since in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared 315
 between you and I, if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding,
 use your pleasure; if your love do not persuade you to come, let
 not my letter.

PORTIA O love, dispatch all business, and be gone!
 BASSANIO Since I have your good leave to go away, 320
 I will make haste; but, till I come again,
 No bed shall e'er be guilty of my stay,
 No rest be interposer 'twixt us twain.

[All exit]



313 Creditors: Those who lent him the money.

322–23 No bed shall e'er ... interposer 'twixt us twain: Bassanio swears not to sleep with his wife or rest (until he has rescued Antonio).



QUESTIONS

- 1 What important news do Nerissa and Gratiano announce?
- 2 What literary device does Shakespeare use to show Nerissa's enthusiasm at the news of Portia and Bassanio's engagement in her speech beginning, 'My lord and lady, it is now our time ...' (lines 186–88)?
- 3 What news do Bassanio and the other characters hear of Antonio's situation?
- 4 Quote and explain a metaphor Bassanio uses to convey the effect that the letter has on him?
- 5 Why is repaying Shylock not an option?
- 6 Can you find any evidence that Jessica is sympathetic to Antonio?
- 7 Can you find any evidence that Portia is not always an attentive listener?
- 8 What action do Bassanio and Portia resolve to take at the end of this scene?



EXTEND

- 1 Can you find any evidence that Bassanio is condescending or patronising when he speaks to Gratiano?
- 2 What evidence can you find to show that Gratiano's attitude towards Jessica, who is a Jew, is both distant and welcoming?

- 3 Draw up and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of how Salerio demonises Shylock.

Device or tactic	Quote	How does this device affect the audience's thinking?
Presenting him as inhuman		
Derogatory (insulting) adjectives		
The status (position) and number of those persuading him to be merciful		



DISCUSS

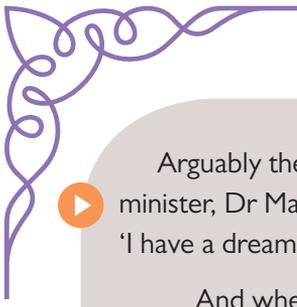
What do you think the actor playing Jessica in this scene should be doing before and after she speaks? What things would this actor need to consider? What attitude would she be looking to convey?

A word about repetition

Arguably, the best way to learn something (times tables, a musical instrument, a foreign language or even how to drive a car) is repetition, repetition, repetition. And sometimes the best way for an author to emphasise the central themes of a text is by repetition of key words, phrases and ideas.

Repetition is a key element in great speeches. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during most of World War II, gave some of the most famous speeches of all time, and these frequently used repetition to great effect: 'we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender ...' In another speech Churchill stated: 'You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs – victory in spite of all terrors – victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.' The British people found comfort and hope in Churchill's speeches in the face of overwhelming hardship and a seemingly impossible situation.





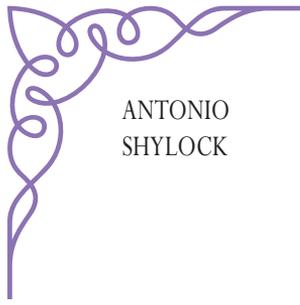
Arguably the best speech-maker of the twentieth century was the African-American minister, Dr Martin Luther King. In his most famous speech, he repeated the phrase 'I have a dream'. The speech also repeated the phrase, 'Let freedom ring' and concluded:

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring ... all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.'

The repetition in King's speeches inspired millions and was a great catalyst for social change. Beyond the prophetic books of the Old Testament, Shakespeare's writing had a profound effect on the speeches of both these men. In our own time, former US president Barack Obama repeated the slogan 'Yes we can' to great effect in his 2008 campaign. Politicians use such phrases because they consider them memorable and therefore effective.

Repetition is a prominent or salient feature of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock's 'Hath not a Jew eyes' monologue generates a great deal of its power through repetition: using recurring phrases like 'Hath not ...' and by starting a series of questions with the phrase 'If you ...' Repetition makes this speech not only memorable but also highly emotive.

Repetition can be used in other ways. For example, the repetition of business terms establishes the setting of Venice as extremely money-minded or materialistic. In Act 3 Scene 3 Shylock repeats, 'I will have my bond' (a phrase that recurs in the court case in Act 4) together with the phrase, 'I have sworn an oath'. The heaping on of words and images to saturation point has a compounding effect, which is called **cumulation**. In this case, the repetition of these phrases emphasises Shylock's obsession.



ANTONIO I pray thee, hear me speak.
 SHYLOCK I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak.
 I'll have my bond; and therefore speak no more.
 I'll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool,
 To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield
 To Christian intercessors. Follow not;
 I'll have no speaking. I will have my bond. 15

[Exit SHYLOCK]

SOLANIO It is the most impenetrable cur
 That ever kept with men.

ANTONIO Let him alone:
 I'll follow him no more with bootless prayers. 20
 He seeks my life; his reason well I know:
 I oft delivered from his forfeitures
 Many that have at times made moan to me;
 Therefore he hates me.

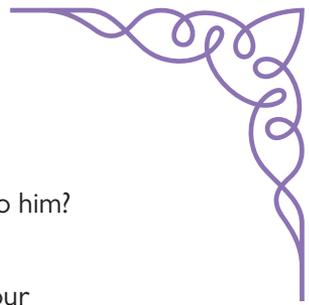
SOLANIO I am sure the duke
 Will never grant this forfeiture to hold. 25

ANTONIO The duke cannot deny the course of law:
 For the commodity that strangers have
 With us in Venice, if it be denied,
 Will much impeach the justice of his state,
 Since that the trade and profit of the city 30
 Consisteth of all nations. Therefore, go.
 These griefs and losses have so bated me,
 That I shall hardly spare a pound of flesh
 Tomorrow to my bloody creditor.
 Well, gaoler, on. Pray God, Bassanio come 35
 To see me pay his debt, and then I care not.

[All exit]



-
- 16 **Christian intercessors:** Those pleading for Antonio.
 - 18 **Impenetrable cur:** Guard dog.
 - 22 **I oft delivered from his forfeitures:** I have often rescued others from their debts to Shylock; thus presumably denying Shylock the interest they would have been bound to pay.
 - 27–31 **The commodity that strangers ... of all nations:** Venice is a city made rich by trade and commerce. A stable law plays an important part in this and, as Antonio points out, the rulers of Venice would not want to compromise this ('impeach' = question).
 - 32 **So bated me:** Made me lose so much weight.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Shylock insist upon in this scene?
- 2 How does Solanio portray Shylock as less than human?
- 3 What does Antonio say is the reason Shylock will not listen to him?
- 4 Why does Antonio fear for his situation?
- 5 Draw up and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of how Shakespeare emphasises Shylock’s power and Antonio’s powerlessness in this scene (lines 1–17).

	Shylock (powerful)	Antonio (powerless)
Who is accompanied by a gaoler?		
Who pleads with whom?		
Who pursues whom?		
Who has the greater portion of the dialogue?		
Who uses polite language? Who is insulting?		



EXTEND

- 1 What can we assume about Antonio’s character given that his gaoler is prepared to take him out into the city?
- 2 Could this scene be interpreted as critical of Venetian society and its priorities? Explain your answer.



DISCUSS

In this scene, Antonio gives a simple reason for Shylock’s hatred of him. Do you find this reason convincing or do you think he misrepresents the situation?



This house, these servants and this same myself are yours ...

Marriage, property and girls' education

Women in Elizabethan England and Renaissance Venice did not enjoy the rights many women take for granted today. To marry, a girl needed her father's consent and marriage was seen, in a legal sense, as a transfer of property. This is the origin of the wedding tradition of the father giving away the bride at the altar. The father was officially giving away, or transferring, his property to another man. In marrying Portia, Bassanio becomes master of Belmont and inherits Portia's vast fortune. The man was recognised as the head of the household and his wife was expected to be obedient. As Portia puts it, when addressing Bassanio in Act 3 Scene 2:

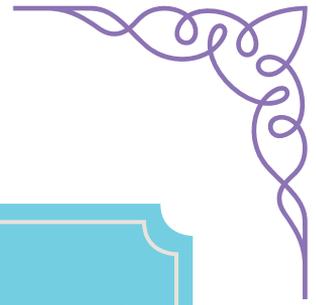
*... her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king.*

165

In Act 1, we discover that Portia's father has arranged the terms and conditions of her marriage. Arranged marriages still take place in many countries today. They were very common in Shakespeare's day, mainly among the rich who were looking to protect their wealth and property. Sometimes a marriage was arranged shortly after a child's birth. While poorer people had more choice in whom they married, they still had to seek their parents' permission, regardless of whether they were male or female. The idea of marrying for love was becoming more popular by Shakespeare's time.

During Queen Elizabeth's reign, education was becoming more widespread and accessible to the middle classes, but few women were able to receive an education equal to that of their male counterparts. It was mostly girls from upper-class families who received formal instruction from hired tutors or through being placed with another upper-class family. Even so, no matter how intelligent a girl was, she could never expect to go to university. The education that girls received was generally less rigorous than that of boys; it also involved acquisition of skills considered more appropriate to the female domain, including sewing and singing. Portia is generally considered to be the most intelligent character in the play and, as a daughter to a rich father, would have surely been tutored as a child. While women could not pursue an acting career, they formed a significant proportion of Shakespeare's audience. The theatre in England provided a platform for writers to challenge conventional expectations such as the role of women and many other prejudices.

Act 3 Scene 4



CHARACTERS	IN A NUTSHELL
Portia Lorenzo Nerissa Jessica Balthazar	<i>Lorenzo commends Antonio as someone deserving of Portia's generosity and Portia responds that Antonio must be a worthy recipient, as he is such a good friend of her husband, Bassanio. Portia then tells Lorenzo and Jessica that she and Nerissa will stay at a nearby monastery until their husbands return, and leaves them in charge of the household. After Lorenzo and Jessica exit, Portia sends her servant, Balthazar, to a relative in Padua with a letter. She then informs Nerissa that the two of them will go to Venice disguised as young men.</i>

Before you read

- This scene serves as a good example of the economy of Shakespeare's writing. The details of Portia's plot are not revealed here. In addition to keeping the audience interested, this keeps the play moving.

V	Semblance:	Appearance or likeness
	Husbandry:	Careful management
	Contemplation:	Prayer and reflection
	Abide:	Stay
	Imposition:	Duty
	Render:	Give
	Habit:	Clothing
Mincing:	Dainty or pretentious	

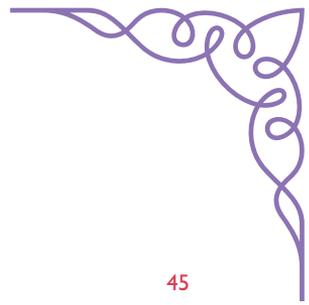
Belmont. A room in Portia's house.

[Enter PORTIA, NERISSA, LORENZO, JESSICA, and BALTHAZAR]

LORENZO Madam, although I speak it in your presence,
 You have a noble and a true conceit
 Of godlike amity; which appears most strongly
 In bearing thus the absence of your lord.



2 **Conceit:** Way of thinking.



JESSICA I wish your ladyship all heart's content.
 PORTIA I thank you for your wish, and am well pleased
 To wish it back on you. Fare you well, Jessica.

[Exit JESSICA and LORENZO]

Now, Balthazar, 45
 As I have ever found thee honest-true,
 So let me find thee still. Take this same letter,
 And use thou all the endeavour of a man
 In speed to Padua: see thou render this
 Into my cousin's hand, Doctor Bellario; 50
 And, look, what notes and garments he doth give thee,
 Bring them, I pray thee, with imagined speed
 Unto the traject, to the common ferry
 Which trades to Venice. Waste no time in words,
 But get thee gone: I shall be there before thee. 55
 BALTHAZAR Madam, I go with all convenient speed.

[Exit]

PORTIA Come on, Nerissa; I have work in hand
 That you yet know not of. We'll see our husbands
 Before they think of us.

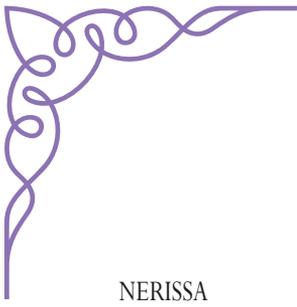
NERISSA Shall they see us?
 PORTIA They shall, Nerissa; but in such a habit, 60
 That they shall think we are accomplished
 With that we lack. I'll hold thee any wager,
 When we are both accoutred like young men,
 I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
 And wear my dagger with the braver grace, 65
 And speak between the change of man and boy
 With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
 Into a manly stride, and speak of frays
 Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies,
 How honourable ladies sought my love, 70
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died;
 I could not do withal. Then I'll repent,
 And wish for all that, that I had not killed them.



52–54 **Bring them ... Which trades to Venice:** Bring them with all the speed you can imagine to the place where the ferry lands in Venice ('traject' = landing place).

63 **Accoutred:** Dressed up.

67 **A reed voice:** A squeaky voice.



And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell,
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth. I have within my mind
A thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks,
Which I will practise.

75

NERISSA
PORTIA

Why, shall we turn to men?

Fie, what a question's that,
If thou wert near a lewd interpreter!
But come, I'll tell thee all my whole device
When I am in my coach, which stays for us
At the park gate; and therefore haste away,
For we must measure twenty miles to-day.

80

[All exit]



74-76 And twenty of these ... Above a twelvemonth: Portia says she will tell 20 of these silly lies so people will think the boy she is imitating has left school only 12 months ago. Boys in Shakespeare's time generally left school at 14 or 15 so Portia is suggesting that she is playing the part of a 16-year-old boy.

80 A lewd interpreter: Someone who interprets things in a rude or bawdy way.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Portia say she intends to do when she is speaking to Lorenzo and Jessica?
- 2 Can you find anything in Lorenzo's speech that suggests he considers Portia his social superior?
- 3 Summarise what the audience learns about Portia's plan in one or two sentences.
- 4 Can you find any evidence in this scene that Portia likes and trusts Jessica and Lorenzo?



EXTEND

- 1 Some critics have argued that Portia is racist based on their observations of her treatment of Shylock in the court scene in Act 4 and from her attitude to many of her suitors, particularly Morocco. Is there anything in this scene to suggest otherwise?
- 2 How would you describe the tone of Portia and Nerissa's conversation?
Note: tone is the sound of the language; in this case, it refers to the way the lines are delivered.



DISCUSS

Portia tells Nerissa that they will visit her cousin Bellario to obtain legal advice. Why do you think Shakespeare doesn't write this scene?

Act 3 Scene 5



CHARACTERS

Lorenzo
Launcelot
Jessica



IN A NUTSHELL

Although Jessica, in marrying Lorenzo, has become a Christian, Launcelot teases her: first about being damned, and then about Jewish conversions raising the price of pork. When Lorenzo enters, he joins in the joking. The scene ends with Jessica praising Portia's good qualities, and then more joking, as the couple go in for supper.

Before you read

- Although much of the joking concerns themes that a modern audience may find confronting or distasteful, it is important to remember that Elizabethan theatre operated under few constraints and with barely any censorship (certainly less than a television writer would work under today). You might compare Shakespeare's plays to some of the riskier comedies whose jokes often rely on offending, and breaking taboos. That said, an Elizabethan audience would not be offended at any generalisations concerning race or religion. It is important to remember that Launcelot was formerly a servant in Jessica's father's house and the two of them are close. When Launcelot raises the very serious topic of damnation, he is certainly joking around and Jessica responds in a light-hearted manner.
- You might notice how the conversation changes from prose to poetry when Launcelot leaves: prose sounds more like ordinary conversation and is well-suited to the kind of jocularly he and Jessica had been engaged in. The tone changes (with the shift to poetry) when the lovers are left alone. One explanation is that the lovers are still on their best behaviour and the more elevated rhythms of poetry are just the right language for this.



Bastard:	A person conceived outside of wedlock
Marry:	Expression of surprise or frustration
The commonwealth:	State; nation (in this case, Venice)
Moor:	Someone of North African descent
Discourse:	Conversation
Sirrah:	A term used to address people of a lower rank
Discretion:	Good taste or judgement
Meet:	Appropriate or fitting



The garden at Portia's house.

[Enter LAUNCELOT and JESSICA]

LAUNCELOT Yes, truly; for, look you, the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children. Therefore, I promise ye, I fear you. I was always plain with you, and so now I speak my agitation of the matter. Therefore be of good cheer, for truly I think you are damned. There is but one hope in it that can do you any good; and that is but a kind of bastard hope neither. 5

JESSICA And what hope is that, I pray thee?

LAUNCELOT Marry, you may partly hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter.

JESSICA That were a kind of bastard hope, indeed: so the sins of my mother should be visited upon me. 10

LAUNCELOT Truly, then I fear you are damned both by father and mother. Thus when I shun Scylla, your father, I fall into Charybdis, your mother. Well, you are gone both ways.

JESSICA I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian. 15

LAUNCELOT Truly, the more to blame he. We were Christians enow before; e'en as many as could well live, one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money.

[Enter LORENZO]

JESSICA I'll tell my husband, Launcelot, what you say. Here he comes. 20

LORENZO I shall grow jealous of you shortly, Launcelot, if you thus get my wife into corners.

JESSICA Nay, you need not fear us, Lorenzo. Launcelot and I are out. He tells me flatly, there is no mercy for me in heaven, because I am a Jew's daughter, and he says, you are no good member of the commonwealth, 25 for in converting Jews to Christians, you raise the price of pork.

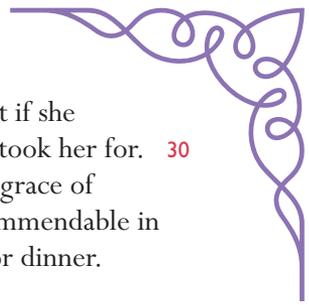
LORENZO I shall answer that better to the commonwealth than you can the getting up of the negro's belly. The Moor is with child by you, Launcelot.

2 **I fear you:** I fear for you.

13–14 **I shun Scylla ... gone both ways:** Launcelot refers here to classical mythology. In the poem 'The Odyssey', Scylla is a cave monster and Charybdis is a whirlpool. In avoiding one of these, the sailors risked getting caught by the other.

17–19 **This making of Christians ... the coals for money:** Launcelot tells Jessica that her conversion, and others like it, will raise the price of pork and that soon no-one will be able to afford to cook a bacon rasher over a coal fire. Christians were permitted to eat meat from pigs whereas Jews were not.

27–28 **I shall answer that ... the negro's belly:** Lorenzo deflects Launcelot's joking by telling him he has impregnated a North African woman. Presumably the woman he is referring to is one of Portia's household staff.



LAUNCELOT It is much that the Moor should be more than reason; but if she
be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for. 30

LORENZO How every fool can play upon the word! I think the best grace of
wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in
none only but parrots. Go in, sirrah; bid them prepare for dinner.

LAUNCELOT That is done, sir; they have all stomachs.

LORENZO Goodly Lord, what a wit-snapper are you! Then bid them prepare dinner. 35

LAUNCELOT That is done too, sir; only 'cover' is the word.

LORENZO Will you cover then, sir?

LAUNCELOT Not so, sir, neither; I know my duty.

LORENZO Yet more quarrelling with occasion. Wilt thou show the whole wealth of
thy wit in an instant? I pray thee, understand a plain man in his plain 40
meaning. Go to thy fellows, bid them cover the table, serve in the meat,
and we will come in to dinner.

LAUNCELOT For the table, sir, it shall be served in; for the meat, sir, it shall be
covered; for your coming in to dinner, sir, why, let it be as humours
and conceits shall govern. 45

[Exit]

LORENZO O dear discretion, how his words are suited!
The fool hath planted in his memory
An army of good words; and I do know
A many fools, that stand in better place,
Garnished like him, that for a tricky word 50
Defy the matter. How cheerest thou, Jessica?
And now, good sweet, say thy opinion,
How dost thou like the Lord Bassanio's wife?

JESSICA Past all expressing. It is very meet
The Lord Bassanio live an upright life; 55
For, having such a blessing in his lady,
He finds the joys of heaven here on earth.
And if on earth he do not merit it, then
In reason he should never come to heaven.

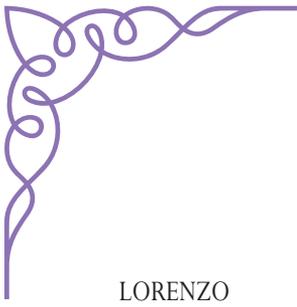


36–38 **That is done too ... I know my duty:** In this exchange Launcelot takes every opportunity to pun, as Lorenzo puts it, to 'play upon the word'. By 'cover' Lorenzo is asking him to lay the table but Launcelot deliberately misinterprets this as a request to put his hat on. In Shakespeare's time, servants were expected to remove their hats in the presence of social superiors and this is why he refuses to put his on, replying that he knows his 'duty'.

39 **More quarrelling with occasion:** Taking every opportunity to joke around.

44–45 **For your coming in to dinner ... conceits shall govern:** Launcelot teases that he has no control over what Jessica and Lorenzo do, and that they can come in to dinner as they feel like it ('humours' = moods, 'conceits' = thoughts).

48–51 **And I do know ... Defy the matter:** Lorenzo says he knows many fools like Launcelot that, supplied with clever, showy phrases, confuse matters through their use of language.



Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match 60
 And on the wager lay two earthly women,
 And Portia one, there must be something else
 Pawned with the other, for the poor rude world
 Hath not her fellow.

LORENZO Even such a husband
 Hast thou of me as she is for a wife. 65

JESSICA Nay, but ask my opinion too of that.

LORENZO I will anon. First, let us go to dinner.

JESSICA Nay, let me praise you while I have a stomach.

LORENZO No, pray thee, let it serve for table-talk.
 Then, howsome'er thou speakest, 'mong other things 70
 I shall digest it.

JESSICA Well, I'll set you forth.

[All exit]



60–64 Why, if two gods ... not her fellow: No woman is Portia's equal ('wager' = bet; 'pawned' = bet; 'fellow' = equal).



QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you find any evidence of a close friendship between Launcelot and Jessica?
- 2 Launcelot puns on the words 'Moor' and 'more'. What does he mean by each of these words?
- 3 What is Jessica's opinion of Portia?



EXTEND

- 1 The opening dialogue of this scene gives the audience the feeling that they are observing Launcelot and Jessica midway through a conversation. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to do this?
- 2 What do you think is Lorenzo's attitude to Launcelot? Consider how he addresses Launcelot, how he speaks about him and what he asks of him.
- 3 Lorenzo suggests he is as good a husband as Portia is a wife. Explain the conceit Jessica uses in response to this. For assistance with conceits see **Introducing similes, metaphors and conceits** on page 29.
- 4 Some critics suggest that Jessica and Lorenzo's marriage will not be a happy one, given it is based on an initial deceit (robbing Shylock) and on Jessica severing family ties. These critics look for signs of Jessica's unhappiness.
 - a Can you find any evidence in this scene that supports this interpretation?
 - b Do you agree with these critics or do you think otherwise?



DISCUSS

This scene adds little to the main plot. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to include it?

Act 4

Act 4 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Portia
Shylock
Antonio
Duke
Bassanio
Gratiano
Salerio
Nerissa



IN A NUTSHELL

Shylock and Antonio meet in court for the trial. Despite the Duke's request that Shylock drop his bond, and Bassanio's attempts to reason with him, Shylock insists the law be followed. He demands he get his pound of flesh and Antonio resigns himself to his fate. Bassanio offers Shylock twice the original loan amount, but still Shylock is unmoved and begins to sharpen his knife. At the crucial moment, Portia arrives disguised as Balthazar, a doctor of the law, with Nerissa masquerading as her male clerk. Portia

explains to the court that there is nothing within the Venetian law that prevents Shylock from proceeding with his case. In a famous speech, she explains the heavenly nature of mercy but this has no effect on Shylock.

Portia then turns the law around on Shylock when she explains that he will lose his own life if he sheds one drop of blood while taking a pound of Antonio's flesh. The law, which Shylock relied so heavily upon, has now been turned against him. Recognising his defeat, he drops his case and asks to leave with the original loan amount. Portia finds him guilty of plotting to murder a Venetian, an act punishable by death. The Duke declares that Shylock must give half of his money to Antonio. Antonio then requests that Shylock be required to renounce his Jewish religion, convert to Christianity and bequeath the other half of his inheritance to Jessica and her husband Lorenzo. Shylock accepts and leaves the court a broken man.

Before you read

- This scene contains the climax or the highest point of tension in the play. The play's protagonists, Portia and Shylock, meet for the first time in the fourth act of this five-act play. Previously their lives have been separate, but through the character of Antonio, Shakespeare brings the two worlds of Belmont and Venice together. The scene is very dramatic in action and dialogue, and is best performed rather than read, with attention given to staging a full-court trial. 



Because of the length of the scene, it has been divided into two parts, part one concluding when Shylock leaves the stage. At least one famous production of the play ended at this point.

- When writers create pictures in our imaginations simply by their choice of words, they are using **imagery**. Shakespeare's plays contain an abundance of powerful imagery. There is striking imagery relating to the sea and storms in the play's opening; there are also animalistic descriptions of Shylock and various hyperbolic images relating to beauty and romantic love. In the next scene, Portia begins her 'quality of mercy' speech by comparing mercy to the falling rain. She employs regal (or royal) imagery throughout this speech, which adds a dignity and lofty tone to her plea. Those sceptical of Portia's motives might find it too lofty and far removed from the realities of Venetian behaviour and politics. Shakespeare again makes use of **antithesis** (see page 85), setting mercy against justice.
- The Christian characters talk about and address Shylock as 'The Jew' throughout the play. In this scene, we see this insulting language extended even to the formal setting of the court.



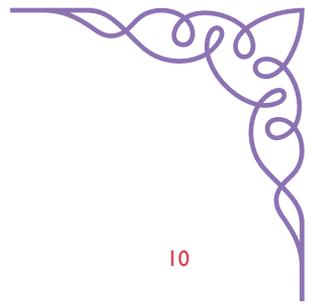
Adversary:	Enemy
Void:	Empty
Dram:	Small drop
Obdurate:	Stubborn; relentless
Forfeiture:	Penalty
Principal:	Original sum
Enow:	Enough
Baned:	Poisoned
Whet:	Sharpen
Tarry:	Wait
Soft:	Wait a moment

Venice. A court of justice.

[Enter the DUKE, the Magnificoes, ANTONIO, BASSANIO, GRATIANO, SALERIO and others]

DUKE What, is Antonio here?
ANTONIO Ready, so please your grace.
DUKE I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer
 A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch
 Uncapable of pity, void and empty
 From any dram of mercy.

5



ANTONIO

I have heard

Your grace hath ta'en great pains to qualify
His rigorous course; but since he stands obdurate
And that no lawful means can carry me
Out of his envy's reach, I do oppose
My patience to his fury, and am armed
To suffer, with a quietness of spirit,
The very tyranny and rage of his.

10

DUKE

Go one, and call the Jew into the court.

SALERIO

He is ready at the door; he comes, my lord.

15

[Enter SHYLOCK]

DUKE

Make room, and let him stand before our face.
Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
That thou but lead'st this fashion of thy malice
To the last hour of act; and then 'tis thought
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty.
And where thou now exact'st the penalty,
Which is a pound of this poor merchant's flesh,
Thou wilt not only loose the forfeiture,
But, touch'd with human gentleness and love,
Forgive a moiety of the principal,
Glancing an eye of pity on his losses,
That have of late so huddled on his back,
Enow to press a royal merchant down
And pluck commiseration of his state
From brassy bosoms and rough hearts of flint,
From stubborn Turks and Tartars, never trained
To offices of tender courtesy.
We all expect a gentle answer, Jew.

20

25

30

SHYLOCK

I have possessed your grace of what I purpose;
And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn
To have the due and forfeit of my bond.

35



7

Qualify: Moderate; tone down.

8

Rigorous: Pitiless.

13

Tyranny: Rage.

24

Loose the forfeiture: Forget the penalty.

26

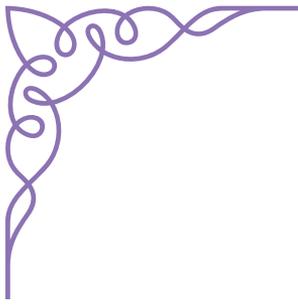
Forgive a moiety of the principal: Not charge a portion of the original sum.

30–33

And pluck commiseration ... tender courtesy: The Duke believes Shylock is holding off until the last minute to show his kindness. Shakespeare's audience considered Turks and Tartars to be particularly inhumane.

37

Due and forfeit: What is still owed and the penalty.



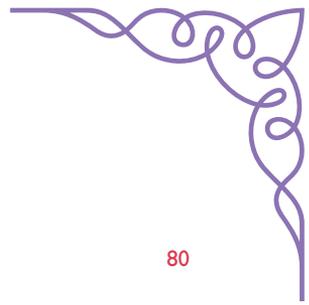
If you deny it, let the danger light
 Upon your charter and your city's freedom.
 You'll ask me, why I rather choose to have 40
 A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
 Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that:
 But, say, it is my humour. Is it answered?
 What if my house be troubled with a rat
 And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats 45
 To have it baned? What, are you answered yet?
 Some men there are love not a gaping pig;
 Some, that are mad if they behold a cat;
 And others, when the bagpipe sings 'th' nose,
 Cannot contain their urine; for affection, 50
 Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
 Of what it likes or loathes. Now, for your answer:
 As there is no firm reason to be rendered,
 Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;
 Why he, a harmless necessary cat; 55
 Why he, a woollen bagpipe; but of force
 Must yield to such inevitable shame
 As to offend, himself being offended;
 So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
 More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing 60
 I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
 A losing suit against him. Are you answered?
 BASSANIO This is no answer, thou unfeeling man,
 To excuse the current of thy cruelty.
 SHYLOCK I am not bound to please thee with my answers. 65
 BASSANIO Do all men kill the things they do not love?
 SHYLOCK Hates any man the thing he would not kill?
 BASSANIO Every offence is not a hate at first.
 SHYLOCK What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?
 ANTONIO I pray you, think you question with the Jew. 70
 You may as well go stand upon the beach
 And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
 You may as well use question with the wolf
 Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
 You may as well forbid the mountain pines 75



38–39 **Let the danger ... your city's freedom:** Much like Antonio in Act 3 Scene 3, Shylock is pointing out that any deviation from the law will jeopardise the freedoms Venetians enjoy and ultimately damage their business interests ('charter' = formal document outlining rights and responsibilities).

41 **Carrion flesh:** The flesh of a rotting corpse.

47 **Gaping pig:** A pig served with an open or gaping mouth (often holding an apple). This is offensive to Shylock because Jews were forbidden to eat any pork product.



To wag their high tops and to make no noise,
 When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;
 You may as well do anything most hard,
 As seek to soften that – than which what’s harder? –
 His Jewish heart: therefore, I do beseech you,
 Make no more offers, use no farther means,
 But with all brief and plain conveniency
 Let me have judgement and the Jew his will.

80

BASSANIO For thy three thousand ducats here is six.

SHYLOCK If every ducat in six thousand ducats
 Were in six parts, and every part a ducat,
 I would not draw them; I would have my bond.

85

DUKE How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?

SHYLOCK What judgement shall I dread, doing no wrong?

You have among you many a purchased slave,
 Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
 You use in abject and in slavish parts,

90

Because you bought them: shall I say to you,
 ‘Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?

Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
 Be made as soft as yours and let their palates
 Be seasoned with such viands?’ You will answer

95

‘The slaves are ours’. So do I answer you:
 The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,
 Is dearly bought; ’tis mine and I will have it.

100

If you deny me, fie upon your law!
 There is no force in the decrees of Venice.

I stand for judgement: answer; shall I have it?

DUKE Upon my power I may dismiss this court,
 Unless Bellario, a learned doctor,

105

Whom I have sent for to determine this,
 Come here today.

SALERIO My lord, here stays without

A messenger with letters from the doctor,
 New come from Padua.

DUKE Bring us the letter. Call the messenger.

110

BASSANIO Good cheer, Antonio! What, man, courage yet!
 The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones, and all,
 Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood.

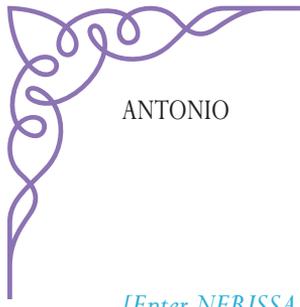


76 **Wag:** Wave.

77 **Fretten:** Fretted, troubled.

92 **You use in abject and in slavish parts:** You use them to perform the horrible tasks you don’t want to do (‘abject’ = low).

97 **Viands:** Delicacies.



ANTONIO I am a tainted wether of the flock,
Meetest for death. The weakest kind of fruit
Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me. 115
You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,
Than to live still and write mine epitaph.

[Enter NERISSA, dressed like a lawyer's clerk]

DUKE Came you from Padua, from Bellario?
NERISSA From both, my lord. Bellario greets your grace. 120

[Presenting a letter]

BASSANIO Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?
SHYLOCK To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.
GRATIANO Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,
Thou mak'st thy knife keen; but no metal can,
No, not the hangman's axe, bear half the keenness 125
Of thy sharp envy. Can no prayers pierce thee?

SHYLOCK No, none that thou hast wit enough to make.
GRATIANO O, be thou damned, execrable dog!
And for thy life let justice be accused.

Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith 130
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,
That souls of animals infuse themselves
Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
Governed a wolf, who, hanged for human slaughter,

Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet, 135
And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallowed dam,
Infused itself in thee; for thy desires
Are wolfish, bloody, starved and ravenous.

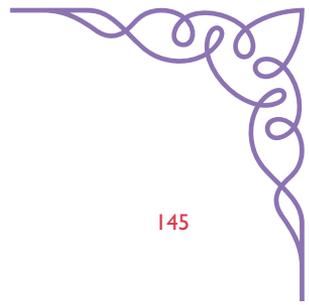
SHYLOCK Till thou canst rail the seal from off my bond,
Thou but offend'st thy lungs to speak so loud. 140
Repair thy wit, good youth, or it will fall
To cureless ruin. I stand here for law.



114–15 I am a tainted wether ... Meetest for death: Antonio compares himself to a sick, castrated ram, the first sheep that the shepherd would kill ('meetest for death' = most fit for death). This is a resonant image in terms of Jewish sacrifices, and the Christian sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

130–38 Thou almost mak'st me ... starved and ravenous: Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher and mathematician, famous for his discovery of geometric law. He believed in a form of reincarnation, which led him and his followers to avoid consuming not only meat but also certain plant life as well. Gratiano asserts that Shylock's behaviour also leads him to agree with Pythagoras' belief, despite it being contrary to Christian teaching. He speculates that while Shylock's unchristian mother ('unhallowed dam') was pregnant, the soul of a wolf, executed or hanged for murdering a human, infused itself into Shylock's body and this is evidenced by his behaviour ('currish' = like a vicious dog; 'fell' = cruel).

139 Rail: Shout.



DUKE This letter from Bellario doth commend
A young and learned doctor to our court.
Where is he?

NERISSA He attendeth here hard by, 145
To know your answer, whether you'll admit him.

DUKE With all my heart. Some three or four of you
Go give him courteous conduct to this place.
Meantime the court shall hear Bellario's letter.

[Reads] Your grace shall understand that at the receipt of your letter I am very sick; but in the instant that your messenger came, in loving visitation was with me a young doctor of Rome. His name is Balthazar. 150

I acquainted him with the cause in controversy between the Jew and Antonio the merchant. We turned o'er many books together. He is furnished with my opinion; which, bettered with his own learning, the greatness whereof I cannot enough commend, comes with him, at my importunity, to fill up your grace's request in my stead. I beseech you, 155

let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation. For I never knew so young a body with so old a head. I leave him to your gracious acceptance, whose trial shall better publish his commendation. 160

DUKE You hear the learned Bellario, what he writes:
And here, I take it, is the doctor come.

[Enter PORTIA, dressed like a doctor of law]

PORTIA Give me your hand. Come you from old Bellario?
I did, my lord.

DUKE You are welcome; take your place. 165

Are you acquainted with the difference
That holds this present question in the court?

PORTIA I am informed throughly of the cause.
Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?

DUKE Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth. 170

PORTIA Is your name Shylock?

SHYLOCK Shylock is my name.

PORTIA Of a strange nature is the suit you follow;
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.
[To ANTONIO] You stand within his danger, do you not? 175

ANTONIO Ay, so he says.

PORTIA Do you confess the bond?

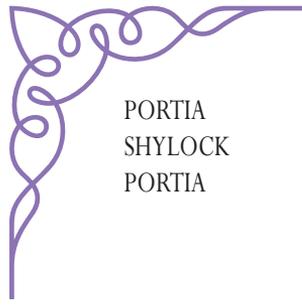
ANTONIO I do.



157 Impunity: Request.

168 Thoroughly: An archaic way of saying 'thoroughly' in two beats, with the stress on the first.

174 Impugn: Fault.



PORTIA Then must the Jew be merciful.

SHYLOCK On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.

PORTIA The quality of mercy is not strained, 180
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
 The thronèd monarch better than his crown. 185
 His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
 The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
 It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings, 190
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
 That, in the course of justice, none of us 195
 Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
 To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
 Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice 200
 Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.

SHYLOCK My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,
 The penalty and forfeit of my bond.

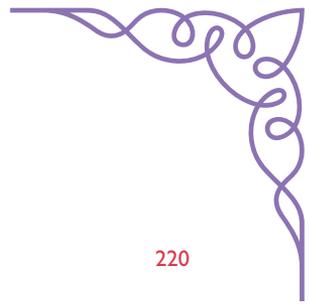
PORTIA Is he not able to discharge the money?

BASSANIO Yes, here I tender it for him in the court; 205
 Yea, twice the sum. If that will not suffice,
 I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er,
 On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart.
 If this will not suffice, it must appear
 That malice bears down truth. And I beseech you, 210
 Wrest once the law to your authority:
 To do a great right, do a little wrong,
 And curb this cruel devil of his will.

PORTIA It must not be. There is no power in Venice
 Can alter a decree established. 215



-
- 186 **Temporal:** Earthly.
- 189 **Above this sceptred sway:** Above the power of monarchs.
- 193 **When mercy seasons justice:** When mercy affects or influences justice.
- 199 **Mitigate:** Soften; tone down.
- 206 **Suffice:** Be sufficient.



'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
 And many an error by the same example
 Will rush into the state: it cannot be.

SHYLOCK A Daniel come to judgement! Yea, a Daniel!
 O wise young judge, how I do honour thee! 220

PORTIA I pray you, let me look upon the bond.

SHYLOCK Here 'tis, most reverend doctor; here it is.

PORTIA Shylock, there's thrice thy money offered thee.

SHYLOCK An oath, an oath! I have an oath in heaven:
 Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? 225
 No, not for Venice.

PORTIA Why, this bond is forfeit,
 And lawfully by this the Jew may claim
 A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off
 Nearest the merchant's heart. Be merciful:
 Take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond. 230

SHYLOCK When it is paid according to the tenor.
 It doth appear you are a worthy judge;
 You know the law, your exposition
 Hath been most sound: I charge you by the law,
 Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar, 235
 Proceed to judgement. By my soul I swear
 There is no power in the tongue of man
 To alter me. I stay here on my bond.

ANTONIO Most heartily I do beseech the court
 To give the judgement.

PORTIA Why then, thus it is: 240
 You must prepare your bosom for his knife.

SHYLOCK O noble judge! O excellent young man!

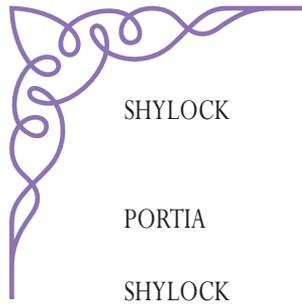
PORTIA For the intent and purpose of the law
 Hath full relation to the penalty,
 Which here appeareth due upon the bond. 245

SHYLOCK 'Tis very true. O wise and upright judge!
 How much more elder art thou than thy looks!

PORTIA Therefore lay bare your bosom.



-
- 216 **A precedent:** In any case before a court judges will study, and lawyers will appeal to, judgements of previous cases. Portia is asserting that there are no exceptions before the law.
 - 219 **Daniel:** A wise young judge from the Apocrypha who exposed hypocrisy by allowing the elders to condemn themselves with their own words. Not only is the theme of hypocrisy relevant to this scene (See **Hypocrisy in *The Merchant of Venice*** on page 137), but this allusion also foreshadows Shylock condemning himself with his own words.
 - 231 **Tenor:** Terms and conditions.
 - 244 **Hath full relation to:** Fully supports.



SHYLOCK

Ay, 'his breast':

So says the bond: doth it not, noble judge?
'Nearest his heart:' those are the very words. 250

PORTIA

It is so. Are there balance here to weigh
The flesh?

SHYLOCK

I have them ready.

PORTIA

Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your charge,
To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death.

SHYLOCK

Is it so nominated in the bond? 255

PORTIA

It is not so expressed; but what of that?
'Twere good you do so much for charity.

SHYLOCK

I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond.

PORTIA

You, merchant, have you any thing to say?

ANTONIO

But little. I am armed and well prepared. 260

Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well.

Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;

For herein Fortune shows herself more kind

Than is her custom; it is still her use

To let the wretched man outlive his wealth, 265

To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow

An age of poverty, from which lingering penance

Of such misery doth she cut me off.

Commend me to your honourable wife,

Tell her the process of Antonio's end; 270

Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;

And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge

Whether Bassanio had not once a love.

Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,

And he repents not that he pays your debt; 275

For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,

I'll pay it presently with all my heart.

BASSANIO

Antonio, I am married to a wife

Which is as dear to me as life itself;

But life itself, my wife, and all the world, 280

Are not with me esteemed above thy life.

I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all

Here to this devil, to deliver you.

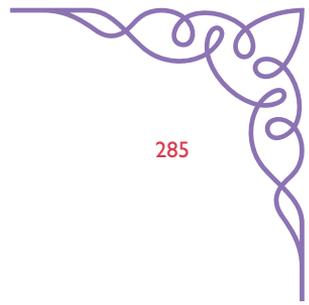


251 **Balance:** Scales.

253 **On your charge:** At your own expense.

263–68 **Fortune shows herself ... doth she cut me off:** Antonio, looking for consolation, reflects that he is fortunate to not be dying in poverty. Fortune was depicted as a woman in classical mythology.

276–77 **For if the Jew ... with all my heart:** If Shylock cuts too deep (which he inevitably will) all Bassanio's debts will be paid instantly by Antonio's death.



PORTIA Your wife would give you little thanks for that,
If she were by, to hear you make the offer. 285

GRATIANO I have a wife, whom, I protest, I love.
I would she were in heaven, so she could
Entreat some power to change this currish Jew.

NERISSA 'Tis well you offer it behind her back,
The wish would make else an unquiet house. 290

SHYLOCK These be the Christian husbands. I have a daughter;
Would any of the stock of Barrabas
Had been her husband rather than a Christian. —
We trifle time. I pray thee, pursue sentence.

PORTIA A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine: 295
The court awards it, and the law doth give it.

SHYLOCK Most rightful judge!

PORTIA And you must cut this flesh from off his breast:
The law allows it, and the court awards it.

SHYLOCK Most learned judge! A sentence! Come, prepare! 300

PORTIA Tarry a little; there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'.
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;
But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed 305
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate
Unto the state of Venice.

GRATIANO O upright judge! Mark, Jew. O learned judge!

SHYLOCK Is that the law?

PORTIA Thyselt shalt see the act: 310
For, as thou urgest justice, be assured
Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.

GRATIANO O learned judge! Mark, Jew: a learned judge!

SHYLOCK I take this offer, then. Pay the bond thrice
And let the Christian go.

BASSANIO Here is the money. 315

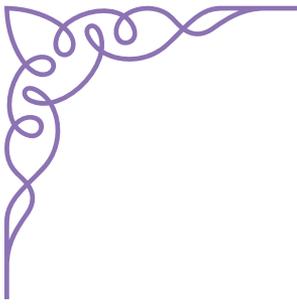
PORTIA Soft!
The Jew shall have all justice. Soft, no haste,
He shall have nothing but the penalty.

GRATIANO O Jew! An upright judge; a learned judge!

PORTIA Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh. 320
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more



292 **The stock of Barrabas:** The descendants of Barrabas, a murderer who is mentioned briefly in the New Testament of the Bible. It was a Passover tradition to free a prisoner and, at the Crucifixion, the crowd appealed for Barrabas to be freed instead of Jesus. Barabas (spelled with one 'r') is also the name of the villainous protagonist in Christopher Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta*.



But just a pound of flesh. If thou cut'st more
 Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
 As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
 Or the division of the twentieth part 325
 Of one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn
 But in the estimation of a hair,

Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.
 GRATIANO A second Daniel! A Daniel, Jew!
 Now, infidel, I have you on the hip. 330

PORTIA Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture.

SHYLOCK Give me my principal, and let me go.

BASSANIO I have it ready for thee; here it is.

PORTIA He hath refused it in the open court.
 He shall have merely justice and his bond. 335

GRATIANO A Daniel, still say I, a second Daniel!
 I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

SHYLOCK Shall I not have barely my principal?

PORTIA Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture,
 To be so taken at thy peril, Jew. 340

SHYLOCK Why, then the devil give him good of it!
 I'll stay no longer question.

PORTIA Tarry, Jew:
 The law hath yet another hold on you.
 It is enacted in the laws of Venice,
 If it be proved against an alien 345

That by direct or indirect attempts
 He seek the life of any citizen,
 The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive
 Shall seize one half his goods; the other half
 Comes to the privy coffer of the state; 350

And the offender's life lies in the mercy
 Of the duke only, 'gainst all other voice.
 In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st;
 For it appears, by manifest proceeding,
 That indirectly and directly too 355

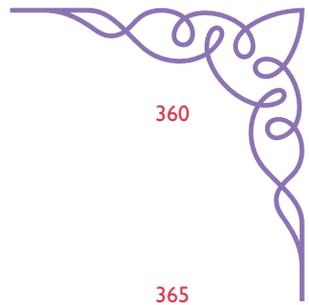
Thou hast contrived against the very life
 Of the defendant; and thou hast incurred
 The danger formerly by me rehearsed.
 Down therefore and beg mercy of the duke.



326 Scruple: A very small weight (roughly 20 grams).

330 Now, infidel, I have you on the hip: Gratiano asserts that he now has the upper hand ('on the hip' is a wrestling term).

350 The privy coffer of the state: The state treasury.



GRATIANO Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself: 360
 And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,
 Thou hast not left the value of a cord;
 Therefore thou must be hanged at the state's charge.

DUKE That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits,
 I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it. 365
 For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
 The other half comes to the general state,
 Which humbleness may drive unto a fine.

PORTIA Ay, for the state, not for Antonio.

SHYLOCK Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that. 370
 You take my house when you do take the prop
 That doth sustain my house. You take my life
 When you do take the means whereby I live.

PORTIA What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

GRATIANO A halter gratis; nothing else, for God's sake. 375

ANTONIO So please my lord the duke and all the court
 To quit the fine for one half of his goods,
 I am content; so he will let me have
 The other half in use, to render it,
 Upon his death, unto the gentleman 380
 That lately stole his daughter.
 Two things provided more, that, for this favour,
 He presently become a Christian;
 The other, that he do record a gift,
 Here in the court, of all he dies possessed, 385
 Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

DUKE He shall do this, or else I do recant
 The pardon that I late pronounced here.

PORTIA Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?

SHYLOCK I am content.

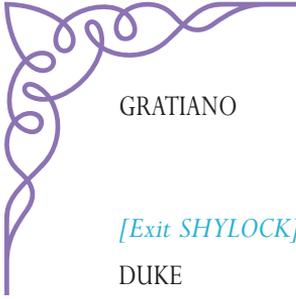
PORTIA Clerk, draw a deed of gift. 390

SHYLOCK I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
 I am not well: send the deed after me,
 And I will sign it.

DUKE Get thee gone, but do it.



-
- 371 **Prop:** Supporting beam (a house would fall down without this).
 - 375 **A halter gratis:** A noose for free.
 - 386 **His son Lorenzo:** His son-in-law, Lorenzo. This is rubbing salt into Shylock's wounds as he would definitely not look on Lorenzo as any sort of son.
 - 387–88 **Recant / The pardon:** Withdraw my decision to pardon him (for murder).
 - 390 **A deed of gift:** Special court document.



GRATIANO In christening shalt thou have two god-fathers:
Had I been judge, thou shouldst have had ten more, 395
To bring thee to the gallows, not the font.

[Exit SHYLOCK]

DUKE Sir, I entreat you home with me to dinner.
PORTIA I humbly do desire your grace of pardon:
I must away this night toward Padua,
And it is meet I presently set forth. 400
DUKE I am sorry that your leisure serves you not.
Antonio, gratify this gentleman,
For, in my mind, you are much bound to him.

[Exit DUKE and his attendants]



394–96 **In christening shalt thou ... not the font:** At the ceremony of baptism, it was common for the parents to nominate godparents to play a role in the ceremony and help with the child's religious instruction. Ten more men would make up the 12 required for a jury to hang Shylock rather than the two godfathers bringing him to the 'font' or basin used for baptism.

400 **Meet:** Appropriate.



- 1 How does the Duke attempt to encourage Shylock to show mercy towards Antonio?
- 2 What does Bassanio offer Shylock and what is Shylock's response?
- 3 List the things Shylock uses in his argument to explain what some men find loathsome.
- 4 What comparison does Antonio make when explaining what it is like trying to change Shylock's mind?
- 5 How is Portia's response ironic when she tells Bassanio, 'Your wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by, to hear you make the offer' (lines 284–85)?
- 6 Explain the flaw Portia finds in Shylock's bond.
- 7 Choose a line from this scene, from any character, that you believe marks the turning point in the drama: when things begin to go badly for Shylock.
- 9 Find two examples of Shylock's behaviour in this scene that give the audience an unsympathetic view of his character.
- 10 Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech encourages us to see that justice is best carried out when mercy accompanies it. List some of the qualities of mercy that Portia identifies in her speech.



- 1 How would you describe the Duke's tone when he says, 'Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too' (line 17) and 'We all expect a gentle answer, Jew' (line 34)?
- 2 This is the last time we see Shylock in the play. Find three quotes from this scene or from other scenes and use them to explain how they have made Shylock a memorable character for you.
- 3 Compare Shylock's lines in the first half of this scene with his last lines before he leaves the stage.
- 4 Imagine you are the character Portia. Explain how you found the courtroom trial experience. Was it nerve-wracking? Liberating? Challenging?
- 5 Imagine you are the actor playing the part of Portia. How would you say her line, 'Tarry a little' (line 301) in order to create the most dramatic suspense and intensity?
- 6 There are many literary devices used throughout this scene to create tension and strengthen the characters' arguments. Copy and complete the table below.

Literary device	Character and context	Lines	Effect
Repetition	Shylock repeats his case	'I would have my bond' (line 87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This shows Shylock's stubborn reliance on the law•
One character's lines echoing another's	Gratiano echoes Shylock's line 'Yea, a Daniell' (line 219)	'A second Daniell!' (lines 329, 336)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
Dramatic irony	We know Portia is disguised as a lawyer		<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
Imagery (royal and natural)	Portia in her 'quality of mercy' speech	'It becomes / The thronèd monarch better than his crown' (lines 184–185)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This shows the spiritual qualities of mercy•

- 7 We pointed out in **Before you read** on page 122 that at least one director has ended the play with Shylock's humiliation.
 - a How would this change the emphasis of the play?
 - b Is this a better ending than Shakespeare's, in your opinion?You may refer to the **Act summaries** (pages 17–18) to assist with this question.

- 8 Copy and complete the table below to explain how you would use costume to show the different personalities of the characters in this particular scene.

Character	Costume	What the costume shows about the character's personality
Portia	professional male attire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intelligent •
Shylock		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outsider • begins strongly but ends defeated •
Gratiano	bright, colourful clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belligerent (loud-mouthed); confident •
Antonio		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detached •



DISCUSS

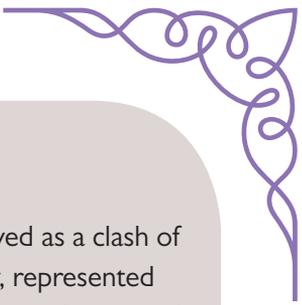
Do you think Shylock deserves what he gets in this trial?

Michael Radford: DVD Chapter 21 (The courtroom)



PRESS PLAY

- 1 How does Radford create the impression of Shylock as a solitary figure in this scene?
- 2 How is the patriarchal nature of Venetian society emphasised in this scene?
- 3 How does Radford emphasise dramatic irony in this scene?
- 4 What effect does Shylock sharpening his knife have on the way you view his character?
- 5 Which detail does Radford emphasise to show the brutality of Antonio's potential fate?
- 6 Some directors choose to have Portia stringing Shylock along, in effect damning himself, while she is fully assured of her plan of action. Other productions have her realising the loophole at the last minute. What approach do you think Radford takes in this scene? Refer in particular to Portia's line, 'Tarry a little' (line 301).
- 7 How does Radford use camera angles and characterisation to emphasise power and powerlessness in Shylock's final defeat?
- 8 What atmosphere do you think the presence of the Venetian crowd creates? Do you think it is effective?



Hypocrisy in *The Merchant of Venice*

Traditionally the dramatic trial of *The Merchant of Venice* has been portrayed as a clash of the law, represented by the character of Shylock, against a plea for mercy, represented by Portia. It can also be seen as a clash of the Old Testament values of ‘an eye for an eye’ set against Jesus in the New Testament who tells his followers to ‘turn the other cheek’. If you consider the play in this light, Antonio represents generous, sacrificial love and Shylock a base desire for revenge. However, many would question: is the situation really this black and white?

Venice is a Christian society and the Venetians are identified as Christians throughout the play. You might, however, ask how Christian these characters really are. In the Bible, in Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus states: ‘love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you’. Throughout the play Shylock takes delight in exposing Venetian hypocrisy and, in doing so, he shows us how far short these characters fall of their high ideals. When Shylock insists on taking his pound of flesh, he argues that Venetians own slaves and treat them as they like. Shylock makes a particular point of exposing the hypocrisy of the ‘good’ Antonio. He questions Antonio in Act I, ‘Methoughts you said you neither lend nor borrow money / Upon advantage’, to which Antonio hypocritically replies, ‘I do never use it’. We also discover in Act I that Antonio has spat on, insulted and kicked Shylock in the past, contradicting Salerio’s statement, ‘a kinder gentleman treads not the earth’. The irony here is that the word ‘kinder’ comes from ‘kin’ (meaning *his own kind*) and this certainly sums up the idea that Antonio, and others such as Portia, do a good job of looking after their own circle of friends but this is as far as their Christian love extends.

Audiences are often moved by the power and poetry of Portia’s famous speech in Act 4 when she declares, ‘The quality of mercy is not strained’. Here Portia draws on the Christian concept of mercy and the importance of forgiving others, but it is interesting to consider the actual ‘quality’ of mercy that is shown towards the outsider Shylock. When the tables are turned on Shylock in the courtroom, the Duke hypocritically tells him, ‘thou shall see the difference of our spirit’ – implying that the Duke and others have a Christian nature and Shylock, as a Jew, has a harsh and pitiless one. The Duke supports the idea of Shylock being stripped of his property, dignity and religion, and threatens execution if he dares to protest. The ‘Christian’ Gratiano asserts that he would have liked to see Shylock hanged.

The critic AD Moody argues that ‘Shylock is openly what the Christians are beneath the surface’. Despite Shylock’s spiteful nature, he is honest, an attribute the Christians often lack. Shylock revels in exposing the hypocrisy of the society that persecutes him and, although his comments have the malevolence of a villain, they convey the truthfulness of a child.

Act 4 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Portia
Bassanio
Antonio
Duke



IN A NUTSHELL

After winning the case, Portia and Nerissa pressure Bassanio and Gratiano into giving them their wedding rings as payment for their efforts. Bassanio is reluctant to part with his wife's ring until Antonio encourages him to do so.

Before you read

- Remembering the play is a comedy (a story with a happy ending) and given all that has just taken place, it is interesting to see how quickly the mood shifts from serious and life-threatening to frivolous and light-hearted. If you trace the source of this shift, you will notice it is Portia who not only controls the drama in the courtroom but who also initiates the trick with the rings.

V

Entreat:	Invite (usually the word means strongly request)
Gratify:	Reward
Proclamation:	Public advertising
Liberal:	Generous
Thither:	To or towards that place

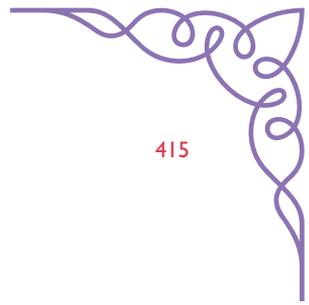
Venice. A court of justice.

BASSANIO	Most worthy gentleman, I and my friend Have by your wisdom been this day acquitted Of grievous penalties; in lieu whereof, Three thousand ducats, due unto the Jew, We freely cope your courteous pains withal.	405
ANTONIO	And stand indebted, over and above, In love and service to you evermore.	410
PORTIA	He is well paid that is well satisfied; And I, delivering you, am satisfied And therein do account myself well paid;	



406 **In lieu whereof:** In return for which.

408 **We freely cope your courteous pains withal:** We most willingly reward all you have done.



My mind was never yet more mercenary.
 I pray you, know me when we meet again:
 I wish you well, and so I take my leave.

415

BASSANIO Dear sir, of force I must attempt you further.
 Take some remembrance of us, as a tribute,
 Not as a fee. Grant me two things, I pray you,
 Not to deny me, and to pardon me.

420

PORTIA You press me far, and therefore I will yield.

[To ANTONIO]

Give me your gloves, I'll wear them for your sake;

[To BASSANIO]

And, for your love, I'll take this ring from you.
 Do not draw back your hand; I'll take no more;
 And you in love shall not deny me this.

425

BASSANIO This ring, good sir, alas, it is a trifle!
 I will not shame myself to give you this.

PORTIA I will have nothing else but only this;
 And now methinks I have a mind to it.

BASSANIO There's more depends on this than on the value.
 The dearest ring in Venice will I give you,
 And find it out by proclamation.

430

PORTIA Only for this, I pray you, pardon me.
 I see, sir, you are liberal in offers

You taught me first to beg; and now methinks
 You teach me how a beggar should be answered.

435

BASSANIO Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife;
 And when she put it on, she made me vow
 That I should neither sell nor give nor lose it.

PORTIA That 'scuse serves many men to save their gifts.

440

An if your wife be not a mad-woman,
 And know how well I have deserved the ring,
 She would not hold out enemy for ever,
 For giving it to me. Well, peace be with you.

[Exit PORTIA and NERISSA]

ANTONIO My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring.

445

Let his deservings and my love withal
 Be valued against your wife's commandment.



414 **Mercenary:** Financially motivated.

418 **Tribute:** Token.

426 **Trifle:** An unimportant thing.

432 **Find it out by proclamation:** Bassanio says that he will make it publicly known that he is attempting to buy the most expensive ring in Venice.



BASSANIO Go, Gratiano, run and overtake him;
Give him the ring, and bring him, if thou canst,
Unto Antonio's house. Away, make haste!

450

[Exit GRATIANO]

Come, you and I will thither presently,
And in the morning early will we both
Fly toward Belmont. Come, Antonio.

[All exit]



QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Portia pressure Bassanio into giving her?
- 2 It is interesting to note that Antonio's influence has more power over Bassanio than the vows he made to Portia regarding the ring she gave him. What does this suggest about Bassanio's loyalties?

Act 4 Scene 2

CHARACTERS

Portia
Nerissa
Gratiano



IN A NUTSHELL

Portia asks Nerissa to find Shylock's house so he can sign the contract. They then race home to beat Bassanio and Gratiano back to Belmont. Gratiano catches them to give Portia Bassanio's ring. Nerissa plans to get her own ring from Gratiano and Portia encourages her to do this.

Before you read

- In **Shakespeare's language** on page 14 we explain that a dramatic pause is created when a character's line is left incomplete. Short lines are also used to tell us about the actions of characters. In this scene Gratiano tells Nerissa 'That will I do' (line 12), showing us that he could be out of breath from running.



Deed:	Letter of information relating to the court
Warrant:	Guarantee
Old swearing:	Abundant (or plenty of) swearing
Tarry:	Wait
Outface them:	Outdo them

Act 5

Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Lorenzo
Jessica
Portia
Launcelot
Stephano
Nerissa



IN A NUTSHELL

Lorenzo and Jessica wander in the gardens at Belmont talking and joking. A servant, Stephano, interrupts their conversation to bring news of Portia's imminent return, and Launcelot enters to announce that Bassanio will also return soon with good news. While Lorenzo and Jessica are listening to music and discussing its qualities, Portia and Nerissa return and Portia gives instruction that no-one speak of their absence.

Before you read

- This scene contains some of the most beautiful descriptions of music in Western literature. Here Lorenzo discusses the music of the spheres. Elizabethans believed that the stars and planets in their movements create a kind of heavenly music, inaudible to humans. Lorenzo points out, because the soul is trapped within the body, 'this muddy vesture of decay' (line 62), humans cannot hear this heavenly music. The descriptions of music and lunar (moon) imagery create a contrast to the drama of the previous act.
- When Launcelot (the clown) enters he calls 'sola' (line 40). In doing this, he is imitating the sound of a trumpet. The word should be delivered in a loud, sing-song way.
- When Portia and Nerissa enter, they seem to hear the music as something distant, and speak roughly 20 lines before they interact with Lorenzo and Jessica. In the original staging they would probably have entered on the opposite side of the stage to where the lovers are talking, and the audience would have understood them to still be some distance away.

**V**

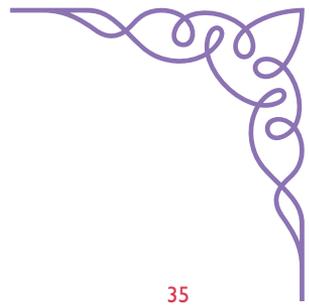
Shrew:	Troublesome woman (offensive)
Slander:	Dishonour
Hermit:	Holy man
Ere:	Before
Signify:	Report
Orb:	Planet or star
Ho:	An exclamation
Perchance:	Maybe
Naughty:	Wicked

A word about allusion

On the surface of things, the dialogue of Jessica and Lorenzo at the opening of Act 5 Scene 1 seems perfect for a romantic night out. In the moonlit gardens of Portia's home, the newlywed couple share stories of lovers from classical mythology. These references to other literary characters are **allusions**: references to another event, person, place or work of literature that provide another layer of meaning to what is being said. During their conversation, the two refer to the following tales.

- **Troilus and Cressida:** During the Trojan War, Cressida, the beloved of Troilus, was taken captive and held hostage in the camp of the Greeks. Troilus climbed the walls of Troy to be with her. She later betrayed him.
- **Pyramus and Thisbe:** Thisbe met Pyramus secretly because their parents forbade their love. They planned to meet at night in the woods where Thisbe, arriving first, was frightened by a lion and hid in a cave. The lion mauled the scarf she had dropped in panic. Finding the scarf, Pyramus assumed Thisbe had been killed and so stabbed himself. In her grief, Thisbe took her life as well.
- **Dido and Aeneas:** When her lover deserted her and set sail for Italy, Dido, the Queen of Carthage, spent the night trying to entice him back, but was unsuccessful.
- **Medea and Jason:** Medea was a young princess who fled from Colchis with Jason and the Golden Fleece. She gathered enchanted herbs to refresh Æson, the father of her lover Jason. Jason later deserted her.

In Act 5 Scene 1, the romantic stories Jessica and Lorenzo share all end tragically in one way or another. Critics have speculated that these allusions create a strong sense of foreboding for the future of Jessica and Lorenzo.



By holy crosses, where she kneels and prays
For happy wedlock hours.

LORENZO Who comes with her?

STEPHANO None but a holy hermit and her maid.

I pray you, is my master yet returned?

LORENZO He is not, nor we have not heard from him. 35

But go we in, I pray thee, Jessica,

And ceremoniously let us prepare

Some welcome for the mistress of the house.

[Enter LAUNCELOT]

LAUNCELOT Sola, sola! Wo ha, ho! Sola, sola!

LORENZO Who calls? 40

LAUNCELOT Sola! Did you see Master Lorenzo? Master Lorenzo, sola, sola!

LORENZO Leave hollaing, man! Here.

LAUNCELOT Sola! Where? Where?

LORENZO Here.

LAUNCELOT Tell him there's a post come from my master, with his horn full of
good news. My master will be here ere morning. 45

[Exit LAUNCELOT]

LORENZO Sweet soul, let's in, and there expect their coming.

And yet no matter. Why should we go in?

My friend Stephano, signify, I pray you,

Within the house, your mistress is at hand, 50

And bring your music forth into the air.

[Exit STEPHANO]

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.

Here will we sit and let the sounds of music

Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night

Become the touches of sweet harmony. 55

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven

Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st

But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins; 60

Such harmony is in immortal souls;

But whilst this muddy vesture of decay

Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

[Enter Musicians]



45–46 **Tell him there's a post ... full of good news:** Tell him there's a messenger from my master (Bassanio) bringing good news. The horn, associated with messengers, is in keeping with Launcelot's earlier joking.



Come ho, and wake Diana with a hymn,
 With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
 And draw her home with music. 65

[Music]

JESSICA I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
 LORENZO The reason is, your spirits are attentive.
 For do but note a wild and wanton herd
 Or race of youthful and unhandled colts 70
 Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,
 Which is the hot condition of their blood;
 If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
 Or any air of music touch their ears,
 You shall perceive them make a mutual stand, 75
 Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze
 By the sweet power of music. Therefore the poet
 Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods;
 Since nought so stockish, hard and full of rage,
 But music for the time doth change his nature. 80
 The man that hath no music in himself,
 Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
 Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
 The motions of his spirit are dull as night
 And his affections dark as Erebus. 85
 Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

[Enter PORTIA and NERISSA]

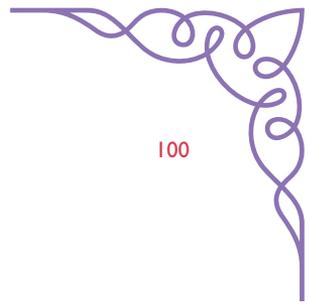
PORTIA That light we see is burning in my hall.
 How far that little candle throws his beams!
 So shines a good deed in a naughty world.
 NERISSA When the moon shone, we did not see the candle. 90
 PORTIA So doth the greater glory dim the less.
 A substitute shines brightly as a king
 Until the king be by, and then his state
 Empties itself, as doth an inland brook
 Into the main of waters. Music! Hark! 95
 NERISSA It is your music, madam, of the house.
 PORTIA Nothing is good, I see, without respect;
 Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.



68–77 **The reason is ... power of music:** Lorenzo claims that even animals are tamed by the power of music.

77–80 **Therefore the poet ... change his nature:** The ancient Roman poet Ovid related how Orpheus charmed inanimate objects with music.

81–86 **The man that hath no music ... man be trusted:** Lorenzo suggests that people who don't like music lack loyalty, joy and affection (Erebus = dwelling place of the dead).



NERISSA Silence bestows that virtue on it, madam.
 PORTIA The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark, 100
 When neither is attended, and I think
 The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
 When every goose is cackling, would be thought
 No better a musician than the wren.
 How many things by season seasoned are 105
 To their right praise and true perfection!
 Peace, ho! The moon sleeps with Endymion
 And would not be awaked.

[Music ceases]

LORENZO That is the voice,
 Or I am much deceived, of Portia.

PORTIA He knows me as the blind man knows the cuckoo, 110
 By the bad voice.

LORENZO Dear lady, welcome home.

PORTIA We have been praying for our husbands' healths,
 Which speed, we hope, the better for our words.
 Are they returned?

LORENZO Madam, they are not yet; 115
 But there is come a messenger before,
 To signify their coming.

PORTIA Go in, Nerissa;
 Give order to my servants that they take
 No note at all of our being absent hence;
 Nor you, Lorenzo; Jessica, nor you.

[A trumpet sounds]

LORENZO Your husband is at hand; I hear his trumpet: 120
 We are no tell-tales, madam; fear you not.



107–08 The moon sleeps ... not be awaked: Endymion was a shepherd who the goddess of the moon kissed, putting him to sleep forever; Portia states that the moon has gone to sleep with him.



QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you find any evidence in this scene that Jessica and Lorenzo are enjoying their time together as the temporary Lord and Lady of Belmont?
- 2 How is Stephano's message deceptive? How is this an example of dramatic irony?
- 3 How does the early part of this scene provide a contrast to Act 4?



- 1 What effect do you think is created by the repetition and rhythm of the speeches of the lovers at the beginning of this scene?
- 2 In what tone should the actor who plays Lorenzo deliver the line in which he calls Jessica a 'little shrew' (line 21)?
- 3 What is Lorenzo's opinion of men who do not like music in lines 81–86?

Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Portia
Bassanio
Gratiano
Nerissa
Antonio
Lorenzo

IN A NUTSHELL

Soon after Bassanio, Gratiano and Antonio arrive in Belmont, a quarrel breaks out over Gratiano losing the ring Nerissa gave him. When Bassanio also admits to giving his ring away, Portia and Nerissa tease their husbands about the serious consequences of these 'betrayals', before eventually revealing the truth. Portia delivers the news that Antonio's ships have safely returned, and that Jessica and Lorenzo will inherit Shylock's wealth upon his death. The play ends with Gratiano expressing his desire for Nerissa and swearing to be more careful with her ring in the future.

Before you read

- A 'civil doctor' is a doctor of law, what we would call a lawyer today. When witnesses were interrogated under oath, these questionings were called interrogatories ('inter'gatories'). When Gratiano and Portia use this word at the end of the scene, they are continuing the legal conceit (extended metaphor).
- The play's resolution focuses on the two newlywed couples: Portia and Bassanio, and Nerissa and Gratiano, but there are three other major characters onstage. It is likely that Jessica and Lorenzo will also retire together but what will Antonio do? Shylock was Act 4's solitary figure. Many productions portray Antonio as equally lonely; thus the play ends on a note of disquiet.
- The humorous plot involving the rings in this final scene bears some resemblance to the more serious themes of the previous act: much of the drama revolves around an agreement or bond not being honoured or adhered to.



V

- Acquitted of:** Released from
- Yonder:** Over there
- Paltry:** Worthless
- Posy:** Poetry
- Vehement:** Passionate
- Prating:** Chattering
- Aught:** Anything
- Conceive:** Think
- Zeal:** Enthusiasm
- Liberal:** Morally loose

Belmont. The Gardens at Portia's House.

PORTIA This night methinks is but the daylight sick;
It looks a little paler. 'Tis a day,
Such as the day is when the sun is hid.

[Enter BASSANIO, ANTONIO, GRATIANO, and their followers]

BASSANIO We should hold day with the Antipodes 125
If you would walk in absence of the sun.

PORTIA Let me give light, but let me not be light;
For a light wife doth make a heavy husband,
And never be Bassanio so for me.

But God sort all! You are welcome home, my lord. 130

BASSANIO I thank you, madam. Give welcome to my friend.
This is the man, this is Antonio,
To whom I am so infinitely bound.

PORTIA You should in all sense be much bound to him,
For, as I hear, he was much bound for you. 135

ANTONIO No more than I am well acquitted of.

PORTIA Sir, you are very welcome to our house.
It must appear in other ways than words,
Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy.

GRATIANO *[To NERISSA]* By yonder moon I swear you do me wrong! 140
In faith, I gave it to the judge's clerk.
Would he were gelt that had it, for my part,



125–26 We should hold day ... in the absence of the sun: Bassanio jokes that they would have sunshine at night if Portia would walk at night. This is in response to Portia's comment about the light in the previous line. The Antipodes is the southern hemisphere, where the sun shines while it is night in the northern hemisphere.

127–28 Let me give light ... make a heavy husband: A pun in response to Bassanio's remarks. Portia comments that a 'light' wife, meaning trivial wife, causes a heavy-hearted husband.

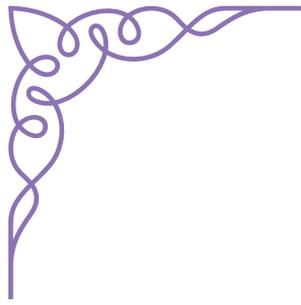
138–39 It must appear ... this breathing courtesy: Your welcome must be clear beyond our words, therefore I cut short ('scant') this polite conversation ('breathing courtesy').



PORTIA Since you do take it, love, so much at heart.
GRATIANO A quarrel, ho, already! What's the matter?
About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring 145
That she did give me, whose posy was
For all the world like cutler's poetry
Upon a knife, 'Love me, and leave me not.'
NERISSA What talk you of the posy or the value?
You swore to me, when I did give it you, 150
That you would wear it till your hour of death
And that it should lie with you in your grave.
Though not for me, yet for your vehement oaths,
You should have been respective and have kept it.
Gave it a judge's clerk! No, God's my judge, 155
The clerk will ne'er wear hair on's face that had it.
GRATIANO He will, an if he live to be a man.
NERISSA Ay, if a woman live to be a man.
GRATIANO Now, by this hand, I gave it to a youth,
A kind of boy, a little scrubbèd boy, 160
No higher than thyself; the judge's clerk,
A prating boy, that begged it as a fee;
I could not for my heart deny it him.
PORTIA You were to blame, I must be plain with you,
To part so slightly with your wife's first gift: 165
A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger
And so riveted with faith unto your flesh.
I gave my love a ring and made him swear
Never to part with it; and here he stands.
I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it 170
Nor pluck it from his finger, for the wealth
That the world masters. Now, in faith, Gratiano,
You give your wife too unkind a cause of grief.
An 'twere to me, I should be mad at it.
BASSANIO [*Aside*] Why, I were best to cut my left hand off 175
And swear I lost the ring defending it.
GRATIANO My Lord Bassanio gave his ring away
Unto the judge that begged it and indeed
Deserved it too; and then the boy, his clerk,
That took some pains in writing, he begged mine; 180
And neither man nor master would take aught
But the two rings.



147–48 For all the world ... Upon a knife: Gratiano swears the poetry is like an engraving on a knife handle. He suggests the poem on the ring is overly sentimental (the equivalent of greeting-card poetry today). It is likely Shakespeare worked for his glove-making father and wrote some of this sort of poetry for the gift boxes of gloves they sold.



	I'll not deny him any thing I have,	225
	No, not my body nor my husband's bed.	
	Know him I shall, I am well sure of it.	
	Lie not a night from home; watch me like Argus.	
	If you do not, if I be left alone,	
	Now, by mine honour, which is yet mine own,	230
	I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow.	
NERISSA	And I his clerk. Therefore be well advised	
	How you do leave me to mine own protection.	
GRATIANO	Well, do you so; let not me take him, then;	
	For if I do, I'll mar the young clerk's pen.	235
ANTONIO	I am the unhappy subject of these quarrels.	
PORTIA	Sir, grieve not you; you are welcome notwithstanding.	
BASSANIO	Portia, forgive me this enforced wrong;	
	And, in the hearing of these many friends,	
	I swear to thee, even by thine own fair eyes,	240
	Wherein I see myself –	
PORTIA	Mark you but that!	
	In both my eyes he doubly sees himself;	
	In each eye, one. Swear by your double self,	
	And there's an oath of credit.	
BASSANIO	Nay, but hear me.	
	Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear	245
	I never more will break an oath with thee.	
ANTONIO	I once did lend my body for his wealth,	
	Which, but for him that had your husband's ring,	
	Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,	
	My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord	250
	Will never more break faith advisedly.	
PORTIA	Then you shall be his surety. Give him this	
	And bid him keep it better than the other.	
ANTONIO	Here, Lord Bassanio; swear to keep this ring.	
BASSANIO	By heaven, it is the same I gave the doctor!	255
PORTIA	I had it of him. Pardon me, Bassanio;	
	For, by this ring, the doctor lay with me.	
NERISSA	And pardon me, my gentle Gratiano;	
	For that same scrubbèd boy, the doctor's clerk,	
	In lieu of this last night did lie with me.	260



228–31 Watch me like Argus ... for my bedfellow: Portia claims that if she is left alone, she may take the doctor, who now possesses Bassanio's ring, as her lover ('Argus' = a monster with a hundred eyes, from classical mythology).

235 I'll mar the young clerk's pen: Gratiano is suggesting some act of violence, possibly castration ('mar' = damage).

252 Surety: Guarantee.



GRATIANO

And charge us there upon inter'gatories,
 And we will answer all things faithfully.
 Let it be so. The first inter'gatory
 That my Nerissa shall be sworn on is,
 Whether till the next night she had rather stay,
 Or go to bed now, being two hours to day.
 But were the day come, I should wish it dark,
 That I were couching with the doctor's clerk.
 Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing
 So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.

300

305

[All exit]



296–97 And charge us ... all things faithfully: Ask us anything you want, as though we were witnesses in court ('inter'gatories').

303 Couching: In bed.

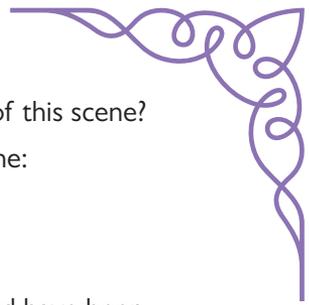
304–05 Well, while I live ... safe Nerissa's ring: Gratiano jokes that he takes great pains to guard Nerissa's honour. Gratiano clearly intends this to be taken as a sexual pun.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What are Bassanio and Gratiano criticised for giving away in this scene?
- 2 In the First Folio (published in 1623), *The Merchant of Venice* is listed as a comedy. List all the comic elements in the play's ending.
- 3 This scene is rich in dramatic irony. Draw up and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of dramatic irony.

Character	Quote	Why is this quote ironic?
Nerissa	'The clerk will ne'er wear hair on's face that had it' (line 156)	
	'Ay, if a woman live to be a man' (line 158)	
	'A little scrubbèd boy, / No higher than thyself' (lines 160–61)	
Bassanio	'Why, I were best to cut my left hand off / And swear I lost the ring defending it.' (lines 175–76)	
Portia		
Bassanio	'Had you been there, I think you would have begged / The ring of me to give the worthy doctor' (lines 219–20)	



- 4 What good news do Lorenzo and Jessica receive at the end of this scene?
- 5 Quote and explain an example of the following from this scene:
 - a a pun
 - b a conceit.



- 1 Which of the comic elements in this scene do you think would have been better received by an audience in Shakespeare's day than an audience today?
- 2 Are there any details in this scene which are improbable and therefore in keeping with *The Merchant of Venice* resembling a fairytale?



- 1 If you were the actor playing Antonio in this scene, how would you communicate your unease at Portia and Bassanio's argument?
- 2 Jessica is onstage for the whole of this scene but does not speak. Do you think she would have conflicting emotions in this scene? How would you play her part?

Michael Radford: DVD Chapter 31 (Resolution)



- 1 What mood do you think the director, Radford, is attempting to convey through music, colour and light?
- 2 Gratiano grabs a glass of wine before retiring to bed. What feature of his personality does this emphasise?
- 3 The final shot of Antonio depicts him as a solitary figure confused about what to do next. What do these details tell us about his situation at the end of the play?
- 4 Shylock, in the closing scenes, is shown as being utterly alone and bereft of any comfort. Use the table below to comment on the techniques Radford uses to emphasise this.

Film technique	Effect of technique
Lighting	
Camera angles	
Costume	

- 5 The doors of the synagogue are closed on Shylock, leaving him alone in the cold, blue light. What aspect of the play is Radford reminding us of here? What impression does it create of Shylock's future?
- 6 How does Radford convey that Jessica is discontented in the closing scene? Refer to camera work, acting and props in your response.



I have better news in store for you ...

The Merchant of Venice as comedy

Shakespeare's plays were first collected and published in 1623, in what we now call the First Folio; this was a thick book entitled *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*. *The Merchant of Venice* was included in the section marked Comedies, along with such famous plays as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. The book did not offer a definition of comedy, so what did the editors mean by comedy?

While the term tragedy suggests an unhappy outcome, comedy implies a happy ending. An example of this is *The Divine Comedy*, which the medieval Italian poet, Dante, wrote in the thirteenth century. The poem was written in three parts, following the pilgrim, Dante, through hell, purgatory and heaven. Despite the graphic torments of hell, the poem is classified as a comedy because it concludes in heaven with the transformed Dante glimpsing the face of God.

The earliest comedies that we know of were performed in ancient Greece. These plays often included the sort of bawdy (rude) joking that we find in Shakespeare's plays. They are often harsh and satirical as well, mocking important people and institutions.

While Shakespeare's plays often celebrate love and ridicule lovers, some of his comedies also present political concerns. *The Merchant of Venice* invites the audience to sympathise with a Jewish character who suffers persecution at the hands of a racist society. Similarly, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* offers, in part, a critique of the power that fathers had over their children in Elizabethan society.

Shakespeare's comedies can also deal with adversity and difficult circumstances. As *You Like It* begins with the wicked Fredrick stealing the kingdom from his brother, Duke Senior, who is then forced to live in exile in the forest. Likewise, *Twelfth Night* begins with a shipwreck that separates brother and sister, Sebastian and Viola. But, despite various trials, comedies end happily – in the case of Shakespeare, usually with the wedding of two or more couples. The story of *As You Like It* has a fairytale ending, with the wedding of four couples, as well as the news that Duke Fredrick has undergone a religious conversion and will, therefore, return the kingdom to Duke Senior. *Twelfth Night* concludes with three weddings, and Sebastian and Viola reunited.

Many critics, beginning with Middleton Murray, have asserted that *The Merchant of Venice* is a fairytale, with Shylock a kind of pantomime or fairytale villain. While Shakespeare's audience may have been insensitive to the harassment of Shylock, audiences in more recent times are often shocked by the way Shylock is treated. This is especially the case since the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, which culminated in the deaths of six million Jews during World War II. Since this event, a number of

directors focus sympathetically on Shylock's humiliation, making the play, in effect, a modern tragedy; other directors include subtle hints of disquiet or foreboding among the happiness of the final act. One example of this is Michael Radford's 2004 film that ends with a shot of Jessica as a solitary, lonely figure staring wistfully out to sea. Despite the serious issues the play raises, the humour of the end of the play, and the joyous resolution, with the newly married couples retiring to bed, is the standard material of Shakespearean comedy.

During his career, Shakespeare wrote more comedies than tragedies. It is believed *The Merchant of Venice* was written around 1597. Although the following period, 1599–1607, saw some of Shakespeare's darkest writing, his later plays (sometimes called romances) generally have happy endings and can, in this way, be defined as comedies.

The most excellent Historie of the *Merchant of Venice*.

VVith the extreame crueltie of *Shylocke* the Iewe
towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a iust pound
of his flesh: and the obtaining of *Portia*
by the choyse of three
chests.

*As it hath bene diuers times acted by the Lord
Chamberlaine his Seruants,*

Written by William Shakepeare.



AT LONDON,
Printed by I. R. for Thomas Heyes,
and are to be sold in Paules Church-yard, at the
signe of the Greene Dragon.
1600.

Title page of the first published version of The Merchant of Venice. Note that it actually refers to the play as a 'history', rather than a 'comedy'.



General activities

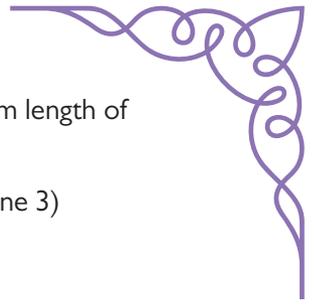
Oral presentations / performance

- 1 Make your own CD soundtrack for a film version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Choose at least eight tracks that you feel are appropriate for different scenes in the film. Specify which eight scenes you have chosen and write at least 50 words about each song to say why it is suitable for the particular scene you have chosen. You should include at least four of the following scenes:
 - Act 1 Scene 2 (Portia and Nerissa discuss the suitors)
 - Act 1 Scene 3 (Antonio and Bassanio go to Shylock for a loan)
 - Act 2 Scene 5 (Shylock instructs Jessica)
 - Act 2 Scene 6 (Jessica escapes with Lorenzo)
 - Act 3 Scene 1 ('Hath not a Jew eyes?')
 - Act 3 Scene 2 (Bassanio and Portia)
 - Act 4 Scene 1 (A moment in the court case)
 - Act 5 Scene 1 (Jessica and Lorenzo at Belmont).

You may choose to perform this as an oral presentation, playing short excerpts from each song and explaining your choices.

- 2 Explain what your emphasis would be if you were given the chance to direct your own version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Cover, in particular, your choice of costume for six of the main characters. Explain what sort of atmosphere you would look to create with the set design.
- 3 Record a scene from the play as part of a radio play.
- 4 Perform a scene from the play as a group or perform one of the soliloquies or monologues on your own.
- 5 Produce a one-minute trailer advertising your version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Make sure you consider music, sound effects and voice-over.
- 6 Set up a chat-show style interview with one of the characters from the play in which you discuss what happened to this particular character. Choose from:
 - Antonio
 - Bassanio
 - Portia
 - Shylock
 - Jessica.

Make sure you stay in character for the entire length of the interview.



- 7 Cover one of the following scenes as a news report (minimum length of two minutes):
- Antonio and Bassanio asking Shylock for a loan (Act 1 Scene 3)
 - The Prince of Morocco and the caskets (Act 2 Scene 6)
 - Jessica's actions (Act 2)
 - News of Shylock's loss and his response (Act 3)
 - The courtroom trial (Act 4 Scene 1)
 - The couples at the end of the play.

This can take the form of either a short video or a radio news story. Make sure that you include some interviews.

- 8 Deliver the lines inscribed on the casket scroll that the Prince of Morocco reads in Act 2 Scene 7 as a rap, emphasising the rhythm. You could also do this for the scroll read by the Prince of Arragon in Act 2 Scene 9; the song Bassanio hears; or the poem on the scroll that Bassanio reads in Act 3 Scene 2. You may perform this as a group or individually. Alternatively, you could write your own rap in which you capture key scenes and events of the play.
- 9 Act out the courtroom trial in Act 4 Scene 1. This will be a group oral presentation involving a minimum of five students, taking the roles of the Duke, Shylock, Antonio, Portia and Bassanio.
- 10 Memorise a passage from *The Merchant of Venice* and perform it for your class. Put the speech in context before you deliver the lines, and explain your interpretation following your performance.
- 11 Imagine you are the host of a television show like *The Bachelorette*. Naturally, Portia is the bachelorette and the Prince of Morocco is one of her many suitors. Script and perform a short interview with Morocco before and after his encounter with Portia. You could also run a before-and-after interview with Portia by way of contrast. Use modern language. You might like to include more than one Prince in your performance.
- 12 Imagine you are an actor who has recently played a character from *The Merchant of Venice*. Write a speech explaining how you felt about your character and your performance.
- 13 Imagine you are a film or theatre director. Pitch your ideas to the class about your own production of *The Merchant of Venice*.



Questions for debate

Debate one of the following topics. The Affirmative Team will agree with the statement, while the Negative Team will disagree. Both teams should consist of three members who each speak for two minutes.

- 1 Shylock gets what he deserves.
- 2 The characters in *The Merchant of Venice* have no genuine religious convictions.
- 3 *The Merchant of Venice* is really a tragedy.

Creative writing

- 1 Try writing part of one of the scenes as a chapter from a modern novel. This will require you to fill in some of the details of the setting, include dialogue and give some idea of what characters are thinking. Make sure you use modern language.
- 2 Imagine that you are Jessica and, in a brief moment of reflection before leaving, you write to your father. Is it a note scrawled in biro stuck to the fridge? A list of dos and don'ts left by the phone? An ink-stained letter sealed with red wax and smeared with tears? Have fun with this and be creative with time and place – you are not confined to the conventions of Shakespeare's language. Aim for about 300 words.
- 3 Write a 300–500 word newspaper article on one of the following events from the play:
 - Antonio and Bassanio ask Shylock for a loan (Act 1 Scene 3)
 - The suitors and the caskets (based on events in Act 2)
 - Jessica's actions (based on events in Act 2)
 - News of Shylock's loss and his response (based on events in Act 3)
 - The courtroom trial (Act 4 Scene 1)
 - The complications with the rings (based on events in Acts 4 and 5).

Make sure your headline and your opening sentence grab the reader's attention. Also, insert some quotes from the play or create fictitious interviews with characters. You might like to present this using ICT (PowerPoint, Keynote, Flash, Podcast or website).

- 4 Think of three alternative titles for *The Merchant of Venice* and write a few sentences on why each of these titles would effectively market the play or film to a modern audience.

- 
- 5 Write an 'extra scene' depicting either of the following.
 - Jessica bumps into her father in the street some years after leaving home.
 - Antonio meets with Shylock a few months after the court case.
 - 6 Give Shylock a moment in the spotlight before he leaves the courtroom, and write his final aside before he leaves the stage (10–20 lines in length). Make sure you employ Shakespearean language.
 - 7 Create a blog or Facebook page in which you write some entries or status updates from one character's point of view at different stages in the play, responding to the events that have occurred. Add other characters' comments to your character's log.
 - 8 Choose any character from the play and chronicle their thoughts and feelings in the form of a diary.
 - 9 Write your own versions of the poems on the scrolls found in the three caskets. This could be done in poetry or prose.
 - 10 Write a series of postcards Jessica sends home while honeymooning with Lorenzo. Alternatively, you could do this with Portia and Bassanio, or Nerissa and Gratiano.
 - 11 Write the letter Portia pens to her cousin Bellario after the court case has been settled, explaining the outcome.
 - 12 Choose a Hollywood actor you think is best suited for a key role in your upcoming film version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Write a letter to the actor explaining their role and why they will be just right for this part.

Illustration

- 1 Design a poster for your own film or stage version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Include quotes, phrases to catch the viewer's attention and a list of the cast.
- 2 Present one of the scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* as a comic book or comic strip. Or, create a flipbook that captures the key characters and events of the play.
- 3 Create a PowerPoint or Flash presentation about five characters in the play, using key quotes, a background that you feel is representative of them, relevant symbols and appropriate background music. Write 50 words on each character explaining why you made these creative choices.
- 4 Draw or paint a map of the play that includes Venice, the Rialto, Belmont and other key settings.



Questions for discussion

Discuss the following questions in a group or as a class.

- 1 Does Shakespeare portray Shylock sympathetically?
- 2 Is *The Merchant of Venice* an anti-Semitic play?
- 3 To what extent is Shylock a victim of forces beyond his control?
- 4 What do you think *The Merchant of Venice* has to say about racism and prejudice?
- 5 Is *The Merchant of Venice* a comedy or a tragedy?
- 6 Do you agree with the critic Harold Bloom that *The Merchant of Venice* is Portia's play?

Essay questions

- 1 '*The Merchant of Venice* is a highly feminist text.' Discuss this statement with reference to the play as a whole.
- 2 Explain how the Jessica–Lorenzo subplot is central to the play's key themes.
- 3 Explain how one scene of *The Merchant of Venice* is central to your understanding of the play as a whole.
- 4 Who is the victim and who the villain in *The Merchant of Venice*?
- 5 Explain why two key themes of *The Merchant of Venice* make the play relevant for study today.
- 6 Discuss the role of prejudice in *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 7 Explain how Shakespeare uses scene length and structure to create dramatic tension in *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 8 Can *The Merchant of Venice* be accurately described as a play of contrasts?
- 9 What themes does Michael Radford emphasise in his film version of *The Merchant of Venice*?
- 10 'It's hard to care about characters in a play who only care about themselves.' Discuss this statement with reference to *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 11 '*The Merchant of Venice* is not really a comedy.' Discuss.
- 12 '*The Merchant of Venice* shows that there is a chasm between ideals and action.' Discuss.
- 13 'Shylock is the only honest character in *The Merchant of Venice*.' Discuss.
- 14 Do you agree with the poet WH Auden that Antonio and Shylock are the only characters who 'give and hazard all'?

APPENDIX 1



To the teacher

It will not be possible for your students to attempt every activity in this book but we have given you a wide range of activities and questions, so that you can determine what best suits the particular needs of your class. Listed below are some of the features of this edition of *The Merchant of Venice* and a brief explanation of how they might be useful in your lessons.

We have used a range of icons to help you and your students identify different parts of the text.

1. Understanding the narrative

Before you begin reading the text, it is important that your students have a sound grasp of the story. It is a good idea for the class to read through the **Act summaries** on pages 17–18, and complete the **Quick questions** and **Freeze-frames** activity on pages 19–20.

At the beginning of each scene, we have given a brief outline of what happens, called **In a nutshell**.

2. Reading the text

While it is likely you will read most of the play as a class, you should also read some scenes in smaller groups, and you might like to perform some as well.

At the beginning of each scene we have listed the characters in order of importance. It is helpful if you take a major role and delegate the other major parts to your most confident readers. It is also helpful, for some scenes, if one student reads the stage directions.

Where possible, try to delegate parts the day before you perform a scene so that students have an opportunity to look over, and perhaps practise, their parts. Encourage students to read loudly and clearly, and be forthcoming with your praise.

Shakespeare's language (see pages 10–14) provides some basic reading tips and explanations of key language features. We recommend that you look at the reading tips with your class before you begin reading through the play. It is important that you do not overwhelm your students with too many concepts in a short time. Introduce concepts such as iambic pentameter after your students have begun to gain an intuitive feel for the language.



We have also provided general introductions on **Elizabethan England**, **Shakespeare** himself, **sources** of the play and the **settings**. These will provide some background and a context in which to read the play. The notes on Elizabethan England and the theatre are the most important of these introductions.

There is, of course, no substitute for seeing the text performed as a live production, and we recommend you have actors or performance companies visit your school.

3. Understanding the text

A summary of **Important vocabulary** at the front of the book (page 15) lists key words that recur regularly throughout the play.



We have also included a short **Vocabulary list** at the beginning of each scene. All of these words, plus some others from the **Text notes**, are repeated in the vocabulary list on pages 167–69. In this way you can find a word without having to remember where it was first introduced.

The **Before you read** section at the beginning of each scene provides reading tips and anticipates problems students may have. Phrases and words that are more secondary to the understanding of a scene are printed as **Text notes** beneath the play text on each page.



Finally, a number of **History boxes** provide useful historical information on Elizabethan England. Some of this information has been included to give a historical context for specific scenes; other information has been provided to fire students' curiosity.

We have included a **Shakespeare reading list** on page 166 in case you wish to read more about Shakespeare and the Elizabethan world.

4. Analysing the text



QUESTIONS

In ordering the **Questions**, we have attempted to balance chronology against degree of difficulty. For some scenes you might look to save time by dividing the questions among different groups in the class, or you may simply use them as a springboard for discussion.



EXTEND

We have also included **Extend** questions that will allow some students or the entire class to analyse a scene in greater depth. It is important that all students engage with the technical aspects of the play and, for this reason, we have also included questions relating to technique among the general questions.



DISCUSS

Finally, some questions have been designed for general discussion of personal responses to the text, as well as possible interpretations for performance. These are indicated by the **Discuss** icon.

highlight particular ideas and devices used by Shakespeare throughout this play. We recommend that students first read these boxes themselves and that you then explain the concept using the examples.

5. The film (Press play)

Michael Radford's 2004 film of *The Merchant of Venice* is the most accessible, exciting and modern version of the play. It is useful to show excerpts from the film as your class studies the play to reinforce your students' understanding of key scenes, and it may serve as an alternative to reading some scenes. The **Press play** activities provide opportunities for further analysis and discussion.

6. Other activities

There is deliberate overlap between the **Questions for debate**, **Questions for discussion** and **Essay questions** (pages 158–61). How you use these will depend largely on the type of class you have. We generally prefer to read through the play in its entirety before beginning debates, essays or creative activities. You may, however, like to break up your reading of the play with one of the **Oral presentations / performance** or **Creative writing** activities after Acts 2 or 3.

7. A note about the text

We have based this edition of *The Merchant of Venice* on the First Folio. Some of the stage directions and the spelling have been modernised in line with standard editorial practices for preparing editions of Shakespeare's plays. Modern punctuation conventions are followed, with the exception of the dash (–), which we have used to indicate an interruption in the flow or the direction of the conversation; for example, when a character switches from soliloquising to addressing another character onstage, or when a character switches from addressing one character to addressing another (see **Shakespeare's language** on pages 10–14 for a more detailed explanation).

8. Finally ...

No-one could reasonably expect to understand every phrase or allusion in Shakespeare's plays and your students should not expect to either. Making this clear from the outset will foster the confidence in students to talk about what they do understand and what they do know: to see the text as a glass half full, rather than a glass half empty. Moreover, this will encourage students to appreciate the subtleties and resonances of the language and to truly understand that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our pedagogy.



APPENDIX 2

A Shakespeare reading list

- Alexander, Catherine MS, *Shakespeare: The Life, the Works, the Treasures*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007.
- Bate, Jonathan, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Picador, London, 1997.
- Crystal, David & Ben, *Shakespeare's Words*, Penguin, London, 2002.
- Greenblatt, Stephen, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, Norton, London, 2004.
- Greer, Germaine, *Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.
- Gurr, Andrew, *The Shakespearean Stage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- Hussey, SS, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare*, Longman, Harlow, 1982.
- Kay, Dennis, *Shakespeare: His Life, Work and Era*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1991.
- Kermode, Frank, *Shakespeare's Language*, Penguin, London, 2001.
- , *The Age of Shakespeare*, Phoenix, London, 2005.
- Rodenburg, Patsy, *Reading Shakespeare*, Methuen, London, 2002.
- Sandler, Robert (ed.), *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1986.
- Shapiro, James, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, Faber & Faber, London, 2005.
- Tillyard, EMW, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Vintage Books, New York, 1960.
- Wells, Stanley, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.
- , *Shakespeare & Co.*, Penguin, London, 2007.
- Wilson, Jean, *The Shakespeare Legacy*, Bramley Books, Godalming, 1995.
- Wood, Michael, *In Search of Shakespeare*, directed by David Wallace, Maya Vision International, 2004.

Vocabulary list

Abide: Stay

Abroad: About the place

Adieu: Goodbye

Adversary: Enemy

Ague: Fever

Alack: Alas

Albeit: Although

Allay: Diminish; calm down

Amity: Friendship

Amorous: Loving; passionate

Anon: Soon

Argosy: Merchant ship

Aught: Anything

Bars: Denies

Base: Low; common; unworthy

Bastard: A person conceived outside of wedlock

Bated: Lessened or diminished (abated)

Bereft: Lacking

Beseech: Request

Beshrew: Curse

Bestow: Give

Bond: Agreement

Bootless: Useless

Burghers: Citizens

By my troth: I tell the truth

Casement: Window

Commodity: Merchandise (security for the loan)

Complexion: Appearance

Conceit: Thought; way of thinking

Confound: Confuse

Constitution: Complexion

Contemplation: Prayer and reflection

Counterfeit: Image

Credit: Financial status

Creditors: Persons lending money

Cur: Dog

Deed: Letter of information relating to the court

Discourse: Conversation

Discretion: Good taste or judgement

Ducats: Venetian gold coins

Entreat: Invite (usually the word means strongly request); beg or request

Ere: Before

Ergo: Therefore

Estate: Someone's personal wealth

Fancy: Love; infatuation

Fell: cruel

Fi: Expression of annoyance, disapproval or disgust

Fiend: Devil

Follies: Acts of foolishness

Fond: Foolish

Foppery: Foolishness; stupidity

Forbear: Stop; avoid

Forfeiture: Not being able to repay the loan; penalty

Garments: Clothing

Gondola: Small boat used for transport on the canals of Venice

Go to: Get moving

Gramercy: Many thanks

Grandsire: A grandfather

Gratify: Reward

Gratis: Interest-free

Graved: Engraved

Gross: Coarse or vulgar





Habit: Clothing
Hazard: Risk; guess
Heinous: Terrible
Hie thee: Hurry
Hither: Here; to this place
Ho: An exclamation

Impeach: Charge or question
Importunity: Request
Imposition: Duty
Imputation: Suggestion
Infidel: Unbeliever or non-Christian
Injunctions: Conditions
Inscription: Written message
In sooth: In truth; truly

Kin: Relation
Kinsman: Relative

Liberal: Extravagant; generous; morally loose
Livery: Uniform; costume

Magnificoes: Venetian noblemen
Mar: Damage
Marry: By the Virgin Mary (expression of surprise or frustration)
Masque: A show or party
Meet: Appropriate or fitting
Mitigate: Soften; tone down

Naughty: Wicked

Obdurate: Stubborn; relentless
Obscured: Hidden
O'er: Over
Orb: Planet or star
Ostents: Expressions
Outface: Outdo

Pagan: Non-Christian
Paltry: Worthless
Patch: Fool; clown
Peevish: Irritable
Pent-house: Balcony
Perchance: Maybe
Plies: Urges
Posy: Poetry
Presage: Foretell
Principal: Original sum borrowed
Prodigal: Someone who has been wasteful and extravagant
Prop: Supporting beam (a house would fall down without this)
Proverb: Well-known saying

Racked: Stretched
Rail: Shout
Reasoned: Talked
Relent: Change one's mind
Render: Give
Requite: Pay back
Rialto: Main business district of Venice

Semblance: Appearance or likeness
Shaft: Arrow
Shrew: Troublesome woman (offensive)
Signify: Report
Signiors: Sirs (gentlemen)
Sirrah: Term used to address people of a lower rank
Slander: Dishonour
Soft: Wait a moment
Sonties: Saints
Straight: Immediately
Sufferance: Distress; suffering
Suit: Request or offer of marriage
Suitor: Someone bringing a request (a suit), often a proposal of marriage
Surety: Guarantee



Surfeit: Overindulge; feed to excess
Suffice: Be sufficient
Sunder: Break apart
Synagogue: Jewish place of worship

Tarry: Stay; remain; wait
Temporal: Earthly
Tenor: Terms and conditions
Thither: To or towards that place
Thoroughly: Archaic way of saying thoroughly in two beats, with the stress on the first
Thwarted: Frustrated
Tongue: Voice
Thrift: Financial profit; being wise with money

Usance / Userances: Interest

Valiant: Brave
Vehement: Passionate

Via: Go away
Virtuous: Full of goodness (virtue)
Void: Empty

Wants: Needs
Warrant: Guarantee
Whet: Sharpen
Wilt: Will
Withal: With or in addition to
Woo: Win over or persuade (in matters of love)
Wooper: Someone looking to persuade (in matters of love)

Yield: Give
Yond: Over there
Yonder: Over there
Yunker: Younger person

Zeal: Enthusiasm

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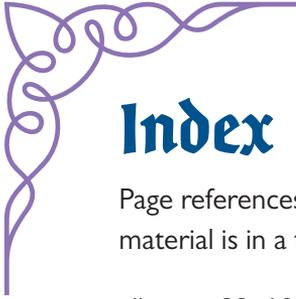
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The Merchant of Venice

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