

I'm not robot!

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Although critics tend to agree that Shylock is The Merchant of Venice's most noteworthy figure, no consensus has been reached on whether to read him as a bloodthirsty hogueyman, a clownish Jewish stereotype, or a tragic figure whose sense of decency has been fractured by the persecution he endures. Certainly, Shylock is the play's antagonist, and he is menacing enough to seriously imperil the happiness of Venice's businessmen and young lovers alike. Shylock is also, however, a creation of circumstance; even in his single-minded pursuit of a pound of flesh, his frequent mentions of the cruelty he has endured at Christian hands make it hard for us to label him a natural born monster. In one of Shakespeare's most famous monologues, for example, Shylock argues that Jews are humans and calls his quest for vengeance the product of lessons taught to him by the cruelty of Venetian citizens. On the other hand, Shylock's coldly calculated attempt to revenge the wrongs done to him by murdering his persecutor, Antonio, prevents us from viewing him in a primarily positive light. Shakespear gives us unmistakably human moments, but he often steers us against Shylock as well, painting him as a miserly, cruel, and prosaic figure. Did you know you can highlight text to take a note? x A Jewish moneylender in Venice. Angered by his mistreatment at the hands of Venice's Christians, particularly Antonio, Shylock schemes to eke out of his revenge by ruthlessly demanding as payment a pound of Antonio's flesh. Although seen by the rest of the play's characters as an inhuman monster, Shylock at times diverges from stereotype and reveals himself to be quite human. These contradictions, and his eloquent expressions of hatred, have earned Shylock a place as one of Shakespeare's most memorable characters. Read an in-depth analysis of Shylock. Portia A wealthy heiress from Belmont. Portia's beauty is matched only by her intelligence. Bound by a clause in her father's will that forces her to marry whichever suitor chooses correctly among three caskets, Portia is nonetheless able to marry her true love, Bassanio. Far and away the most clever of the play's characters, it is Portia, in the disguise of a young law clerk, who saves Antonio from Shylock's knife. Read an in-depth analysis of Portia. Antonio The merchant whose love for his friend Bassanio prompts him to sign Shylock's contract and almost lose his life. Antonio is something of a mercurial figure, often inexplicably melancholy and, as Shylock points out, possessed of an incorrigible dislike of Jews. Nonetheless, Antonio is beloved of his friends and proves merciful to Shylock, albeit with conditions. Read an in-depth analysis of Antonio. Jessica Although she is Shylock's daughter, Jessica hates life in her father's house, and elopes with the young Christian gentleman, Lorenzo. The fate of her soul is often in doubt; the play's characters wonder if her marriage can overcome the fact that she was born a Jew, and we wonder if her sale of a ring given to her father by her mother is excessively callous. Read an in-depth analysis of Jessica. Bassanio A gentleman of Venice, and a kinsman and dear friend to Antonio. Bassanio's love for the wealthy Portia leads him to borrow money from Shylock with Antonio as his guarantor. An ineffectual businessman, Bassanio proves himself a worthy suitor, correctly identifying the casket that contains Portia's portrait. Read an in-depth analysis of Bassanio. Gratiano A friend of Bassanio's who accompanies him to Belmont. A coarse and garrulous young man, Gratiano is Shylock's most vocal and insulting critic during the trial. While Bassanio courts Portia, Gratiano falls in love with and eventually weds Portia's lady-in-waiting, Nerissa. Lorenzo A friend of Bassanio and Antonio. Lorenzo is in love with Shylock's daughter, Jessica. He schemes to help Jessica escape from her father's house, and he eventually elopes with her to Belmont. Nerissa Portia's lady-in-waiting and confidante. She marries Gratiano and escorts Portia on Portia's trip to Venice by disguising herself as her law clerk. Launcelot Gobbo Bassanio's servant. A comical, clownish figure who is especially adept at making puns. Launcelot leaves Shylock's service in order to work for Bassanio. The prince of Morocco A Moorish prince who seeks Portia's hand in marriage. The prince of Morocco asks Portia to ignore his dark countenance and seeks to win her by picking one of the three caskets. Certain that the caskets reflect Portia's beauty and stature, the prince of Morocco picks the gold chest, which proves to be incorrect. The prince of Arragon An arrogant Spanish nobleman who also attempts to win Portia's hand by picking a casket. Like the prince of Morocco, however, the prince of Arragon chooses unwisely. He picks the silver casket, which gives him a message calling him an idiot instead of Portia's hand. Salario A Venetian gentleman, and friend to Antonio, Bassanio, and Lorenzo. Salario escorts the newlyweds Jessica and Lorenzo to Belmont, and returns with Bassanio and Gratiano for Antonio's trial. He is often almost indistinguishable from his companion Solanio. Solanio A Venetian gentleman, and frequent counterpart to Salario. The duke of Venice The ruler of Venice, who presides over Antonio's trial. Although a powerful man, the duke's state is built on respect for the law, and he is unable to help Antonio. Old Gobbo Launcelot's father, also a servant in Venice. Tubal A Jew in Venice, and one of Shylock's friends. Doctor Bellario A wealthy Paduan lawyer and Portia's cousin. Doctor Bellario never appears in the play, but he gives Portia's servant the letters of introduction needed for her to make her appearance in court. Balthasar Portia's servant, whom she dispatches to get the appropriate materials from Doctor Bellario. Play by Shakespeare This article is about Shakespeare's play. For other uses, see The Merchant of Venice (disambiguation). The Merchant of VeniceTitle page of the first quarto (1600)Written byWilliam ShakespeareCharacters Antonio Shylock Portia Bassanio Jessica Original languageEnglishSeriesFirst.FolioSubjectDebtGenreShakespearean comedySettingVenice, 16th centuryPlotThe Merchant of Venice is a 16th-century play written by William Shakespeare in which a merchant in Venice named Antonio defaults on a large loan provided by a Jewish moneylender, Shylock. It is believed to have been written between 1596 and 1599. Although classified as a comedy in the First Folio and sharing certain aspects with Shakespeare's other romantic comedies, the play is most remembered for its dramatic scenes, and it is best known for Shylock and his famous demand for a "pound of flesh" in retribution, as well as its "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech on humanity. As a result a debate exists on whether the play is anti-Semitic. Also notable is Portia's speech about "the quality of mercy". Characters Antonio – a prominent merchant of Venice in a melancholic mood. Bassanio – Antonio's close friend; suitor to Portia; later the husband of Portia Gratiano – friend of Antonio and Bassanio; in love with Nerissa; later the husband of Nerissa Lorenzo – friend of Antonio and Bassanio; in love with Jessica; later the husband of Jessica Portia – a rich heiress; later the wife of Bassanio Nerissa – Portia's waiting maid – in love with Gratiano; later the wife of Gratiano; disguises herself as Portia's clerk Balthazar – Portia's servant Stephano – Portia's servant Shylock – a miserly Jew; moneylender; father of Jessica Jessica – daughter of Shylock, later the wife of Lorenzo Tubal – a Jew; friend of Shylock Launcelot Gobbo – servant of Shylock; later a servant of Bassanio; son of Old Gobbo Old Gobbo – blind father of Launcelot Leonardo – servant to Bassanio Duke of Venice – authority who presides over the case of Shylock's bond Prince of Morocco – suitor to Portia Prince of Arragon – suitor to Portia Salario and Salanio (also known as Solanio) – friends of Antonio and Bassanio[1] Salario – a messenger from Venice; friend of Antonio. Bassanio and others[1] Magnificos of Venice, officers of the Court of Justice, goliards, servants to Portia, and other attendants and Doctor Bellario, cousin of Portia Plot summary Gilbert's Shylock After the Trial, an illustration to The Merchant of Venice Bassanio, a young Venetian of noble rank, wishes to woo the beautiful and wealthy heiress Portia of Belmont. Having squandered his estate, he needs 3,000 ducats to subsidise his expenditures as a suitor. Bassanio approaches his friend Antonio, a wealthy merchant of Venice, who has previously and repeatedly bailed him out. Antonio agrees, but since he is cash-poor – his ships and merchandise are busy at sea to Tripolis, the Indies, Mexico and England – he promises to cover a bond if Bassanio can find a lender, so Bassanio turns to the Jewish moneylender Shylock and names Antonio as the loan's guarantor. Antonio has already antagonized Shylock through his outspoken antisemitism and because Antonio's habit of lending money without interest forces Shylock to charge lower rates. Shylock is at first reluctant to grant the loan, citing abuse he has suffered at Antonio's hand. He finally agrees to lend the sum to Bassanio without interest upon one condition: if Antonio were unable to repay it at the specified date, Shylock may take a pound of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio does not want Antonio to accept such a risky condition; Antonio is surprised by what he sees as the moneylender's generosity (no "usance" – interest – is asked for), and he signs the contract. With money in hand, Bassanio leaves for Belmont with his friend Gratiano, who has asked to accompany him. Gratiano is a likeable young man, but he is often flippant, overly talkative, and tactless. Bassanio warns his companion to exercise self-control, and the two leave for Belmont. Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia is awash with suitors. Her father left a will stipulating that each of her suitors must choose correctly from one of three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead respectively. Whoever picks the right casket wins Portia's hand. The first suitor, the Prince of Morocco, chooses the gold casket, interpreting its slogan, "Who chooseth me shall gain what he desires", as referring to the casket's contents. The second suitor, the prince of Morocco, chooses the silver casket, which proclaims, "Who chooseth me shall have what he deserves", as he believes he is full of merits. The third suitor leaves empty-handed, having rejected the lead casket because of the baseness of its material and the inviting nature of its slogan, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath". The last suitor is Bassanio, whom Portia wishes to succeed, having met him before. As Bassanio ponders his choice, members of Portia's household sing a song that says that "fancy" (not true love) is "engend'rd in the eyes, / With gazing fed",[2] Bassanio chooses the lead casket and wins Portia's hand. A depiction of Jessica, from The Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines At Venice, Antonio's ships are reported lost at sea, so the merchant cannot repay the bond. Shylock has become more determined to exact revenge from Christians because his daughter Jessica eloped with the Christian Lorenzo and converted. She took a substantial amount of Shylock's wealth with her, as well as a turquoise ring which Shylock had been given by his late wife, Leah. Shylock has Antonio brought before court. At Belmont, Bassanio receives a letter telling him that Antonio has been unable to repay the loan from Shylock. Portia and Bassanio marry, as do Gratiano and Portia's handmaid Nerissa. Bassanio and Gratiano leave for Venice, with money from Portia, to save Antonio's life by offering the money to Shylock. Unknown to Bassanio and Gratiano, Portia sent her servant, Balthazar, to seek the counsel of Portia's cousin, Bellario, a lawyer, at Padua. The climax of the play is set in the court of the Duke of Venice. Shylock refuses Bassanio's offer of 6,000 ducats, twice the amount of the loan. He demands his pound of flesh from Antonio. The Duke, wishing to save Antonio but unable to nullify a contract, refers the case to a visitor. He identifies himself as Balthazar, a young male "doctor of the law", bearing a letter of recommendation to the Duke from the learned lawyer Bellario. The doctor is Portia in disguise, and the law clerk who accompanies her is Nerissa, also disguised as a man. As Balthazar, Portia in a famous speech repeatedly asks Shylock to show mercy, advising him that mercy "is twice blest. It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes". "Who chooseth me shall gain what he desires", as he believes he is full of merits. Shylock adamantly refuses any compensation and insists on the pound of flesh. As the court grows restless, the disguised Prince of Morocco, the disguised Prince of Arragon, chooses the silver casket, which proclaims, "Who chooseth me shall have what he deserves", as he believes he is full of merits. Shylock allows Shylock to remove only the flesh, not the blood, of Antonio (see quibble). Thus, Shylock were to shed any drop of Antonio's blood, his "lands and goods" would be forfeited under Venetian laws. She tells him that he must cut precisely one pound of flesh, no more, no less; she advises him that "If the scale do turn, / But in the estimation of a hair, / Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate." Defeated, Shylock consents to accept Bassanio's offer of money for the defaulted bond: first his offer to pay "the bond thrice", which Portia rebuffs, telling him to take his bond, and then merely the principal, but Portia also prevents him from doing this, on the ground that he has already refused it "in the open court". She cites a law under which Shylock, as a Jew and therefore an "alien", having attempted to take the life of a citizen, has forfeited his property, half to the government and half to Antonio, leaving his life at the mercy of the Duke. The Duke spares Shylock's life and says he may remit the forfeiture. Portia says the Duke may waive the state's share, but not Antonio's. Antonio says he is content that the state waive its claim to half Shylock's wealth if he can have his one-half share "in use" until Shylock's death, when the principal would be given to Lorenzo and Jessica. Antonio also asks that "for this favor" Shylock convert to Christianity and bequeath his entire estate to Lorenzo and Jessica. The Duke then threatens to recant his pardon of Shylock's life unless he accepts these conditions. Shylock, re-threatened with death, accepts with the words, "I am content." (IV. i). Bassanio does not recognise his disguised wife, but offers to give a present to the supposed lawyer. First she declines, but after he insists, Portia requests his ring and Antonio's gloves. Antonio parts with his gloves without a second thought, but Bassanio gives the ring only after much persuasion from Antonio, as earlier in the play he promised his wife never to lose, sell or give it. Nerissa, as the lawyer's clerk, succeeds in likewise retrieving her ring from Gratiano, who does not see through her disguise. At Belmont, Portia and Nerissa taunt and pretend to accuse their husbands before revealing their lawyer and his clerk in disguise (V). After all the other characters make mistakes, Antonio learns from Portia that three of his servants were not stranded and have returned safely home. Sources The title page from a 1565 printing of Giovanni Fiorentino's 14th-century tale Il Pecorone The first page of The Merchant of Venice, printed in the Secdo Folio of 1632 The forfeit of a merchant's deadly bond after standing surety for a friend's loan was a common tale in England in the late 16th century.[3] In addition, the test of the suitors at Belmont, the merchant's rescue from the "pound of flesh" penalty by his friend's new wife disguised as a lawyer, and her demand for the betrothal ring in payment are all elements present in the 14th-century tale Il Pecorone by Giovanni Fiorentino, which was published in Milan in 1558.[4] Elements of the trial scene are also found in The Orator by Alexandre Sylvane, published in translation in 1596. [3] The story of the three caskets can be found in Gesta Romanorum, a collection of tales probably compiled at the end of the 13th century.[5] Date and text The date of composition of The Merchant of Venice is believed to be between 1596 and 1598. The play was mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598, so it must have been familiar on the stage by that date. The title page of the first edition in 1600 states that it had been performed "divers times" by that date. Salerino's reference to his ship the Andrew (I, i, 27) is thought to be an allusion to the Spanish ship St. Andrew, captured by the English at Cádiz in 1596. A date of 1596–97 is considered consistent with the play's style. The play was entered in the Register of the Stationers Company, the method at that time of obtaining copyright for a new play, by James Roberts on 22 July 1598 under the title "The Marchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Jewe of Venyce".[6] On 28 October 1600 Roberts transferred his right to the play to the stationer Thomas Heyes; Heyes published the first quarto before the end of the year. It was printed again in 1619, as part of William Jaggard's so-called False Folio. (Later, Thomas Heyes's son and her Laurence Heyes asked for and was granted a confirmation of his right to the play, on 8 July 1619.) The 1600 edition is generally regarded as being accurate and reliable. It is the basis of the text published in the 1623 First Folio, which adds a number of stage directions, mainly musical cues.[7] Themes Shylock and the antisemitism debate The play is frequently taught today, but is potentially troubling to modern audiences because of its central themes, which can easily appear antisemitic. Critics today still continue to argue over the play's stance on the Jews and Judaism. Shylock and Jessica (1876) by Mauryc Gottlieb Shylock as an antagonist English society in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era has been described as "judeophobic"[8] English Jews had been expelled under Edward I in 1290 and were not permitted to return until 1656 under the rule of Oliver Cromwell. Poet John Donne, who was Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and a contemporary of Shakespeare, gave a sermon in 1624 perpetuating the Blood Libel – the entirely unsubstantiated antisemitic lie that Jews ritually murdered Christians to drink their blood and achieve salvation.[9] In Venice and in some other places, Jews were required to wear a red hat at all times in public to make sure that they were easily identified, and had to live in a ghetto.[10] Shakespeare's play may be seen as a continuation of this tradition.[11] The title page of the Quarto indicates that the play was sometimes known as The Jew of Venice in its day, which suggests that it was seen as similar to Marlowe's early 1590s work The Jew of Malta. One interpretation of the play's structure is that Shakespeare meant to contrast the mercy of the main Christian characters with the Old Testament vengefulness of a Jew, who lacks the religious grace to comprehend mercy. Similarly, it is possible that Shakespeare meant Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity to be a "happy ending" for the character, as, to a Christian audience, it saves his soul and allows him to enter Heaven.[12] Regardless of what Shakespeare's authorial intent may have been, the play has been made use of by antisemites throughout the play's history. The Nazis used the usurious Shylock for their propaganda. Shortly after Kristallnacht in 1938, The Merchant of Venice was broadcast for propagandistic ends over the German airwaves.



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