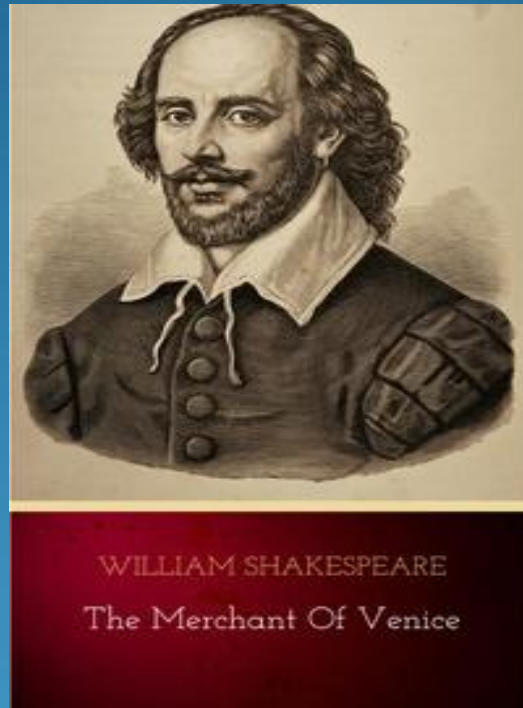


THE MERCHANT OF VENICE(PART 1 OF 4)



A FAMOUS TRAGICOMEDY OF THE BARD
OF AVON : WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

[1564-1616]

Shakespeare's most brilliant heroine, Portia's speech in Act IV is the Soul of this play.



“The quality of mercy is not strained. 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.” --- Portia's speech Act 4, scene 1

An Outline of the Play

- *The 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 "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech on humanity, Also notable is **Portia's** speech about "**the quality of mercy**".

Major 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

Some Other Characters

- 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 – slave 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
- Salarino and Salanio (also known as Solanio) – friends of Antonio and Bassanio
- Salerio – a messenger from Venice; friend of Antonio, Bassanio and others
- Magnificoes of Venice, officers of the Court of Justice, gaolers, servants to Portia, and other attendants and Doctor Bellario, cousin of Portia

Sources

- 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. 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.
- Elements of the trial scene are also found in *The Orator* by **Alexandre Sylvane**, published in translation in 1596. 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.

The Merchant of Venice : A Brief Summary

- Antonio, an antisemitic merchant, takes a loan from the Jew Shylock to help his friend, Bassanio to court Portia. Antonio is a man of simple heart and did not realise that the money lender Shylock is laying a trap in the form of a bond that he has to sign regarding the terms and conditions of the loan. Antonio can't repay the loan, and without mercy, Shylock demands a pound of his flesh. The heiress Portia, now the wife of Antonio's friend, dresses as a lawyer and saves Antonio. Portia delivers a great speech highlighting the moral, ethical and humane side of showing mercy and letting Antonio go but Shylock is completely unmoved. Portia even offers double the money of the loan to Shylock, but he wants nothing but his pound of flesh. Portia then traps Shylock through her wisdom. She offers that Shylock may take a pound of flesh from Antonio's chest, but not an ounce more or less. Furthermore, not even a single drop of blood shall come out because the bond entitles him only one pound of flesh and not any blood.

Shylock now feels trapped and tries to settle on double the money, but he is denied that since he refused the option earlier. Now, Shylock ends up on the losing side as the court decides to arrest Shylock and try him on the charges of plotting to kill Antonio. Shylock loses everything, his daughter, his money and now loses a chance to take his revenge.

The identity of the lawyer is revealed after some jest and Bassanio feels proud that it is his wife Portia who has come to Antonio's rescue.

- The good news of ships safely reaching shores comes as a big relief to Antonio. He gets all his money back and his life is saved from the clutches of Shylock.


Act - I

- The play opens and gives us an idea about Antonio's nature and financial status and how he is stressed right now running a big risk of having all his investments loaded on different ships. The main plot of Antonio's collateral for Bassanio's loan also starts taking shape. Readers are introduced to the deep love and friendship that Antonio and Bassanio share.
- Shakespeare introduces the object of Bassanio's affection, Portia, in the second scene.
- Scene third is a very critical scene as the signing of the bond takes place. Shylock's hatred towards Antonio as he is a Christian and Antonio's dislike of Shylock as he is a Jew, becomes evident in this scene.

Act - II

- Scene I is very dramatic in nature and as readers, we anticipate and know that Bassanio stands a good chance of winning Portia.
- Scene II proves that race and religion are a strong basis for hatred between Shylock and other characters. Launcelot's chief and perhaps sole complaint against Shylock is that he is a Jew.
- In Scene III, Jessica calling her home hell actually dents Shylock's image seriously because till now it was outsiders who were calling him names but now it is his own daughter.
- Scene IV is important to understand society at the turn of the 16th Century. Masque parties, disguising and female dressing as males are at the center of this play. Jessica's elopement is a part of the sub-plot but it will contribute in a major way to the main plot relating to the bond.
- Scene V further shows Shylock's hatred towards Christians.
- Jessica's concluding sentence of the scene is very important

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

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- ➔ Scene VI is also known as the elopement scene and especially for an Indian reader the reference to dowry is interesting.
 - ➔ Scene VII is a detailed one about the caskets. A close reading helps in understanding Portia's father's mind, of how he wanted to ensure that the right kind of person should succeed him and take Portia's hand in marriage.
 - ➔ In Scene VIII, it's very important to note how Shakespeare uses 'showing' and 'reporting' in his stagecraft. Especially, the role given to Salarino and Solanio is very delicate.
 - ➔ For an alert reader/audience the caskets hold firm attention and by the end of Scene IX, one can easily deduce the right casket because two of the three caskets have been opened and rejected.

Act III

If you prick us, do we not bleed?

— *Merchant of Venice, Act 3 Scene 1*

- After a few days, Shylock hears that his daughter Jessica is squandering her stolen wealth in Genoa. He begins to rail bitterly against Christians. He reminds Antonio's friends that if the loan is not repaid on time, he will insist on the original agreement of one pound of flesh.
- Back in Belmont, Bassanio chooses the lead casket, and in so doing, he wins Portia. His friend Gratiano asks for Portia's maid Nerissa to be his wife. Portia gives her ring to Bassanio, making him promise never to give it to another. As Lorenzo and Jessica come to Belmont, news arrives that Antonio's ships have been lost at sea, and he is now bankrupt. They are also told Shylock insists on the fulfilment of his bond and has had Antonio arrested. Bassanio and Gratiano leave in haste to help Antonio. Portia and Nerissa resolve to follow afterwards, disguised as lawyers.

Act III

- In Scene I, Shylock's soliloquy is a great example of Shakespeare's capability and his greatness in creating live characters.
- Scene II is one of the longest scenes in the play, three months are shown to have passed by the time Bassanio wins Portia.
- Scene III is important as the various angles of the bond and its execution are discussed.
- Scene IV is an important link between Bassanio going and Portia and Nerissa following in male disguise.
- Scene V is more of a comic relief where the reader/audience is provided with some lighter moments.

Act IV

- Scene I- The Trial Scene, undoubtedly is the soul of the play .The way Portia solves the case speaks volume about her wisdom and her love and affection for Bassanio and it is only on the count of her display of brains in the trial scene that Portia is considered one of the brightest of Shakespeare's heroines.
- Scene II provides some comic relief after an intense and dramatically drenching trial scene. Portia being able to extract the ring from Bassanio creates anticipation in the reader/audience's mind about the impending trouble for Bassanio.

Act V

- Undisguised, Portia and Nerissa return home at night to find Lorenzo and Jessica enjoying the tranquillity of Belmont. When their husbands arrive, Portia and Nerissa scold them for giving away their rings, pretending they had been given away to other women. Before long, they reveal themselves as the lawyers from the trial. Antonio receives news that his ships have returned safely after all. The play ends as the three couples prepare to celebrate their marriages.

Act V

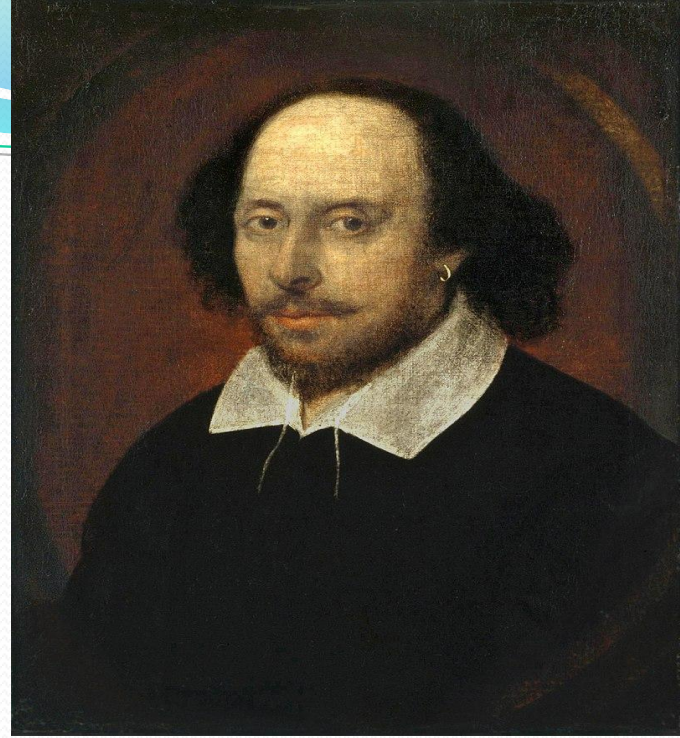
- Rarely do we come across a play as neatly tied as *The Merchant Of Venice* and this makes the play a structural beauty. The play is a wonderful sync between the main plot and the sub-plots. The three love stories [Bassanio-Portia, Gratiano-Nerissa, Lorenzo-Jessica] are different and unique in their own way and have hardly anything common with the other, still they unite and supplement the bond story in an imaginative way.
- The play is entertaining and has a wholesome experience and is undoubtedly one of the greatest of Shakespeare.

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Thank You

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**“How far that little candle
throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a
naughty world.”**
Portia (Act 5, Scene 1)