

NOTES ON

Shakespeare's

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Editor:

A.K.Hewage



A DENUMA PUBLICATION

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P R E F A C E

The Merchant of Venice

These notes on Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" were prepared by a panel of writers, practising teachers and examiners.

We hope this would be of use to the GCE (A/L) students in their immediate need.

A. K. HEWAGE

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NOTES ON

Shakespeare's

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

1.0 Introduction to the play :

The Merchant of Venice is known as one of the early comedies of Shakespeare, being entered in the Stationer's Register on July, 1598, six years after his first play Henry VI was performed.

Sources of the play:

It is a well known fact that Shakespeare did not create the stories of his plays himself, but borrowed and adapted them from a number of sources. History was one such source: romance was another. So was myth and legend. The Merchant of Venice owes its origins to a number of stories, current and popular at that time. These include Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone* 1558, *Gesta Romanorum* 1595: Christopher Marlowe's *the Jew of Malta* 1589: Alexander Sylvanin's *The Orator* - a collection of orations, one entitled 'Of a jew, who would for his debt, have a pound of the flesh of a Christian, 1596. The jew was referred to by Stephen Crosson in his *School of Abuse*, 1579.

In addition a real factual incident too may have influenced Shakespeare: in 1586, Roderigo Lopez, a Jewish Portuguese doctor became Queen Elizabeth's physician, and in 1594 was hanged for suspected poisoning of the queen. Marlow's *Jew of Malta* was revived to take advantage of the popular sentiment of hostility to the Jews. Shakespeare may have tried to direct some of that sentiment towards his own play, although what we have in *The Merchant of Venice* is an ambivalent attitude - Shylock is depicted both as a monster as well as a pitiable human.

2. Synopsis of the play:

Act 1

Sc. I - Venice

Antonio, a wealthy merchant of Venice, is gripped by a melancholy, but he cannot give any reason for this sadness. His friends think that he is sad because most of his assets are on the high seas and have not reached their destinations. Bassanio enters with two friends, Lorenzo and Gratiano and the others leave so that they may discuss whatever business they came for. Bassanio tells Antonio that he is interested in marrying Portia, a beautiful heiress in Belmont who he greatly admires, and wants to borrow three thousand ducats so that he may go to Belmont to woo the lady. Bassanio had borrowed money from his friend Antonio on several occasions, and he tells Antonio that if this loan is given he will be able to pay back his former loans also because when he marries this lady he will become a wealthy man.

Antonio is willing to give his friend a further loan, but all his money is tied up with the ships he has sent out to foreign countries and at the moment he has nothing to give. Being a good friend, he does not want to let down Bassanio and asks Bassanio to borrow the sum he wants from where ever it is possible and offers to guarantee the loan. Once his ships return in a few days as expected, he says he will settle the loan.

Sc. ii - Portia's home in Belmont:

Portia is a very beautiful young lady. She is the only heir to her father's vast fortune. Her parents are dead and she lives with a waiting-woman called Nerissa. Four young men have come to win Portia's hand but she does not like any one of them. However, Portia is not free to marry any one she chooses. Her father has laid down some conditions as to how she should select her husband. None of the young men is prepared to accept her father's conditions and they all leave.

Sc. iii - Venice:

Bassanio goes to Shylock, a Jewish money lender to borrow 3000 ducats. Shylock is a hardhearted usurer, who has collected

an immense fortune by lending money at high interest. In those days usury, lending money on interest, was prohibited according to Christian teachings and because of this Shylock was very unpopular in Venice. On the other hand Antonio lent money to people in trouble free of interest. Because of this Shylock hated Antonio. At the Rialto, the place where rich merchants met to carry out their transactions, Antonio used to snub Shylock for his usury and hard dealings. The Jew, even though he was very angry, could not do anything to Antonio and abided his time for a chance to take revenge.

Antonio was also looking for some one to borrow 3000 ducats for his friend Bassanio and finally comes to Shylock, however much he hated the money lender. After an exchange of a few words that showed their animosity, Antonio requests that Bassanio be given a loan of 3000 ducats promising to pay him back as soon as his ships return in a few days.

Shylock, being a shrewd man seized the opportunity to hurt Antonio. Instead of interest, he demands a pound of flesh from a place closest to the heart if the loan is not paid back on or before the date. Bassanio refuses to take the loan under this condition, but Antonio assures him that his ships will be back long before the loan is due to be settled and that there is no risk involved in this. Shylock too pretends that 'the pound of flesh' condition is introduced just for the fun of it.

ACT 11

Sc. 1 - Belmont:

The Prince of Morocco has arrived to woo Portia. He is anxious to try his luck according to the conditions laid down by Portia's father.

Sc. ii - Venice:

Shylock's servant, Launcelot Gobbo, the clown, debates with himself and finally decides to leave Shylock's household. His father, a blind man appears, but cannot recognise his own son and Launcelot has some fun at the old man's expense. Bassanio arrives at this time and the old man Gobbo helps his son to enter Bassanio's service. Gratiano,

a friend of Bassanio, arrives and Bassanio agrees to take him to Belmont with him.

Sc. iii

Launcelot is bidding farewell to Jessica, Shylock's daughter. She too is keen on leaving Shylock and it comes to light that she intends to elope with her lover Lorenzo. Launcelot is given a note to be taken to Lorenzo.

Sc. iv

Lorenzo and his friends are preparing a masque to enliven the feast. On receiving Jessica's message. Lorenzo immediately gives a note to Launcelot to be given to Jessica and tells Gratiano that Jessica will elope with him disguised as his torch-bearer in the masque. She is also going to take as much gold and jewels as possible from her father's vault,

Sc. v

Lorenzo comes to Shylock's house to remind Shylock about the invitation to Bassanio's dinner and secretly passes his own message to Jessica which says that he will come to take her away tonight as planned. Shylock gives the keys to Jessica, instructs her to lock up the house and stay in. She is told not even open a window to look at the masquers going on the road.

Sc. vi

The masquers wait outside Shylock's house for Lorenzo, Jessica appears at the upstairs window disguised as a page boy. She throws a casket full of cash and jewels to Lorenzo and descends to go away. Antonio appears and tells them that the masque has been cancelled because Bassanio is going to set sail for Belmont, taking advantage of the favourable winds. He asks Gratiano to join Bassanio immediately.

Sc. vii - Belmont:

Prince of Morocco is about to try his luck according to the conditions laid down by Portia's father. There are three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead respectively. One of these contains Portia's portrait and the one who chooses this wins Portia and her fortune. Those who fail must leave immediately without even speaking to Portia and remain unmarried throughout their life time. Each casket also bears an inscription. Morocco considers the inscriptions and

selects the golden casket which has the inscription. "Who chooseth me gains what many men desire," Morocco thinks that what many men desire is Portia and opens the casket. There he finds only a death's head and the lyric.

"All that glitters is not gold:
Ofen have you heard that told
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs to worms infold.
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."

Accepting defeat, Morocco sorrowfully departs as agreed.

Sc. viii - Venice :

On discovering the double loss of his daughter and his wealth, Shylock is bewildered. In his grief he behaves in such a way that the people are highly amused. At this moment news comes that Antonio had lost one of his ships loaded with valuable cargo. In that case Antonio will not be able to pay back Bassanio's loan on the due date. According to the agreement the penalty is for Shylock to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body from a place closest to his heart. Antonio's friends fear that since Shylock is in a very angry mood at the moment, he would demand the pound of flesh, even though it was taken as a joke at the beginning.

Sc. ix - Belmont:

Another suitor, Prince of Arragon tries his luck with the caskets and picks the silver casket with the inscription, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves," On opening the casket he finds only a fool's head and a matching lyric which says -

"The fire seven times tried this:
Seven times tried that judgement is
That did never choose amiss.
Some there be that shadow's kiss;
Such have but a shadow's bliss.
There be fools alive. I wis,
Silvered o'er and so was this.

Take what wife you will to bed.

I will ever be your head.

So be gone; you are sped."

The Prince of Arragon also leaves and almost immediately a messenger enters to announce the arrival of a Venetian Lord - Bassanio.

Act III

Sc. i - Venice:

The loss of Antonio's ship is confirmed. Shylock swears that he will take his revenge on Antonio. Another Jew arrives and informs that Shylock's daughter could not be found and that Antonio's other ships too have been lost:

Sc. ii - Belmont:

The third casket scene-Bassanio arrives. He and Portia are already in love. She wants him to postpone the choosing of the casket. If he fails, according to the conditions, he too will have to leave immediately. But Bassanio is impatient to try his luck and goes at it. He considers the inscriptions carefully and selects the lead casket which bears the inscription. "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." Portia's portrait was in it. Portia is very happy over the selection and immediately gives him a ring as a symbol of her love. Bassanio swears never to part with it: Nerrissa and Gratiano too announce their plan to marry: This joyful turn of events is marred by the arrival of Lorenzo, Jessica and Salario, with a letter bringing the news of Antonio's plight. Bassanio tells Portia how much he is indebted to Antonio and if all his wealth has been lost, then he will have to die because of him.

Portia reads the letter. Portia asks Bassanio to "Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond . Double six thousand and then treble that", if necessary and asks to read his friend's letter.

"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 between you and I, if I might but see you at my death.

Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If you love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter,"

On reading the letter Portia asks Bassanio to leave for Venice immediately:

Sc. iii - Venice.

Antonio is arrested for not being able to pay his debts. Since Antonio was a popular gentleman, even the gaoler was considerate towards him, but not Shylock. He demands his pound of flesh. Salanio cannot believe that the Duke will enforce this absurd bond, but Antonio is sure that the Duke is under obligations to do so. Since Shylock is a Jew and an alien, if he does not observe the law to the letter, other foreign merchants who bring trade to Venice will lose confidence in the judicial system.

Sc. iv - Belmont.

Portia immediately forms some plan to save Antonio on behalf of her husband. She leaves the house in charge of Lorenzo and Jessica and leaves the house under the pretext that she and Nerissa are going to spend their time at meditation at a convent.

Portia has a cousin - a well known learned doctor of Law at Padua. His name is Ballario. Portia writes to him giving all the details of Antonio's case and asks for his advice. She plans to play lawyer in the court of Venice disguised in such a way that not even her husband will be able to recognise him.

She sends one of her servants to Doctor Ballario and requests him to meet her and her maid Nerissa by the ferry to Venice with notes and garments that Doctor Ballario will give him.

Act IV

Sc. i - Venice (a Court of Law)

Shylock is summoned to the court and the Duke asks him to be sympathetic. Bassanio offers to pay him back several times of the original loan. The Duke probably expecting a situation where he will have to enforce the law to the letter, even though it is not correct in the spirit of the law, had already written to Doctor Ballario, the

famous counsel to come and help him in the adjudication of this case. While he was addressing Shylock, a young man appears with a letter from Doctor Ballario saying that he is not in a position to come because of ill health and recommends a lawyer sent with this letter to take his place if the Duke pleases. The Duke who is pleased to get away calls upon the young Lawyer Portia disguised - to take up the case. Nerissa comes as the clerk to the eminent lawyer.

Portia now in charge of the case, implores Shylock to be merciful. He is adamant that he must have his pound of flesh and Antonio is asked to prepare himself to allow Shylock to cut a pound of flesh from a place to his heart. Shylock is pleased with the new Counsel and openly declares his admiration. Then she presents the legal interpretation. He may take his pound of flesh in keeping with the bond, but if a drop of blood is spilled. Shylock will lose his life as well as his wealth. According to the law of Venice, for an alien it is a crime even to intend to injure a free citizen of Venice. The penalty for such an offence is that one half of the wealth of the criminal goes to the state and the other half to the victim. The Duke is given the discretion to decide whether to allow the offender to live.

In the face of this legal hitch Shylock gives in and pleads for his life. Antonio does not want to have anything to do with Shylock's wealth and wants to hold it in trust for Lorenzo and Jessica, Shylock's daughter.

Bassanio was thoroughly grieved over the turn of events which nearly killed his good friend Antonio for helping him. When the case ended with a victory for Antonio, he was so overwhelmed with happiness, pleads with the lawyer to accept as his fee at least the three thousand ducats he has borrowed from Shylock. But the Lawyer refuses to accept anything and as if on second thought asks whether he could have the ring Bassanio wears as a souvenir. Bassanio is reluctant to give the ring, the ring Portia has given him as a token of her love. The lawyer leaves without accepting any presents. Antonio intervenes and pleads with Bassanio to give the ring because the lawyer has done so much for him. Bassanio gives in and sends the ring to the lawyer through Gratiano.

Sc.ii

The ring is duly delivered. On seeing this Nerissa also wants to test her husband. She pleads with Gratiano for his ring and ultimately manages to get it, as the clerk of the lawyer, a mere boy. The two women (Portia and Nerissa) leave Venice that night itself to be at Belmont before their husbands arrive.

ACT V

Sc.i - Belmont:

Jessica, and Lorenzo are in a grove in front of Portia's house engaged in playful and romantic conversation. A messenger arrives to inform that Portia will return home in a short while. Then comes another messenger to say that Bassanio is arriving.

Portia and Nerissa arrive first and request Lorenzo and Jessica not to reveal their absence from home. A little later Bassanio and Gratiano arrive with Antonio. They were gracefully received by the lady of the house, Portia.

While they were engaged in a discussion of what took place in Venice, Nerissa pretends to discover that her husband Gratiano does not wear the ring she had given him. She starts rebuking him saying that he must have given the ring to some other woman. Bassanio explains what happened -that he gave the ring to the lawyer's clerk, a mere boy, and swears not to break his promise again. In this dispute Portia sides with Nerissa and blames Gratiano for taking so lightly the promise he made to his wife. She further says that her husband will never do such a thing and then pretends to observe that Bassanio too does not wear the ring she had given him. He too gives an explanation and Antonio confirms the story. After this playful rebuking Portia admits her deception. Antonio is given a letter from Ballario which reveals the identities of the young doctor of law and his clerk. In the same letter it is revealed that three of his ships have miraculously reached their destinations with all the valuable cargo. This unexpected good fortune and comical adventure of the rings and the failure of the husbands to recognise their own wives concludes the play in a merry mood.

3. The plot and the theme:

The merchant of Venice has a fairly complex structure, as there are a number of stories or sub-plots. There are two main stories which develop parallel to each other and converge on each other; i. the bond story and iii. the casket story. There are three more minor plots of stories those of Lorenzo and Jessica; Launcelot Gobbo and the episode of the rings. The main themes develop the themes of usury, justice, friendship, love and of course the theme of Jew versus Christian. The minor plots or stories support the main stories and the themes therein. For example the Lorenzo and Jessica relationship partly helps to develop the theme of love, partly the theme of usury. Gobbo illustrates the Christian - Jew confrontation. At the beginning of the play the two stories develop side by side although connections and inter connections are seen from the beginning. As the action becomes complicated, the interactions become more complex. Bassanio wins the right casket and wins Portia. And comes to know that Antonio had lost his argosies. This draws Portia; a character out-side the main action into the main plot. She disguises herself as a brilliant young lawyer and makes a dramatic entry to the court of Venice to save Antonio. The two sub-plots converge on the main one. Gobbo takes service with Bassanio, Lorenzo and Jessica seek the peace and sanctuary of Belmont after their tempestuous and expensive honeymoon. It is significant that Belmont seems to be the destination of all the key characters except Shylock., who remains the pitiful victim of profit and loss, of buying and selling-the utterly commercial and in consequence the utterly callous world of Venice. Belmont is associated with music and beauty, a sacred place where the virtuous Portia dwells. Portia herself is spoken of as a holy spirit; a person in whom all goodness had been unified.

"She is fair, and fairer than that word.
Of wondrous virtues".

The drama resolves itself in happy ending. Antonio is saved from the wrath of the Jew; from a horrible revenge; his ships come back to port safe and well; and the

misunderstanding between the husbands and wives are happily ended with Portia's teasing:

"For by this ring the doctor lay with me"
and Bassanio's response;

"Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow"
As with many of Shakespeare's plays the broad theme is the conflict between the apparent and real; between illusion and truth. This is suggested in Antonio's words;

" I have much ado to know myself."

He has to discover the truth about himself, perhaps his ineffectiveness as a businessman compared to Shylock. But the truth also concerns his love for his friend Bassanio, for whose sake he signs the bond forfeiting his life. The discrepancy between illusion and reality is bared vividly in the casket episode. What seems to be is not. The golden casket, which form the outside themes to the most suitable to contain Portia's picture does not hold it. It is contained in a leaden casket, refuting glitter and brilliance. Sound reason and logic, are important in love as in any other situation and both Bassanio and Portia behave rationally. Love is a theme in the play, but there are types and degrees of love. Portia's and Bassanio's is the ideal; it is a complexity made up of physical, emotional and spiritual forces, a love of sharing and devotion to each other. After Bassanio has selected the right casket and he has been confirmed as the man she was to marry. Portia says

" Myself and what is mine to you and yours
is now converted". (Act III Sc. II L. 166-167)

Bassanio himself pledges;

But when this ring (Portia's)
Parts from this finger, then parts life from me
(III, II)

The second set of 'lovers', Nerissa and Gratiano seem to represent the entirely practical approach to love. It is convenient to both. Nerissa serves Portia and Gratiano serves Bassanio. What better arrangement than they marry each other. Not many feelings or words are wasted by them in deciding. The other extreme form of love is repre-

nted by Lorenzo and Jessica. It is not rational or logical. They merely give in to their feelings - particularly Jessica. Lorenzo seems to love the Jewess for her money as well as for herself.

The play emphasises friendship as well - that of Bassanio and Antonio: Tubal and Shylock, Portia and Nerissa and Bassanio and Gratiano, Bassanio's and Antonio's central relationship. It parallels that between Portia and Bassanio and Bassanio seems sometimes to demand greater attention. Antonio's unexplained sadness at the beginning of the play could be attributed to Bassanio's preference to Portia and realisation that he would lose his friend soon. It is also significant that the height of their love and joy after the casket episode (Act iii, ii). Bassanio rushes back to Venice to help Antonio. Antonio reciprocates Bassanio's love with all the fervours he is capable of. One of the most poignant scenes in the play is the one enacted by Antonio when he realises that there is no hope for him.

"Say how I love you, speak me fair in death:
And when the tale it told bid her be judged
Whether Bassanio had not once a love"

If the casket episodes are so closely related to the theme of love and marriage, the bond story is similarly related to the themes of usury and justice. Shakespeare is critical of usury. Why one feels repulsive towards Shylock is not because he is a Jew but because he is a money lender. This difference is made categorically although many characters in the play, as people are in society, confuse the two. Shylock is a merciless money lender who drives a hard bargain. But people (even Antonio) seem to associate that as part of his Jewishness. Shakespeare disapproves of usury, but sympathises with the Jewishness. It comes very clearly in the court scene. The Christians are no more merciful than the Jew. It is true they spare his life. But all kinds of jibes and tones are levelled at him, so that Shylock is compelled to say:

"Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that ,"

It also focusses on the other theme, that of justice. Shylock believes implicitly in the law and invokes justice. Ironically he receives the same justice that he invoked, without pity, without mercy or humanity. Shylock gets more than justice, he also receives mercy; from the state of Venice and from Antonio. It sounds very much like a condescension though. But clearly the two men's attitude to this business and to money are different. Antonio is a right royal merchant. Shylock is an usurer. The former is generous with his riches; the latter is a miser and a hoarder. In the last analysis, the play is about humanity versus brutality, love versus revenge.

4. Characters in the play:

✦ The Merchant of Venice raises the problem of appropriate response and judgement, most acutely in relation to Shylock. The question often posed is whether Shylock is a diabolical monster or a tortured scapegoat. Shakespeare's characterisation of Shylock only reveals the depth of understanding Shakespeare shows towards his characters. From a caricature of a Jew, an 'infidel' and an embodiment of all that was bad in the English society at that time. (a common theme used by writers to draw audiences.) Shylock changes into a deserted tortured father, the widower mourning the loss of Leah's ring. He is both a caricature and a human being, and also a torturing monster and a tormented victim. He is presented as the total businessman, the most hard hearted usurer. But even then he is not devoid of human feelings. ✦ Like the other characters in the play he does represent extreme materialism. Even Bassanio speaks of Portia as a lady 'richly left' (Act I Sc. II.161). while he loves her, he is not totally insensitive to the rich heritage she has. Bassanio is in need of that inheritance. Nobly born and cultured he

'had disabled mine estate,
than my faint means would grant continuance'

Bassanio reveals himself here. He looks into himself, accepts his mistakes and wants to reform himself. He had lived beyond his means ('by something showing a more swelling part') but he genuinely wants to change his lifestyle:

"Nor do I now moan to be abridged
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 gagg'd" (Act, I Sc.I)

Portia's reference to him and Antonio's regard raises his stature. Portia's character has been charged and shaped by Shakespeare to make it that of a virtuous daughter. The constraints of a situation had not affected her will. She makes fools of her suitors as conceited fools, braggarts and nincompoops. The 'casket' scene emphasises Portia's superiority to her suitors and her ability to deal with them directly, without the aid of other men, but it also suggests the powerlessness of her situation. The world of Belmont is clearly defined as feminine, yet it is ironically governed by the will of a dead man. It emphasises Portia's resilient femininity and her ability to cope efficiently with men. She is proved an intelligent and capable woman and one could well believe her transformation into the brilliant Balthazar—the ruthlessly efficient lawyer dispensing justice with the utmost vigour and in accordance to the letter of the law. Some critics make her the most shrewd businessman in the play. In that she buys off Antonio's loyalty. Antonio would never contest Bassanio's love for her. He says that he nearly forfeited his life for Bassanio's sake and Portia

'I once did lend my body for his wealth,
Which for him that had your husband's ring
Had quite miscarried.....')

Portia has given him life and living for it is she who gives Antonio the news of the safe return of his ships. Consequently Antonio would be eternally grateful and would reconcile himself to accept the new relationship with doctor.

Antonio's friendship with Bassanio is the guiding force of his life. His despondent at the beginning of the play could be attributed to the change which he may have anticipated as a result of coming to know of Bassanio's feelings for Portia. He is depicted as serious and somber figure, reserved and dignified. The Duke calls him a loyal merchant, and, there is no doubt that he is tremendously

popular as he is surrounded by a faithful band of friends who would do anything for him. Bassanio is one example. To him Antonio had been the dearest friend, to turn to in need, misfortune and distaste. But even men like Salario and Salarino like him and respect him. Gratiano speaks of Antonio as the 'royal merchant, good Antonio'. Salarino speaks of him as the good Antonio, the honest Antonio and feels that those adjectives don't do him justice;

' O that I had a title good enough to keep his name company'.

The string of minor characters support the main characters in developing the various themes of the play. They also provide comic relief and lighten the seriousness of the action, Salario, and Salarino, are the rumours or the gossips (the present day media) who carry information forward and backwards, from one character to the other. They also act as commentators on the action and help to mould audience opinion and attitudes. In sum they represent the average man in the street and their viewpoint is important to understand the tempo of the play. Lorenzo and Jessica are two characters Shakespeare uses to emphasise the main themes as well as to evaluate them - eg. the themes of love and marriage. One is able to understand and appreciate the Bassanio - Portia relationship better because of the extravagance and imprudence shown by Jessica and Lorenzo - Jessica relates to the theme of reward and punishment, developed through Shylock. One way Shylock is punished for his 'usury' is through Jessica. She runs away with the gold and jewellery he had hoarded. So before his actions are adjudged and punished in court he is already punished morally. Gobbo comes very close to the fool found in other plays of Shakespeare, but he is also a commentator on character and action. His confusion about how to treat Shylock suggests the general ambivalent attitude that Shakespeare has towards the characters in the play, none is entirely black or white.

Kamala Wijeratne

From Education Vol. 4

A Study Guide to
Shakespeare
The Merchant of Venice

Introduction :

In the late sixteenth century, when *the Merchant of Venice* was first staged in London, trade and industry was greatly expanding in Europe. As a result a new broad based culture came into existence. Horizons were expanding due to international travel and exchange of information. A knowledge of the world and accomplishments in language and literature became as important as birth in the preceding era.

Drama was becoming popular particularly in the cities. Most people were not used to reading and they preferred shared life rather than solitary pastimes. Therefore, drama which catered to these needs appealed to the people. It must be noted that Shakespearian theatre is quite different from its modern counterpart. The boisterous reaction of the audience to what went on the stage was a part and parcel of drama.

The rich merchant-class was greatly admired because of the great wealth they brought in. They set the pace of life in the society. Merchants like Antonio was the ideal, an embodiment of the best qualities expected of a rich merchant. The prosperity of the nation greatly depended on international trade that was carried out at great risk in sailing vessels and the adventure that went with it was much admired.

Venice was considered a representative city of a prosperous merchant class. It was believed that Venice was a city of great wealth, royal merchants, well dressed gentlemen and refined culture compared with bustling society in London.

However, in spite of great wealth that came at this time, many aristocrats fell into debt because of their extravagant living. Their only way out of the problem was not austere living, but to turn to the money-lenders who charged a very high rate of interest which was called usury. Usury was prohibited in the European society until it was legalised in 1571. However, the society in general still looked down upon usury as an antisocial activity, and the people who engaged in it- the Jews- became unpopular.

The Jews were hated at this time for another reason. A Jew named Lopez was Queen's physician and was tried for conspiracy against her life. This evoked much prejudice against that race of people. This social prejudice was used by many writers at that time to make the plays appealing to the people.

As against this, we are introduced to another city- Belmont, a place of beauty and culture, peace and friendship, loyalty and love, a haven away from the commercial world with its inherent frictions. Thus we see that in *the Merchant of Venice* there are several themes to make it a popular comedy that ends in happiness for all. Shylock (a devadatta) is made to pay heavily financially as well as emotionally for his wickedness.

ACT I : SCENE I Venice

1.1 In this opening scene Shakespeare sets up his plot in motion. Antonio is in a sad mood due to no apparent reason. His friends are trying to find the cause for this unexplained sadness.

(a) What reasons do his friends give ?

i.

ii.

iii.

(He is worried because a greater part of his wealth is tied up with the ships that have gone out. May be that he is in love or it may be even because of some preoccupation with something that he has become

aware of such as the imminent departure of his good friend Bassanio with the intent of getting married to a lady in Belmont.)

- (b) Bassanio comes to see Antonio. What has he promised to tell Antonio?

1.
(About the lady that he is going to visit with the idea of winning her over for marriage.)

- (c) What analogy does Bassanio give from his school days to defend his action?

1.
(In his school-days he had shot an arrow and it got lost. Then he had shot another in the same direction and watched carefully where it fell. He had gone after the second and found both. He is asking for another loan from Antonio, claiming that like in the case of the second arrow, his present venture will succeed and he will be able to pay back not only the present loan, but also the previous ones. (L. 140-152)

- (c) Antonio is not in a position to give a loan at the moment. What does he suggest Bassanio to do?

1.
(To raise a loan from someone else on his guarantee.)
(L. 180-186)

- (d) In this scene Shakespeare sets out certain noble qualities. What are they?

i.
ii.
iii.
(generosity, love and friendship)

- (e) What other forces does he expect to operate?

i.
ii.
(The helplessness of man against external forces. Complicated nature of human behaviour.)

ACT I SCENE II : Belmont

Portia is discontented about her father's will which specifies as to how her husband should be chosen. She says, 'I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter controlled by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard Nerissa, that I cannot choose one or refuse none ?'

- (a) What reply does Nerissa give ?
.....
.....
(L. 25-32)
- (b) Nerissa names the suitors who have come and Portia finds some fault or other with each of them. Mention the fault given by Portia against each of the following
- i. Neopolitan Prince : (L. 37-39)
 - ii. Count Palatime : (L. 41-47)
 - iii. Falcanbridge : (L. 61-69)
 - iv. The Scottish Lord: (L. 72-75)
 - v. Duke of Saxony's nephew: (L. 78-83)
- (c) What have these men told Nerissa ?
.....
..... (L. 104-107)
(They are returning home because they do not want to take the test of caskets)
- (d) Nerissa reminds Portia of another suitor who visited sometime back. Who is he ?
..... (L. 104-107)
(Bassanio)
- (e) What is their opinion about him ?
Nerissa: 'Of all I have seen, the best that deserves a fair lady.'
Portia : 'He is worthy of your praise', (L. 109-111)
- (f) How does this dramatic technique help in the play ?

ACT. I SCENE III:

The scene changes back to Venice. Bassanio meets Shylock in a street to plead with him to borrow 3000 ducats.

- (a) For how long is the loan ?
 (L.2)
- (b) Who is going to be bound ? (to stand surety)
 (L.4)
- (c) What reason does Shylock give for hesitating to give the loan on the guarantee of Antonio ?

 (L. 17-24)
- (d) Why does Shylock decline the invitation for dinner to meet Antonio ?

 (L. 38-48)
- (e) For the first time the audience comes to know how much Shylock hates Antonio. What has caused Shylock to hate Antonio so much ?

 (L. 38-59)
- (f) What does Antonio mean by 'I neither lend nor borrow by taking nor by giving of excess' ?
 (L.58-59)
- (g) How does Shylock justify usury ?
 (L.69-84)
- (h) Shylock delays in giving a word about the loan and keeps tormenting Antonio to annoy him. What does he remind Antonio of ?

 (L.95-118)
- (i) Antonio's immaturity as a businessman is shown by his words spoken in anger. (L.119-127) Shylock being a more matured and an experienced person reacts differently. How does he react ?

Shylock pretends to be not angry and schemes to kill Antonio by cutting a pound of flesh from a fatal part

of his body. This he does apparently in jest, though he is very serious about it.

- (j) Bassanio is more practical. What evidence can you find for this ?

.....
Bassanio says " You shall not seal to such a bond for me: I'll rather dwell in my necessity". (L. 143-144)

- (k) Shylock now almost forces the loan on them. What excuse does he give ?

.....
To buy his favour. To win his friendship.

- (l) Explain. 'I like not fair terms and a villain's mind'

.....
I don't like fair conditions coming from a person who has a vicious mind.

- (l) Make a character sketch of Shylock from what you know so far.

.....

ACT II SC. I

In Belmont. A room in Portia's house. Loud sounding trumpets to announce the arrival of an important person. Prince of Morocco arrive to take the test of caskets.

- (a) Morocco is considered an arrogant man. Why?

.....

- (b) Morocco wants to take up the test without delay, but he is not happy about the nature of the test, why?(L.23-38)

.....

- (c) The test is given only on agreeing to abide by certain conditions. What are these conditions ? (L.40-42)

.....

ACT II SC. II:

Back to Venice. A street. Launcelot, the servant of Shylock, is contemplating on leaving his master's service.

- (a) What reasons does he give ? (L. 1-28)

.....

- (b) Launcelot is debating with himself. It is a debate between his conscience and a fiend. The fiend is urging him to leave Shylock, but his conscience urges him to remain. What happens in the end? (L.28)
-

- (c) Why does he take that course of action?
To obey the fiend and leave Shylock would mean following the devil. To stay would be to live with 'an incarnation of the devil'. (L.24) Both alternatives are equally bad. So he runs away from Shylock as well as the fiend.

Old Gobbo's appearance is used for comic affect. But the conversation between Launcelot and his father touches on some of the main themes?

- (a) What are these themes?
Gullibility - Antonio believes Shylock's claim that he is giving the loan to win Antonio's friendship, and the condition of cutting a pound of flesh is just for fun. Gobbo believes when his son himself tells him that the son is dead. And also refuses to admit when he reveals his identity.

Deception - Launcelot pretends to be a stranger to his father. Shylock pretends to be a good hearted employer even after using the words 'fearful guard (unreliable); 'unthrifty knave' (a good-for-nothing fellow) (L.164-65)
Gratiano begs to be allowed to accompany Bassanio to Belmont. But Bassanio says
'Thou art too wild, too much and bold of voice' (L.167)

- (b) What does this indicate?
Sensitivity to the environment. Many things acceptable in a flourishing commercial city like Venice would be out of place in Belmont where culture, good manners, music, human qualities are admired.

ACT II SC. iii :

In Venice, a room in Shylock's house. Launcelot wants to leave Shylock's service. He is saying farewell to Shylock's daughter Jessica. She doesn't like to see him go, but agrees that 'Our house is hell' (L 2) and father is 'the

devil'. Launcelot is good humouredly called 'merry devil' because he was the only character that brought some light heartedness and fun to the house. Even though Jessica has a genuine affection towards Launcelot, she does not grieve over his leaving.

(a) Why ?

Because she is about to elope with her lover, Lorenzo. Jessica is uncomfortable because of her attitude towards her father. She is ashamed of to be her father's daughter, but at the same time her conscience pricks her about her leaving him like this. However she resolves the problem to appease her conscience

(b) How does she do this ?

She tells herself that even though she is a daughter to his blood, she is not like him in her manners. And also she finds consolation in the fact that she is going away to become a Christian and a loving wife to Lorenzo. (L 15-20)

ACT II SC, iv:

The young men including Lorenzo are getting ready for the evening masquerade to entertain Bassanio who is about to leave for Belmont and Antonio, who is burdened with an unexplained sadness. They want to do it well. While they were discussing the plans. Lancelot hands over Jessica's letter to Lorenzo. On reading the letter Lorenzo tells his friends 'I am provided of a torch bearer'.

(a) What does the letter say ?

it says how he shall take her away from her father's house; for her be ready with fold and jewels and a page boy's suit (she is going to elope disguised as a page-boy to Lorenzo when the masquerade passes Shylock's house) (L.29-39)

ACT II SC, v.

Shylock returns home with Launcelot. (In this scene Shylock is made an object of ridicule) Lancelot tells his master that he is leaving him to take up service with Bassanio.

Shylock's reaction is full of amusement to the audience. Irony is at work here. The audience already know that Shylock is a miser who wants nothing but money and his own daughter is about to leave him because she cannot live with him. See the following paraphrase:

Well, you shall see with your own eyes the difference between Shylock and Brssanio. You shall no longer spend much time eating, sleeping and snoring as you have done with me.

- (a) What do these words indicate about Shylock's nature? He is a selfcentred man who is always thinking of his own interests. He doesn't realise that he is short of humane qualities such a sympathy, kindness, mercy, friendliness. Filial understanding etc.

Jessica comes out and asks from her father

"Call you? What is your will? (Did you call me? What do you want ?)

- (b) What so these words indicate about their filial relationship ?

- (c) How does the writer ridicule Shylock in this Scene? The audience by now knows that Jessica is about to elope with Lorenzo. Shylock tells her that he is invited to supper and gives her the keys of the house. He puts her in charge of the house in his absence. Launcelot reminds Jessica about the appointment tonight in the presence of Shylock. When Shylock hears the word 'masque' he gets alarmed and cautions Jessica not to open even a window to see the masquerers, but she is planning to go away with them. As launceolt departs. he says.

"There will come a Christian by'
will be worth a Jewess' eye."

and when shylock asks what it is about, Jessica says it is just "Farewell, Mistress" a very natural way of saying goodbye, because he is leaving the house for good

Shylock's comments on Launcelot are also amusing.

He says that he is a kind fellow, but a huge eater snail-slow in useful work, sleeps by day more than a wild cat and drones. Shylock is glad to part with him so that he may go to Bassanio and waste his borrowed money.

Even the bidding of farewell by Jessica to his father is amusing.

'I have a father, and you have a daughter lost'

No regrets on her part to leave her own father and her home. Shylock is abandoned even by his own daughter.

ACT II SC. vi:

A place near Shylock's house in a street. Gratiano and Salarino are waiting for Lorenzo. They are surprised that he is late, because they say that lovers are never late for their appointments. While they are arguing about reality and romance

(a) Give examples of reality and romance mentioned in the discussion. (L. 20)

Lorenzo arrives, apologises for his delay and makes fun at them to coming to play the thieves for wives. All of them walk for the street outside Shylock's house..

The audience knows what is going to happen and they sympathise with Lorenzo and Jessica. This scene is romance come true to them. Therefore Shakespeare makes it more interesting by adding more fun. eg. Jessica finds it difficult to recognise Lorenzo in a masquerer's clothes. When he is recognised, caskets full of Shylock's wealth is thrown down to Lorenzo by Shylock's own daughter. Her appearance in the street disguised as a page boy adds interest to the scene.

Antonio arrives on the scene and tells them that the masque tonight has been cancelled. The wind has turned fair for sailing to Belmont and Bassanio is leaving. He asks Gratiano to go and join Bassanio's party immediately.

ACT II SC. vii

In Belmont, A room in Portia's home. Background music. The Prince of Morocco and his party arrives. He is directly taken to the caskets for him to make the choice.

- (a) What are the inscriptions given on the caskets. (L4-9)
- (b) How will a suitor know that he has selected the correct casket ?

Morocco immediately dismisses the last casket saying it is unworthy of him, Golden minds like the one he possesses do not stoop to worthless matter.

- (c) What does this kind of thinking indicate about his nature- (arrogant and over-confident)
- (d) This type of character is contrary to the ideals of the play . Explain
The play stresses the need for friendship and upholds healthy interdependence among people. Self dependence and arrogance do not go with these ideals..
- (e) Does the message found in the golden casket tally with Character traits of Prince of Morocco

ACT II SC. VIII

A street in Venice. Salarino and Salanio discusses the outcome of Jessica's elopement and the news that one of Antonio's ships has been miscarried and destroyed.

As soon as shylock came to know that his daughter had eloped with Lorenzo, a Christian, taking his gold and jewellery with them, he had raised cries and gone as far as taking the duke in search of Bassanio's ship. However they had left Venice by then and Antonio gives a certificate to say that Lorenzo did not board the ship.

Being frustrated in his attempt to catch Lorenzo and Lessica, Shylock has gone berserk crying our "O my daughter' 'my ducats' repeatedly in confusion, making him the but end of laughter.

- (a) From the way shylock crie, what did you think is more important to him-his daughter or ducats?

The Breaking of the news of Antonio's loss humbles the audience in its jubilation at Shylick's calamity. If Antonio has lost a ship in the English Channel, then it must be the one he expected first to pay up Shylock's debt. In that case he will not be able to pay the debt and the bond

will be forfeited and the Jew will be entitled to cut a pound of flesh from his body, which means sure death. A dramatic turn of events.

- (b) How do you think will this affect Shylock Antonio deal ?
Shylock is now highly grieved over the loss of his wealth and his daughter eloping with a Christian. This is bound to harden his heart against Antonio and it is unlikely he will have any mercy towards those who are even remotely connected with his calamity.
- (c) Describe the role Salarino and Salanio play in this Scene ?
Their main role is to carry information. In other words they play the role of the media in the modern world. Not only they carry information, but also provide it in such a way that the audience will act positively towards it

ACT II SCENE XI

Belmont, A room in Portia's house. Nerissa announces the arrival of another suitor: the Prince of Arragon

- (a) The audience is given further information on the conditions of the casket test. What are these conditions ? (L. 9-15)
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.

The Prince of Arragon is also blinded by sense of his own importance and greatness. He decides to take what he thinks he deserves and chooses the silver casket.

- (b) What did he find in the silver casket ? (L. 54)
 - i.
- (c) Who arrives next and what is Nerissa's attitude towards this suitor ? (L. 85-100)
 - i.
- (d) What kind of effect Nerissa's talk will have in the audience ?

A keen sense of anticipation. They have been a party to the gamble of caskets knowing the rules of the test and how the previous suitors fared.

ACT III SC. I

Action moves fast towards a climax. Forces are amassing to the disadvantage of Antonio. The loss of his ship is confirmed. (L. 2-4)

Shylock enters. He is angry with Salarino and Salanio for not telling him about the flight of his daughter. They make him more angry by saying that they knew even the person who made the suit for her 'that means their involvement in the conspiracy is confirmed.

- (a) Salarino claims that 'there is more difference between thy (Shylock's) flesh and hers. What examples does he give to illustrate this point?

Shylock	Jessica
Non Christian	
non-humane qualities	full of humane qualities
vicious	merciful
Unsociable	sociable
hoards wealth miserly	uses wealth to bring about happiness
	generous
This analysis further	angers Shylock.

- (b) List out the reason Shylock gives for his hatred against Antonio. (L 45-61)

ACT III SC. II

Back to Belmont. Portia's house. Bassanio arrives and he was received with affection that other did not receive even though Portia steadfastly keeps to the rules of the test of caskets.

- (a) Bassanio says that he lives up on the rack. What does he mean by this?

Rack is a gadget to stretch joints of people as punishment. Bassanio is stretched in two ways. On one side he is pulled by his love towards Portia to delay the taking of the test. If he fails he will have to leave immediately. On the other hand he is indebted and this stretches him towards the other side if he

chooses the correct casket, he can pay his debts and be a free man again.

- (b) How does Bassanio reason out in selecting the leaden casket ?
- (c) With the selection of the correct casket Bassanio's status changes completely. What are these changes?

(L 166-171)

Salerio and Lorenzo (with Jessica) arrive at Portia's house. Selerio comes with a letter from Antonio. What made Lorenzo to come?

Selerio met him on his way to Portia's house and invited him to come with him.

- (a) What do you think about this technique and what does Shakespeare expect from it ?
- (b) Portia is presented as the embodiment of all that is good. How does this claim go in the context of this Scene.

ACT II SC. iii

Antonio is now in the charge of a gaoler. He is a prisoner. But he acts courageously. In the first instance he pleads with Shylock and when that fails he gives in to his fact. He even justifies the action of Shylock by saying that it is his according to the law. Not even the duke can do anything about it.

- (c) Why can't the duke help Antonio? He is the one who is going to decide the case.
 - i.(L. 26-31)

ACT III SC iv

In this Scene Portia makes an important decision.

- (a) What do you think is this decision?
- (b) What is her plan of action?

ACT IV SCENE I :

this scene presents Antonio's trial. It is considered a very important scene, because it is in this scene that all the main characters are brought together for the first time. The meaning of 'Justice' and 'law' are discussed in detail

and in the course of this Shakespeare praises the qualities of mercy, friendship and love. Shylock the villain is defeated and it is a defeat for inhuman qualities as well.

At the opening of the court case, the Duke openly shows his sympathy with Antonio. He says'

'I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer
A stony adversary, and inhuman wretch,
Uncapable of pity, void and empty
From any dram of mercy.' (L 3-7)

(a) How would you interpret such a talk from a modern judge ?

By now Antonio has given in to his fate and is ready to face the consequence. His strong hatred of Shylock had abated.

(b) What weapon is he going to use against Shylock?

Patience - 'I do oppose my patience to his fury' (L. 10-11)
When Shylock appears the Duke makes a last effort to convince him that his course of action is wrong. He says 'Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too.
(L. 16-34)

(c) What mocking answer does Shylock give ?

It is my humour: (My whim)

What does this answer indicate about Shylock ? hearless inconsiderate, irrational man guided by his emotions, the desire to take revenge without any regard for the feelings of others.

Because of his vindictiveness, Shylock loses all chances of receiving any mercy or sympathy from the audience.

In Antonio's speech (L. 70-83) he describe Shylock's temperament with analogies of the sea, the winds and the wolf.

(e) What do these images indicate ?

Shylock is quite different from all the other characters in the play. He is an outsider in the Venetian society. He firmly believes that he is doing nothing wrong in exacting his revenge. He cannot understand that relationships between

human deigns are guided by another set of laws called 'morality'. He thinks only of the law administered in course of law. He believes that this law should not be hampered with kindness or mercy. According to him this law can neither see nor hear. Just a machine to be implimented to the letter. Spirit of the law is completely ignored.

'Shylock argues that Christians have slaves, and treat them harshly, simply because they own them. Under the same laws a pound of Antonio's flesh is Shylock's property. He had a right to-use it anyway he likes it.

(f) What do you think of this argument? Can it be justified?

The Duke is pushed into a difficult position. According to his common sense it is immoral to allow Shylock to have his way, it is nothing but vindictiveness. On the other hand he has to uphold the law of the city, without that the society cannot survive. (There were many foreigners in Venice at that time who brought in prosperity through their trade) the only way out is to consult another eminent lawyer for his opinion. He is expecting Bellario, a learned doctor of law.

The audience is aware that Portia sent word to a Bellario, a cousin of hers for advice.

A lawyer's clerk enters court, gives the Duke a letter from Bellario. While Shylock is getting ready to cut his pound of flesh, the audience come to know the content of the letter which says that Bellario is not well and in his place he is sending a young lawyer with his advice.

Even though Bassanio and Gratiano are not aware who the new comers are, the audience is give enough clues to guess who they are.

Portia in disguise, introduces poetry, grace and mercy into the musty courthouse. Her famous speech here appealing to Shylock to be merciful is not based on legal facts, but on higher values such as kindness, mercy, sympathy, friendship etc.

she says,

'The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

.....(L. 182-200)

In mankind mercy goes beyond routine, justice and power, In showing mercy, men are most like god. The main theme of the play: to give freely without hope of profit is a blessing for both, the giver and the receiver, is highlighted here,

(g) Explain how far this theme applies to Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock.

The way Portia deals with the case at the beginning makes the audience anxious. After giving Shylock full tether. Portia comes to the legal point that is going to make Shylock's bond crumble and make him open to a criminal charge.

When Shylock refuses to take even thrice the amount he has he merely says.

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

(L. 226-28)

thus sealing his doom.

However the suspense is further increased by the pleading of Antonio in exasperation to give the judgement which everyone is scared of.

'You must prepare your bosom for knife.' Portia
"O noble judge; O excellent young man:
O wise and noble judge;
How much more elder art than thy looks; Shylock
"Therefore lay bare your bosom." Portia
"Nearest his heart' those are the words" Shylock
It is so. Are the balance here to weigh
The flesh?' Portia
'I have them ready' Shylock

Then the anticlimax begins;

"Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your

Charge''

To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death.'

Portia.

Then the audience is made to hear Antonio's' last words before death. (L.262-279)

Bassanio's reply (L280-85) said in the presence of his wife provides the audience a diversion. Gratiano too says something similar.

(h) What do you think about this episode ?

(i) What is the final point of law made by Portia ? (L303-310)

When the final point of law is made everyone including Shylock understands that wind has gone off Shylock's sail. After this it is just a matter of punishing Shylock for his inhuman behaviour. As in all comedies in *The Merchant of Venice* also heroes have to be rewarded and villains punished.

(j) What do you think about the punishment given to Shylock by people who were pleading for mercy from him. Is the punishment justifiable from your point of view.

Four people are involved, Portia, the Duke, Antonio and Shylock. Portia's knowledge of the law of Venice puts Shylock at her mercy. A new charge is also leveled at him: that of intended murder. The penalty for endangering the life of a citizen of Venice by a foreigner is that half of the accused's wealth shall be confiscated by the state, the other half be given to the victim and the Duke will control the accused's destiny.

The Duke immediately extends mercy to Shylock by sparing his life. (L366-67) Further he says that if Shylock shows humility, the state may give up its claim to half of his property and simply fine him. (L369-70)

Antonio on his part rises to the occasion. While pleading the state to forgo even the reduced penalty of a fine, says that he will keep the other half, not for himself, but in trust for Jessica. This largeness of heart must be viewed from the present context of his economic condition; almost a pauper.

On the part of Shylock, even though shown mercy at the hands of the court, he still pays a high price in other ways. He has to become a Christian, which he certainly detests doing. He has no respect for Christian values. Secondly, when he dies all his wealth must go to Lorenzo and Jessica who have betrayed him. This is bound to cause a lot of pain of mind to Shylock.

Portia who said that mercy falls like rain from heaven, makes Shylock to beg for it on bended knees. CL361) Her language also changes towards the end, It was poetic at the beginning when she pleaded for mercy, but at the end it becomes sneering. eg. Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?' (L391)

Shylock can only say, 'I am content' (L.392) What else could he do? It is unbecoming of Porta to do this.

ACT V SC. I

In this Scene all the important characters in the play are brought to Belmont, the ideal city which embodies 'good' as against 'bad' in Venice. All the parties, Portia and Bassanio, Nerissa and Gratiano, Jessica and Lorenzo, the couples come together after clearing all the obstacles. Antonio arrives as a guest of Bassanio and is welcomed warmly by Portia. The play ends as a comedy.

(a) What do you think about the ending of the play?

Questions for discussion :

1. 'We must hate Shylock, yet at the same time he wrings from us an unwilling sympathy'. How far is this correct.
2. 'In Belmont is a lady richly left.
And she is fair and, fairer than that word,
Of wondrous virtues.'

Write about Portia showing (a) her importance to the play, and (b) the features of her character that find attractive or unattractive. (ULEB)

3. 'Antonio is certainly the most unremarkable character ever to have a play named after him' Have you found him an uninteresting character?
4. 'Bassanio is completely unworthy of Portia' How far do you agree with this view?
5. Explain the importance of the casket episodes to the rest of the play, and describe with attractions they may have for the audience.
6. Does the trial scene represent a victory for mercy over justice? Discuss the scene in some detail in to support your views.
7. "Every important scene is a masterpiece of stagecraft" Discuss this with reference to the Merchant of Venice Act IV Scene I (GVF - 1988)
8. "Shakespeare's was a theatre for eloquence as much as for pagentry". Discuss with reference to 'The Merchant of Venice'. (GVF - 1987)

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SCENE BY SCENE COMMENTS

ACT. I: Sc. i

This scene begins with melancholy as its theme and confusion arises drawing the attention of the spectators to what goes on on the stage. This is an unusual beginning for a comedy. 'The Merchant of Venice' is regarded as a comedy. During Shakespearean times, comedy was associated with magic, fun and romance where the marriage of the hero and the heroine are assured. In this scene the melancholy mood of Antonio signals that the characters are going to run into storms even though the play might have a happy ending.

In the seventeenth century London was becoming important as a centre of trade. With the increase of naval power of England, goods from different parts of the world began coming to London and with this foreign traders shifted their trade from Venice, then the most popular trading centre when merchandise was brought to Europe over land routes from the East. Royal patronage was given to the traders. Even though wealth began to flow into the country, they happened to be concentrated in the hands of a few in London.

With the growth of trade and industry the feudal system broke down and also the guilds that controlled labour in the country. The feudal system and the guilds brought about law and order to the country. They had their social service functions too. The disruption of these centuries old systems made people anxious and insecure. Riches could not be viewed as a blessing by the majority in the country, because money was concentrated in the hands of a few rich merchants. The power of money to corrupt was obvious. The cultured circles were aware of these changes- They had their own views as to how wealth should be used. Shakespeare was sensitive to the changes in the moods of the people and

made use of the generally accepted values and attitudes in his dramas.

The drama *The Merchant of Venice* opens with a presentation of a colourful, civilized society. (Act. I Sc I L. 10-14). Wealth is a source of pleasure. Antonio uses his wealth to bring happiness to people.

Salario's description of Antonio's ships as 'signors burghers on the flood' (L.10) is important. Other ships seem to 'curtsy to them' (L.13). This shows the high social and economic status Antonio had in Venice. However the sides of his vessels are 'gentle' (L32) and just a touch from the rocks would be enough to scatter their valuable cargo in the sea.

In the opening scene Antonio is in a gloomy mood and his friends think that his melancholy mood is due to the heavy risks that he has taken by tying up all his wealth in four ships of trade. Antonio does not accept that his melancholy mood is due to the risks he has taken by tying up all his wealth with the cargo in four ships that have gone out to foreign countries. He also denies that Solario's suggestion that he is in love. It is also suggested that his melancholy is due to his good friend Bassanio is about to leave Venice on a secret mission.

Before the end of this scene we find that Antonio involving himself in a deeper problem. Bassanio, his friend who has borrowed money from Antonio many a times and who had not paid them back requests for another loan of 3000 ducats, fairly a big sum those days. Bassanio, a member of an old feudal family, had been living beyond his "faint means" and is in debt to many others as well.

The theme of the play is still highlighted from what follows. Antonio's response to Bassanio's anxiety to settle his debts illustrates what a good hearted man Antonio is. His generosity seems boundless. (ll. 138-39)

My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

He is always ready to help his friends and they have only to ask him. Antonio is a gentleman and is guided by his heart. Compare this to Shylock's attitude towards money when we come across him a little later.

Bassanio's words tell us the ideals of love and romance at that time. The lady he is going to woo is Portia, Portia is not only an exceptionally beautiful, immensely rich, virtuous maiden, she is also a symbol of generosity. She gives her wealth without any thought of personal gain. Bassanio's attitude to marriage, love and romance is different from the modern attitude. A modern young man might say that he is mercenary. But in the Elizabethan era when women had no right to own wealth, fortune hunting was not that much disapproved as in the modern times. Think of Elizabeth's attitude to Darcy's wealth in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

If we look at the first scene as a whole, we find that Shakespeare sets his plot in motion and presents some of the ideals of generosity, love and friendship with much of the play is concerned. It also presents a new concept different from what was taken as comedy in the Elizabethan era. Comedy used to be full of fun ending with the marriage of hero and heroine. In this drama Shakespeare introduces threats to the hero and heroine from within and without. From the beginning we see that Antonio's ships are in danger and if any damage occurs to them it will be the economic ruin of Antonio. Secondly he is going to stand surety for a large sum of money that Bassanio is going to borrow from a Jew with a very bad name for his usury and harsh dealings. Further more however much Antonio loves Bassanio, he is unreliable. Bassanio spends borrowed money irresponsibly and he has no alternative means of settling this debts if he fails in his mission.

ACT I Scene ii :

Portia's home in Belmont is the setting for poetry, music and romance. Portia is a symbol of generosity and treats every one kindly. Her life is charmed with very little obstacles to lead a happy life, but the scene opens with a complaint by Portia of weariness.

"By my troth Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this 'great world'". (II. 1 - 2)

Her waiting woman consoles her by saying that her weariness is because of her wealth. The suggestion is that Portia has been exceedingly indulgent - enjoying herself too much. When Portia says that it is easy to lay down rules to live frugally, when one is rich it is not that easy to follow, we can surmise that she agrees with what Nerissa said.

Portia wants to live according to the directions of her heart (feelings), not according to cold conditions laid down by others. She is worried because she is not free to select a man of her choice as her husband. Her father has laid down certain conditions in his Will as to how she should select her husband if she is to inherit the wealth he leaves behind. Therefore we can conclude that her weariness is due to this reason rather than over indulgence.

This situation brings out two facts.

- (1) There are some similarities between Antonio and Portia. Both are rich and wants to be guided by the heart rather than cold facts.
- (2) The plot is highly artificial. This kind of situation can be found in many folk tales. However all the Belmont scenes are based on this artificial situation. Shakespeare uses it to take the audience into the world of romance and comedy.

There is another important point we should note. That is the contrast between Venice and Belmont. In

Venice the characters are guided by monetary considerations - that is profit they can make. As businessmen they are also ridden with all types of problems on land also.

Belmont has a fairy tale setting. This is proved by the fact that Portia soon gets over her weariness in spite of the bond that has taken away her freedom to choose her own husband. In this contrived plot the suitors that come for her hand on listening to the conditions attached to it leave on their own. Those who took the risk are defeated and gentlemanly enough to abide by the agreement they have made.

By now the audience must have got the message that a prince charming is coming to take her hand. Nerissa's reminding Portia of Bassanio who had visited her sometime back and admired each other. At the same moment the arrival of Prince of Morocco is announced and Portia in good spirit but without much enthusiasm rises to greet him. (II. 118 - 123)

ACT I Scene iii :

This Scene begins with the introduction of Shylock, the Jew, to the audience. Bassanio has come to get a loan from Shylock. The scene begins with colourful words just to be polite and soon come to the language of business and harsh dealings.

Bassanio is a nobleman and he talks politely to reveal that he needs a loan of 3000 ducats and Antonio will guarantee the repayment of it. Shylock does not heed this gentlemanly talk and his responses are really dangerous. Shylock is not only considering the feasibility of getting his money back, but taking revenge on Antonio on what he believes as wrongs that Antonio had done to him and his community of Jews.

Shylock's response is mechanical and dehumanized and from the beginning appear to be dangerous. They also signify cruelty and moral degeneration. From the beginning Shylock makes Antonio appear small. He begins

with the type of perils his ventures are faced with. (II. 15-26) He even refuses to eat with him when invited to dinner to talk over the matter. "I will not eat with you... (II. 33-36) Compare this speech with what Salerio says about dangers of sea travel. (I. i. 22-36) and Shylock's rude words (II. 20-24). Shylock's character is that of an outsider in Venice and he remains so throughout.

Shylock's aside

How like a fawning publican he looks.
I hate him for he is a Christian:
But more, that in low simplicity
He lends money at 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.
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.

shows his deep hatred of Antonio

Antonio is breaking a rule he has laid down for himself, that is "Neither lend nor borrow by taking more by giving of excess" (interest) for the sake of his friend. This illustrates his good nature, but his weakness is that he is unsuspecting and liable to fall victim to vicious people. For example, in spite of all the hard words used against Antonio, Shylock is prepared to give him a loan free of interest. But there is a peculiar condition attached to it. He wants the following condition included in the bond.

"Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me".

Had this kind of condition was stipulated by Bassanio or any one of his friends in fun, he need not have taken

it seriously. But this suggestion is coming from Shylock one of those who detest Antonio because he is fair in his dealings.

When Bassanio shows his reluctance to borrow under such a condition strangely Shylock presses the deal.

O father Abraham, what these Christians are
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect
The thoughts of others: Pray you tell me this,
If he should break his day, what should I gain
By the exaction of the forfeiture ?

A pound of man's flesh taken from a man,
Is not so estimable, profitable neither
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats, I say
To buy his favour, I extend this friendship,
If he will take it, so: if not adieu,

And for my love I pray you wrong me not.

Antonio's response is "Yes Shylock, I will seal unto this bond." This shows how easily Antonio was trapped.

ACT II Scene i :

Belmont. Portia's house. One of the suitors has arrived. He is Prince of Morocco, a Moor with a brownish yellow complexion. His first words are "Mistake me not for my complexion" indicating that he is self-conscious about his complexion and he is self-centred too. Portia tells him that he is as fair as any of the suitors she has yet seen, a joke the audience would have immensely enjoyed. She tactfully points out that the choice is not her's and conducts him to the temple. The choice is to be made after dinner.

Prince of Morocco is an arrogant man, whose inner character is formed by the prejudice others have towards his tawny complexion. He is a Moor and obviously his complexion is dark. He has achieved a lot in the way of bravery. He has come to know about the conditions only after coming to Portia's house and in keeping with his adventurous nature he opts to try his luck. He thinks that

it is purely a matter of luck because there is no place in it for bravery. He does not seem to think that intelligence is as important as bravery.

Portia's reaction to Morocco is amusing. In reply to Morocco's opening remark, she tells him that she is not free to choose a suitor and the statement:

"Yourself (renowned Prince) then stood as fair
As any comer I have look'd on yet
For my affection".

would have caused deep sympathy for her and at the same time and laughter. Other suitors wouldn't have been as dark as Morocco, a tawny Moor. Her farewell too signifies her attitude towards him.

"A gentle riddance, Draw the curtains, go.

Let all of his complexion choose me so"

Here 'complexion' can mean temperament or character.

Refer to further quotes at Act. II Sc. vii

ACT II Scene ii :

This scene is devoted to comic as usual in comedies. It is a diversion for the audience to laugh and enjoy. Note the change in the style of language - Morocco's noble, polished language and Gobbo's comic verbosity. Gobbo, the clown talks a lot but says nothing. His making use of Old Gobbo's blindness to create laughter is in bad taste in modern times, but we find this kind of situation in many of Shakespearean plays and therefore we have to take it as the type of comic the then audience enjoyed.

Underlying this comic speech and the comic situations, some critics say there is a subtle reference to the main themes of the play. Antonio's guillibility and inability to detect pretence is hinted at in the ludicrous Gobbo situation. The repeated confusion between words (infection for affection; defect for effect etc.) reminds us Antonio's more dangerous misinterpretation of Shylock's sarcastic use of 'kindness', 'good' etc.

Launcelot's words "truth will come to light; murder

cannot be hid long, but in the end the truth will out" appears prophetic as the play ends.

Launcelot's speech upholds richness of love as against material wealth. He leaves Shylock's service and joins with Bassanio in this spirit. This is another reference to the main theme. When Launcelot requested Bassanio's permission to go with him to Belmont, he was accepted and a feast was to be held to treat his friends. This shows the kind of social amity the citizens of Venice had as against Shylock who is always waiting like a carrion crow to plunder somebody. Bassanio's advice to Gratiano when he was accepted to go to Belmont to check his speech in Belmont shows how sensitive he is to the social environment.

ACT II Scene iii :

In this scene we see Shylock from the point of view of his daughter Jessica and his servant Launcelot. Jessica says 'our house is hell' The clown was the only one who brought some warmth into the house. Now she is sorry that the clown is leaving.

Again her words

"Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my Father's child,
But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners: O Lorenzo,
if thou keep promise I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife."

show that she is ashamed of her father because of the way he lives and does business. She wants to disassociate herself from him. She is running away from home with Lorenzo because she no longer can live with her father - the house is hell and she even wants to change her religion and become a Christian. Here Shakespeare is taking another step forward to build up the character of Shylock as a vicious miser.

ACT II Scene iv :

The main development in this scene is Jessica's

preparation to run away with her lover, Lorenzo taking as much as possible of Shylock's wealth with them.

There is going to be a masque in the evening and Jessica is going to slip away disguised as a pageboy to Lorenzo. Before she leaves she will drop into the hands of Lorenzo several bags containing gold and jewellery.

The purpose of this scene is to let the audience know before hand about preparations so that the spectators may enjoy fully what will happen shortly.

ACT II Scene v :

Shylock is glad that Launcelot left his service and took up employment under Bassanio who he expects will waste the money he borrows. His reasons are that Launcelot takes much time eating, sleeps in the day time and snores. Then he puts Jessica in charge of his house, handing over the keys to her and leaves for dinner with Bassanio. The audience is aware that Jessica is planning to take his wealth and run away with her lover. It is to this Jessica that he hands over the keys of his house. This is a highly ironical situation because of the prior knowledge of the audience as to what is going to happen. At this point Shylock becomes an object of ridicule and a cause for laughter. His servant is leaving him because he is tired of his service. Shylock thinks that he has been too generous and Launcelot has been sleeping in the day time and eats too much and does little work. Thus we see Shylock as a Jewish miser, Jews were believed to eat human flesh. The words Shylock uses 'feed upon' 'The prodigal son' appears to suggest the old superstition is true.

Shylock tells Jessica

"I am bid forth to supper Jessica,

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,.....

Probably he is correct when he says he is not bid for love. Even his words "Jessica, my girl" sounds hollow. His behaviour in this scene is comic and scornful. He appears to be always worried about the security of his house. When he heard that there is going to be a masque in the evening he warns his daughter not to open even a window to look out on the street where the festivities will take place. He wants to lock out all sounds of festivities, the opposite of Bassanio and Antonio. The Christians as represented by Antonio are generous, kind and changeable according to impulses.

Shylock's language is abrupt and literal and does not have the smoothness of the language of the native speakers. He says "But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements"; (1.3.33) "the man is notwithstanding sufficient" (1.3.22-3). Shylock cannot bear the sound of music. He always stands out as a foreigner even among festivities. In line 29 he says "What are these masques? hear you Jessica? Lock up my doors when you hear the drum."

Shylock does not trust even his own daughter. His statement that he may return immediately may be a warning for her to be attentive. To him she is only a guard of his property. He is devoid of human feelings.

ACT II Scene vi :

This scene focusses on the elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo. Lorenzo's friends are waiting for him outside Shylock's house. They are surprised at his being late, because it is not usual for the lovers belate for appointments.

The poetic images created are ambiguous. The reference to marriage apply to argosies as well. The ship is compared to 'prodigal' (1.14) which refers to Bassanio who spends his money wastefully. A 'prodigal' leaves home full of hope, but returns defeated and humbled by his adventures. The temporary nature of human hopes and happiness is conveyed powerfully

The audience is amused to see the old miser outwitted by the young lovers. However, a serious theatre goer will think twice at this action. How right is Jessica's action? The colourful speech and tone of the lovers enlivens the audience. But what Jessica has done is a serious break away from the accepted norms of the society. She had stolen money and jewellery while she was the custodian of her father's house. Thus she has broken two commandments i.e, to honour one's parents and not to steal. If not for the unpopularity of Shylock Jessica and Lorenzo would have had a difficult time defending their action.

ACT II Scene vii :

Now the action switches to Belmont again, a continuation of Act II Sc i. Morocco is now ready to try his luck. The three caskets made of gold, silver and lead bear the following inscriptions respectively.

1. Who chooseth me, shall gain what many men desire.
2. Who chooseth me, shall get as much as he deserves.
3. Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all.

Portia tells him that one of the caskets contains her picture and if he chooses that she will be his.

Morocco dismisses the lead casket thinking that it is unworthy of him. He says 'A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross'. His self-importance is stressed as he considers the inscription on the silver casket. He weighs his own importance and compares it with that of Portia and thinks that the silver casket should be the correct one. But he hesitates and moves on to the gold casket. He finally comes to the conclusion that a portrait of Portia cannot be in any other and asks for the key of the gold casket. Within it he finds a scroll in which he finds the following message.

"All that glitters 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 infold:
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs in judgement old,
Your answer has not been inscroll'd,
Fare you well, your suit is cold
Morocco departs wiser than when he came

ACT II Scene viii :

In this scene in Venice we see two developments. The first is the comic behaviour of Shylock on hearing that his daughter has run away with Lorenzo, a Christian, taking much of his wealth. The second is the news that one of Antonio's ships has been wrecked.

According to Salanio he had never heard an anger so confused, so strange, outrageous and so variable. He shouts in frustration calling the justice to help him repeating that his daughter had stolen his money and precious stones His exasperation and mad shouting was so ridiculous that all the boys in Venice followed mimicking him.

The purpose of making Shylock behave like a mad man is to make him still unpopular and provide fun to the audience. It also serves the purpose of developing the main theme that friendship and kindness's rewarded and cruelty and hard heartedness is punished.

The news about Antonio's loss is a matter of concern for the audience. Since Salerio and Solanio do not give sufficient details of the incident, suspense is created.

ACT II Scene ix :

Again we are back at Belmont in Portia's house. Another suitor has come to try his luck. He is Prince of Arrogan. Taking the usual oath like Morocco, he goes to select the casket in which Portia's portrait lies. From the point of view of the audience, this is another gamble. The spectators will enjoy how Prince of Arrogan

behaves as against the Prince of Morocco who made himself the butt end of laughter. Prince of Arrogan too is defeated in his choice and leaves.

In the last few lines the arrival of another suitor is announced. He is Bassanio who is known to Portia and Nerissa because of a previous visit. This is an important turning, because the spirit of love takes over from here onwards as against mercinary motives.

ACT III Scene i :

Salanio confirms that one of Antonio's ships has been destroyed in a storm. Shylock who had lost his face because of the elopement of his daughter Jessica with Lorenzo, a Christian, turns his anger on Antonio. His intention from the beginning was to take revenge on Antonio for what he thought the insults cast at him at the Realto and lending money free of interest. Now he thought is the to make him suffer.

Salerio teases Shylock mercilessly about the loss of Jessica who he claims as his own flesh and blood, reminding that "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory."

In this Scene we find how Shylock justifies his action. He lists the wrongs done to him by Antonio, all because he is a Jew (Refer to ACT III Sc. i L. 45-63) However, Shylock's speech only increases the antagonism towards him. His argument on similarity between him and Chistians is based on superficial facts. He ignores generosity, love and mercy the most noble ideals in human nature. Shylock's intention is not to ask for sympathy, but to justify his particularly vicious form of revenge.

Tubal says that his daughter could not be found. His vindictiveness is directly exposed when he says that he wished that Jessica were dead at his feet with his stolen ducats in her coffin. This destroys any pity the audience might have had for Shylock.

Shylock's delight on hearing that one of Antonio's

ships has been destroyed makes him forget the loss of his daughter and ducats. He is only worried at losing a particular ring. His change of mood makes the situation really comic. What is he aiming at? Can a man be so hard hearted over a supposed disgrace caused to him, worrying over the loss of a ring? Love is contradictory to his nature.

ACT III Scene ii :

Bassanio and Portia are deeply attached to each other. Even though she does not admit that she is in love with Bassanio how strong her feelings are shown by her statement.

“One half of me is yours, the other half yours,
Mine own I would say.”

Portia is faced with a difficult situation. She wishes to convey that she loves Bassanio and she does so directly however much she wants to protect her modesty. In addition to this she knows that she has to abide by her father's wishes. Therefore she tells Bassanio “If you do love me, you will find me out”. The music enhances the romantic atmosphere.

Some critics are of the opinion that Bassanio was given a clue to select the lead casket, but if so there is no reason for him to linger over making his selection. Whatever it is, in spite of the fact that the events in this Scene are highly contrived, it keeps to the main theme that love and generosity pays. Bassanio rejects the gold casket because it shines and the silver casket because it is a symbol of money, trade and commerce. His selection of lead suggests that he believed that ideal love looks down upon superficial appearances because the true worth of a person lies hidden beneath.

What part money plays in this Scene is interesting to contemplate. Bassanio came to Belmont with borrowed money and the reason for his coming is not only to win Portia, but also to become the master of the immense wealth that will come to him once Portia becomes his

wife. What would happen if he failed his mission is anybody's guess. Bassanio has to pay back many loans he has taken from Antonio as well as others. He is a man who has wasted his borrowed money and in the modern society he would be looked down upon as an incompetent, wasteful person. He is from a feudal family and has no business sense.

On the other hand the 3000 ducats he borrows from Shylock is put to good use. He hires a ship to go to Belmont with his retinue in keeping with his status, sends valuable presents to Portia before he goes to meet her and makes his presence in Belmont dignified and respectable. If not for money all this wouldn't have been possible. Therefore money cannot be looked down upon, how money is used determines the character of a person. To Shylock it is a means to make other people unhappy. To Antonio, Bassanio and Portia it is a means to make other people happy.

The next development in this Scene is the announcement by Gratiano and Nerissa that they are going to marry. Thus we see Bassanio's mission made possible by Antonio, Gratiano's and Nerissa's happiness is made possible.

Bassanio explains the plight of Antonio to Portia and she offers the money to pay back the 3000 ducats that he has borrowed, but Jessica sounds her a warning that her father is not out to get the loan back, but to kill Antonio by cutting his pound of flesh from a place closest to his heart. Portia's willingness to send Bassanio back to as soon as the marriage is solomonized is another instance where she uses money to uphold the value of generosity and friendship, a role quite different from what Shylock is to doing with his money.

ACT III Scene iii :

Antonio is arrested for failing to pay back the loan, but persuades the goaler to talk him to Shylock to talk

the matter over in an attempt to reason with him and gain time. Shylock is not prepared to listen to him but repeats that Antonio has treated him like a dog and now he is about to be got bitten. He says "But since I am a dog, beware of my fangs". Antonio realizes that it is useless to plead with Shylock, a heartless foreigner

The audience would have reacted to this kind of behaviour strongly. While Shylock's passionate desire for revenge makes him still more unpopular, it increases our sympathy for Antonio. In the past Antonio has saved many debtors at the hand of Shylock. Antonio's kindness and generosity and Shylock's greed and the desire to take revenge are brought out again.

ACT. III Scene iv :

Lorenzo tells Portia that Antonio is worthy of her generosity. She believes it, because usually friends are alike and if Antonio is like Bassanio the money she had spent to save him is well used.

Portia is not a woman to just wait hoping for the best. She immediately puts another plan into action. She puts her household in charge of Lorenzo telling him that she and Nerissa intend to await their husbands return in prayer and contemplation in a monastery. This is not her intention. When Lorenzo and Jessica have left we discover that Portia and Nerissa are planning to join Bassanio in Venice disguised as young men. A servant is sent to Portia's cousin, Doctor Ballario, a famous lawyer, with a letter requesting him to supply her notes and garments, needed to operate her plan. What she is planning to do is not yet clear, but it is obvious that she is going to play the role of a 'fine bragging youth'. From our early experience with her behaviour we know that she is capable of being an actress.

ACT III Scene v :

This Scene, the last in Act III, is meant to mark the passing of time and providing some relief before the

tension of Antonio's trial. The exchanges between Launcelot, and Jessica goes beyond pure comedy. They contain a certain element of seriousness for example in 'damned' used by Launcelot and the eloquent praise of Portia by Jessica.

ACT IV Scene i:

In this trial Scene all the main characters are brought together. The concept of law and justice are scrutinized closely. Shakespeare makes use of this opportunity to uphold the godliness of mercy, friendship and love. Shylock is defeated and bows out in disgrace as a punishment for his ill intentions and misuse of money. The immediate threat to the golden world of comedy is removed.

There are certain ambiguities and imperfections in this Scene. The Court is expected to be impartial. But the Duke is very sympathetic to Antonio. He calls Shylock 'a stoney adversary' associating with him the cold, immovable rocks that have wrecked Antonio's ships. The Duke's appeals again to 'human gentleness and love' falls on deaf ears. If we consider humanity and mercy displayed by the Christians and vindictiveness displayed by Shylock, Shylock does not deserve our sympathy. He does not justify his hatred of Antonio rationally. He appeals only to the lowest form of instinct and caprice in man. His justification is 'say it is my humour'. Here Shylock displays the crudest form of human nature and what we hear later from Gratiano that "he is the spirit of a wolf in the body of a man" is justified. Finally Antonio gives up all hope and appeals to the Duke to get on with the business of the court. Antonio in his speech compares the fury of the sea and the wind and the wolf, all images of destructive forces to Shylock's temperament.

It is useless to appeal to Shylock on the grounds of common decency and kindness, because he is totally different from other characters. He is not a Venician,

but an outsider who does not possess the human qualities of Venician citizens.

Shylock's argument is that he is not doing anything wrong by taking his revenge. His request is in accordance with the law. He believes that the law should be administered ruthlessly without any regard for kindness and mercy. It is difficult to judge on this matter. Can we say the law allows him to cut off a pound of flesh of Antonio as his property to do whatever he wants with it? Shylock's argument that some of the vicious characteristics that he embodies are present in Christians too cannot be totally rejected. His final statement.

"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"
seals Shylock's claim.

The Duke is in a difficult position. He cannot reject Shylock's argument and if he makes a judgement that is not above criticism, the foreign merchants in Venice, whose number is very high, might lose faith in the Duke's court. His only way out is to stop the proceedings until a learned doctor of Law, Ballario, arrives to advise him. Ballario is the cousin to whom Portia had sent a messenger when she was about to leave for Venice. At this point Nerissa enters the Court dressed as a lawyer's clerk and we soon come to know what Portia's plan is. As Nerissa hands over the Duke a letter from Ballario, Shylock sharpens his knife. The letter informs the Duke that Ballario is too ill to attend the court in person; and in his place he is sending a young lawyer who he has advised on the case.

The young lawyer is Portia in disguise. Not even her own husband could recognize her. The story at this point is far from realistic. The timing of her arrival at the Court and her knowledge the Duke had asked for Ballario's advice, looks strange, but possible. Maybe she had no knowledge of any of these when she sought

her cousin's advice, because he is a famous lawyer. It is possible Ballario being a clever lawyer, saw through the case and detected a flaw in the bond. Whatever it is this scene is highly dramatic and entertaining to the audience.

Portia's formal routine at the beginning and her eloquent appeal for mercy is breath taking. She says.

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
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 throned monarch better than his Crown.
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 scepter'd sway...

In spite of this passionate plea Shylock's response is "I crave the Law, penalty and forfeit of my bond."

The proceedings from here onwards is highly dramatic, Portia requests the Duke to act according to the law and praises the Venetian Law for its uprightness. She says "There is no power in Venice can alter a decree established".

Shylock's jubilation at this is expressed by his words "A Daniel come to judgement, yea a Daniel. (Refer to Glossary) The dramatic effect of the scene develops with the audience thrown into anxiety and confusion until Portia plays her trump card

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

The legal argument is that Shylock has a right to get his pound of flesh because Antonio has failed to pay back the loan and is subject to the condition of the bond. However the Venetian Law says that if a foreigner plans to endanger the life of a citizen, his property will be confiscated and passed over to the State of Venice

Cutting a pound of flesh from the breast is certainly endangering the life of Antonio. It is the duty of the complainant to take all necessary action to save the life of the person subjected to punishment. This is an impossible condition and Shylock begs to withdraw.

Then comes the anti-climax. From here onwards Shylock appeals for mercy, and becomes the laughing stock of all when he comes down and asks for his principal - merely the sum he has given to Bassanio. But the final decree is harsher than that. If any alien tries to seek the life of a citizen of Venice directly or indirectly the party against such action is taken shall seize one half of the property of the alien and the other half goes to the treasury of the state and the life of the offender lies at the mercy of the Duke. The Duke pardons his life, but orders one half of his wealth be given to Antonio and the other half to the general treasury.

When Shylock laments that his life is not worth living when all his wealth is taken, Antonio gives one half of his share of the property back to him as a gesture of mercy and keeps the other half to be given on his death to Lorenzo who eloped with his daughter. Further for this favour he should become a Christian and sign a bond making Lorenzo and Jessica the heirs of his property when he dies. Shylock with no alternative agrees to the decree and begs permission to leave the Court.

Portia's refusing to take a reward for her services at this instance is another gesture of generosity in keeping with the theme of the play.

What humour do we find in this scene. In the first instance Bassanio fails to recognize his own wife. Secondly he offers in the presence of all to sacrifice everything, even his wife Portia to save Antonio. Thirdly, Portia manages to take back her wedding ring which he promised not to part with until his death. Nerissa too manages to get her ring back from Gratiano too which leads to a round of vehement swearings in the next scene.

ACT IV Scene ii :

In this short scene Portia tells Nerissa to find out where Shylock lives, and get his signature on the deed conferring all his wealth on Lorenzo and Jessica when he dies. Graciano comes with Bassanio's ring and an invitation to dinner. Portia takes the ring but refuses the invitation to dinner saying that they must be in Belmont soon. In a short time Portia and Nerissa hatch another plot to take Graciano's ring which he too had promised to keep for ever and they succeed. Their intention is to tease their husbands when they return.

ACT V Scene i :

In this last scene the setting is idyllic. The tricky part of the play is over and music and romance is the theme. Lorenzo and Jessica is talking in front of Portia's house seated in a grove bathed in moonlight. One of Portia's servants tells Lorenzo and Jessica that Portia will return from the monastery where she was supposed to be meditating. Launcelot too reports that Bassanio will return home before morning. The poetry they speak backed by music is idyllic.

Portia is welcomed by Lorenzo and she barely had time to inform the others not to talk about her absence from home and gets ready to welcome Bassanio, Antonio and Gratiano. Portia plays the role of a gracious hostess and extends her warm welcome to Antonio. In this role Portia comes nearest to the true ideal of the play. Her ability to adopt herself to different situations is surprising. Nerissa follows her mistress in her mood and actions. She teases her husband complaining that he has given the ring to a woman. Portia soon joins making use of Bassanio's embarrassment and feelings of guilt by swearing that her husband would not do such a thing. Bassanio ashamed pretended that his ring was taken away by force. However Portia knows that Bassanio has broken his promise for good reasons: to help his friend

Antonio. His intention is to help, and there is no ulterior motive in it. The interesting part is the bantering that goes on, Bassanio and Gratiano trying to give all kinds of lame excuses to the two ladies who knew the truth. Finally they were excused with a promise by them not to do such silly things again. The rings are returned to their respective owners with a letter from Bassanio explaining the identities of the young lawyer and his clerk. In the same letter he gives an important news to make Antonio happy, that three of his ships have miraculously reached their destinations. That is Antonio's material reward for his love and generosity. Lorenzo and Jessica were informed of their good luck and the play ends as a comedy.



The play concludes by Antonio and the party had
from Bassanio and Gratiano and Antonio
and Antonio's class of a good
less and he had never in Antonio's life
joy from things nearest to the heart of the play.
The play is about Bassanio's actions is such
which follows his mission in his heart was
Antonio's business and explaining that he has
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CHARACTERS IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

The play "The Merchant of Venice" is named after a leading merchant in Venice who used his wealth to help others. Therefore let us consider his character first.

ANTONIO :

Antonio is a leading merchant of Venice. His status in the city must have been high for Salarino to say that other ships curtesy Antonio's ships. That means other citizens respect Antonio. However much the Venitians respect him for what he has done we can see certain serious flaws in his character. Antonio is a leading merchant in Venice, but the way he manages his wealth is closer to that of a benevolent feudal than a careful businessman. Bassanio has borrowed money from him several times, but has not paid back. Bassanio gives an analogy of shooting another arrow when one arrow is lost to find it, to ask for another a loan, a substantial one, 3000 ducats. Antonio is not in a position to give this loan to his friend and he asks Bassanio, who has only "meagre means" to borrow the money from somebody and promises to bind himself for the loan.

This shows that even though Antonio is rich and has a good reputation in Venice, he is not a shrewd businessman. However in the play Shakespeare is presenting him as a model character that should receive the approval of the then Venitian society.

Antonio is soft not only with his money even with his feelings. This is proved by Salanio's statement that Antonio "loves the world".

It is difficult to understand how so kind a person could function himself as a merchant except in the world of comedy.

Let us look at the role the character of Antonio is expected to play in the drama. The main theme of the play is that wealth should be used for the good of others.

If we take Antonio's encounter with Shylock, we find that Antonio was easily fooled by Shylock. Shylock had been insulted by Antonio repeatedly and Antonio should have known that Shylock is bound to be one of his enemies. What is amusing is he readily agrees to the pound of flesh clause in the bond. He believed Shylock's words that it is only a 'merry bond' and even said "Hie thee, gentle Jew... he grows kind" (I. iii, 174-5)

Antonio's giving of loans without charging any interest is his business, but he has no right to insult Shylock, a fellow businessman. Shylock has been insulted, spat upon and kicked and he has 'borne it with a patient shrug' (I. iii. 106) may be because he was a foreigner. Even when he met Shylock to arrange the loan for Bassanio, he asserted that he would do the same again. This does not go with his attitude towards the other characters in the play.

However in the trial scene when Shylock is crushed and became helpless, Antonio offers sympathy far beyond the demands of the law, but his demand that Shylock must become a Christian and make a will nominating Lorenzo who eloped with his daughter and Jessica who stole his wealth shows that he is not willing to allow Shylock to go without punishment. And also he is keeping half of Shylock's wealth in trust for Lorenzo and Jessica. Therefore Antonio is not free from weaknesses that human beings have and for these weaknesses he cannot be punished because he is one of the heroes in the comedy.

SHYLOCK :

Shylock is the leading character in the play. He plays a very important role to develop the main theme in 'The Merchant of Venice'. It was mentioned earlier that during the Elizabethan times with the English navy becoming very powerful, London became an important trading centre. Until then Venice was the most important trading centre in Europe and royal patronage was

Christian

given to the merchants who shifted their, business to London. At the same time traditional Guilds that controlled labour and performed certain social service functions broke down with the growth of industries that used machines on large scale and the feudal system too lost its importance. As a result money came to be concentrated in the hands of a few who could not be trusted to perform the social service functions that the Guilds and the feudal system performed. This caused great anxiety among the people. One of the main themes of "The Merchant of Venice" is to show that money should be used to make other people happy. Shylock plays the opposite role to Antonio to show when money is used to cause pain and unhappiness retribution follows.

Shylock is at odds with the dominant festive and romantic spirit in Venice. His behaviour makes him a very foolish person that causes laughter and on the other hand he is a fearful heartless person. One of the ways Shakespeare makes Shylock a figure of fun is by making use of traditional beliefs that people had about Jews. They are presented as greedy misers and money lenders who charged very high rates of interest. Jews are presented as devils. Solanio says that Shylock is coming in the garbs of a devil. They were also believed to eat human flesh and Shalock's remark that Antonio 'will feed my revenge' is supposed to prove this belief.

Shylock is also presented as a cunning vicious person. When Antonio casts insulting remarks at him, kicks him, spits on his gaberdine, the traditional dress the Jews wear he bears them with a shrug. But he shows how angry he is with Antonio when he cunningly includes the pound of flesh clause into the bond.

Launcelot Gobbo complains that he is 'famished' in Shylock's service. But the latter thinks that he has been excessively generous. He thinks that Gobbo eats too much, sleeps in the day time and does not do any useful

work. He is happy to learn that Gobbo is going to serve Bassanio and thinks that he will hasten Bassanio's down all.

Shylock's behaviour when he learns that his daughter had run away with Lorenzo with his wealth is very comical. He ran in the streets lamenting

"My daughter ! O my ducats ! O my daughter
Fled with a Christian ! O my Christian ducats !"

These words are so confused that it was difficult to determine whether he was lamenting over his money or daughter.

His manneristic speech and behaviour draws the attention of the boys in the street. They were so amused by the behaviour of Shylock, they follow him imitating his words and mannerisms. When Tubal tells him that his daughter could not be found, he cries "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear: would she were hears'd at my foot, and ducats in her coffin..." (Act III Sc. i). These words show that he has no love even for his own daughter, he needs only ducats. This removes any sympathy the audience might have had for him because of the loss of his daughter. Act III Scene i is full of evidence that Shylock is a vicious, greedy miser.

Shylock does not enjoy music or other people enjoying themselves. He has no sense of humour. When he called his pound of flesh clause in the bond 'merry bond' the audience is aware that this is pure hypocrisy.

Shylock is an outsider in Venice. He is an outsider not only because he is a Jew, his selfishness, his talk and the way he behaves make him an outsider. He cannot mix with the prevailing mood and the festive environment in Venice. His is the language of hard businessman, it has no warmth in it. His dealings even with his daughter is crisp. He is always suspicious of other people. When he was invited to dinner by Bassanio, he

says "I'm not bid for love, they flatter me." When he left for dinner leaving his daughter in charge of the house, he warns her to keep all the windows shut and not to allow even the sound of music enter his house.

Shylock's terms of the bond were purposely chosen to take revenge on Antonio. Even though he uses the words 'good' it has to be interpreted as good to take revenge. In the trial scene we see in spite of all the pleadings by important people in Venice to be lenient on Antonio he refuses to deviate from a place closest to his heart. The point from which to cut a pound of flesh shows that he is out to kill Antonio. But it is this non-wavering determination that brought his downfall. The punishment given to him may be argued as too severe but if we go by his intention the punishment should be that is imposed on the charge of attempted murder.

PORTIA :

Portia is exceedingly beautiful and extremely rich. "Her sunny locks hang on her temples like a golden fleece." Shakespeare says "All the world desires her" "Suitors come from the four corners of the earth" to pay homage to this mortal breathing saint". She has an immense power of attraction. It is this power that comes up above all the other positive aspects. Morocco refers to her divinity and Bassanio says she is not only fair, but of wondrous virtues. She is also full of energy and tact.

Out of the leading characters Portia is the most dominant figure in the play. None of the other characters has her authority and control. Even though she is highly dissatisfied with her father's will which prevents her from choosing her own husband, she does not brood over it. She quickly overcomes her weariness and gets into the festive mood. The way she deals with those who came to Belmont seeking her hand were cleverly handled. Even a difficult man like Morocco who was proud and arrogant was put in his place with a mild joke. Her inner zeal is best seen in her

speech to Bassanio as he prepares to make his choice of the caskets. She was in a difficult situation. She does not want to lose Bassanio, and at the same time she does not want to accept that she is in love. But her excitement gives her away.

There are many similarities between Portia and Antonio. Antonio puts his wealth and person at the disposal of Bassanio for the sake of love and Portia does the same. However, there is a difference. When Bassanio left Venice to come to Belmont, Antonio remained speechless whereas when Bassanio chose the right casket Portia's love is expressed jubilantly. She says

"Myself and what is mine to you and yours
Is now converted." (III, ii, 166-7)

For her also money is to be used for the sake of love and friendship. To give for the sake of friendship, without expecting personal gain is the Christian ideal. She is not all honey. She offers Shylock only a minimum of mercy. "Down... and beg mercy of the Duke" However finally she triumphs as 'a woman of resource and command, a beautiful object of desire, a mischievous school girl, and an authoritative lawyer.' Peter Millson.

BASSANIO :

Bassanio is helped by both Antonio and Portia. Antonio's funds were at his disposal for mere asking. He says

"My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlock'd to your occasions."

Portia says

"Myself and what is mine to you and yours
Is now converted".

On his own he has little funds: "meagre means", but this does not hinder his inner willingness to be helpful and to enjoy good life. He is not over careful with money like Shylock. He spends when it is necessary to spend. For example he hires a ship to go to Belmont with his friends and sends expensive presents to Portia before

he goes to see her. Because of his lifestyle, he has borrowed lot of money mostly from Antonio. It was with borrowed money that he lived a grand life.

He has a plan to pay up his debts and to lead a happy life. That is to marry a rich lady. Those days women had no right to hold money or property and all the wealth in the family became the property of the husband. It is with this idea that he is going to Belmont to woo Portia. His plan works and he becomes very wealthy, it is a reward for his gentlemanly nature. But had he failed in this mission, he would have gone bankrupt and Antonio would have lost his life. None of the characters in the play raises this point and therefore we have to take it that the then society did not look down upon such fortune hunting. We also must remember that he will not be able to marry any other lady had he failed in his mission, according to the conditions of Portia's father's will.

In the context of the play his behaviour is admired and the darker side forgotten, probably because he is a winner. The most striking aspects of his character are his warmth and sociability. He likes to associate friends and be sociable, another aspect of life Shylock avoided. Even in business his speech is friendly and interesting. When he spoke to Shylock to arrange the loan of 3000 ducats he says.

“My you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?”

With what Shylock said Antonio lost his temper, but Bassanio managed to remain calm and even invite Shylock to dinner with them. Bassanio is a gentleman in every sense of the word. He helps a great deal to bring out the main theme of the play - money should be used to make people happy. However his ability to manage finances is open to question.

JESSICA :

Jessica is the daughter of Shylock. Her mother had died and she was living in her father's house almost like a hermit. She is not allowed to move with other young people as it should be. The only person that enlivened the lite house was the clown Launcelot; the 'merry devil'. However Jessica has the strength of character like that of Portia. She too disguises herself to run away with Lorenzo.

Why is she running away from her father who is very wealthy and influential. At home she is not treated kindly. The temperament of Jessica and her father are different. In short she has opposite characteristics. Therefore it becomes impossible to live at the same place. As she says she has his 'blood' not his 'manners'. Solanio tells Shylock that "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory." She is not a miser and her attitude towards money is similar to that of Christians: impulsive and careless. Her spending "Fourscore ducats at a sitting" and exchanging a valuable ring for a moneky shows how careless she is with money. She was living a sheltered life and may be she does not know the purchasing power of money and now she is spending freely what Shylock earned by causing so much pain to others. This can be taken as a punishment given to Shylock.

At this point a question arises as to whether it is correct for Jessica to waste the money she stole from her father. Jessica herself understands the moral complication of her action. She disowns her father and then steals his wealth.

"Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child."

The only excuse is that her spending her father's greedily stored money appeals to the audience. This is a comedy and lot of things that provides fun becomes acceptable.

LORENZO :

Lorenzo is Jessica's young lover who takes her away from her father's house that had no comforts or happiness and sets out for an unknown future. He is a typical light-hearted, impulsive, careless, playful Venetian. His sense of fun highlights the pleasure and joy of love. His conversation with Jessica is lyrical and playful. He trusts his friends and expects their help in carrying out his plan: to outwit Shylock and elope with Jessica, taking a major part of his wealth. His fooling Shylock must have been appealing to the audience.

Lorenzo with his wit and light-heartedness won over Portia's confidence and she leaves her house in his charge during her absence from Belmont. His ability to see through things helps him in the long run and Portia must have observed.

Even though the way Lorenzo took away Jessica is a black mark on him, his love for Jessica cannot be questioned. He respects her not only for her beauty, but also because she is 'wise' and 'true'. His practical nature to see through what is Christian in a Jewess is noteworthy. He does not expect the world to be perfect. Out of the main characters he can be taken as the most realistic. Finally we see that he goes after love and ends up with love and money, an ideal character the audience would have liked.

GRACIANO :

Graciano, Antonio's friend has a philosophy that he is following. He tells Antonio

"Let me play the fool:

With mirth and laughter, let old wrinkles come

And let my liver rather heat with wine

Than my heart cool with mortifying groans....."

(Act. I Sc. I ii. 79-104)

Graciano tells Antonio that he takes life too seriously. But he wants to grow old laughing, drowning sadness

in wine. Motivated by Antonio's reserve, he deploras the sort of man who tries to appear wise by remaining silent. Antonio did not take his friend seriously because he is noted for speaking 'an infinite deal of nothing'

Graciano is not a clown who is out to make other people laugh. He believes in light-heartedness and the company of his friends, but his weakness is that he talks too much. When he requested Bassanio's permission to join the party that was going to Belmont Bassanio warned him to guard his mouth when in Belmont.

But hear thee, Gratiano,
Thou art too wild, rude, and bold of voice;
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
Thy skipping spirit; lest, through thy wild behaviour,
I be misconstrued in the place I go to
And lose my hopes.

Act II. Sc. ii. 166-174

When Graciano announces his intention to marry Nerissa, Bassanio does not take him seriously. He asks "And do you, Gratiano, mean good faith?" Are you serious in what you say? According to Bassanio he is an unlikely lover. Bassanio now being the Lord of the house has to be very responsible with what he does. Nerissa is not just a servant. The maids who attended on noble families were of gentle breed and they were regarded as members of the family in many respects.

In the quarrel Graciano had with Nerissa over the ring, after returning to Portia's house he did not consider the ring as an important thing. That is in keeping with his nature.

It is said that Graciano is insensitive. But he is not vicious. His conduct at Antonio's trial is more guided

by his emotions than his head. His talk is not motivated by viciousness as that of Shylock, but by anger over what Shylock has done.

What role does Graciano play? The main theme of the play is love, friendship and kindness that can be brought about with money. Antonio, Ballario and Portia follow this lines of thinking. Graciano does not have wealth, but he lives a life in keeping with the principles upheld by the Venician society. His character is dynamic and does not fall into a sterio type. He is witty and takes life in a lighter vain, but when emotionally aroused he behaves like a normal human being expressing his anger at Shylock. He is not refined as much an Bassanio, Solanio or Salarino but brings in festivity by his unending talk and actions.

LAUNCELOT GOBBO :

Launcelot Gobbo is the clown in the play. He was in the service of Shylock and later joined Bassanio's service and went to Belmont with him. He is the leading comedian in the play. We first meet him in Act II Scene ii when he was arguing with himself whether to leave Shylock or to remain with him which in itself is enough to generate laughter. His language is witty. He calls Shylock 'devil's incarnation' and the long winded spech would have amused the audience.

When his father, a blind old man came he amuses himself at his expense. He plays on his father's poor eyesight refusing at first to admit his identity, Possibly he must have imitated some one else's voice and it must have made the dialogue more interesting. Typical of Shakespeare's clowns Gobbos are using long words but do not always choose the right one. For example they use 'infection for affection'; effect for diffect; frutify for certify throwing the audience into confusion. His statement "The old proverb is well parted between my master Shylock and you sir, you have the grace of God

sir, and he hath enough. (he is wealthy), not only got the job for him, but also a livery better than that of others.

Lorenzo is more than a clown, (meaning an ignorant rustic); he has the verbal aptitude needed for a good fool (vide Act. III Sc. v). The exchange with Lorenzo in this scene is a good example of purely verbal humour in the play. Launcelot uses his fluency: "his army of good words"; to deliberately misinterpret and distort the meaning of what is said to him. He turns the plainest English into amusing nonsense. 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" as a reply to Lorenzo's request to lay the table.

Through Launcelot, Shakespeare exploits the comic appeal of the traditional stage Jew. Launcelot passes sarcastic remarks on Shylock such as 'the Jew is the very devil incarnation'; he is 'famished' in Shylock's service meaning he was not given enough to eat. Once he asked his father old Gobbo to count his ribs with his hand. He asys "My master's a very Jew" mening that he is a micer.

Launcelot's jokes sometimes draw our attention to important aspects of other characters. Many of his remarks stresses. Shylock's meanness and wickedness. When he tells Jessica she is 'damned' even though it is in the lighter vein, we are reminded of her robbing and deserting her father. Launcelot highlights the positive quality of Bassanio when he says "you have the grace of God, and he hath enough". When he tells his father that 'truth will come out,' it sounds like a prophecy on how the play will conclude (II iii) From Shylock's descriptions of Launcelot such as 'unthrifty knave'; 'Snail-slow in proft' we see that he has some of the qualities we admire in Bassanio, Portia and Antonio. He is not over concerned about riches like the Jew. Jessica's words.

"I am sorry thou wilt leave my father so,
Our house is hell, and thou a merry devil
Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness:"

show that her opinion of Launcelot is quite different from what Shylock thought about him. His shedding tears at their parting shows that he is affectionate towards Jessica, a quality that elevates him in the society. He is a type of a clown that can play his role in refined society such as in Belmont.

SOLANIO AND SALERIO :

These two names sound similar and the characters are also similar in many respects. The similarity of the names are such that in some texts these names are mixed up. Their roles are important only to the extent of presenting typical Venitians. Both are educated, refined gentlemen. Their language is rich and eloquent and fits into the cultured luxury and leisure in Venice, Solanio's description of Antonio's ships as

"Like signiors and rich burgher 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".

is one example of their rich language. Solanio and Salerio stand as the opposites of vulgar, blustering Graciano and harsh, austere Shylock.

Salerio plays the part of an attendant at the Duke's court. When the Duke asked some one to call the Jew into the court, it was Salerio who answered "He is ready at the door, he comes my Lord" and it is he who tells the Duke that a messenger from the Doctor Bellario has come from Padua.

Solanio and Salerio comments on the characters too. Their comments help to bring out the comic aspect of Shylock. Solanio says:

"I never heard a passion so confus'd,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets;
My daughter, O my Christian ducats!
Justice, the law, my ducats, and my daughter;
A sealed bag, two sealed 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.

In reply Salerino heightens the comic by saying;
Why all the boys in Venice follow him,
Crying his stones his daughter, and his ducats."

(Act II Sc. 8)

Salerio draws our attention to the positive qualities of Antonio. He says "A kinder gentleman treads not the earth" Solanio and Salerio are the first to get the news that one of Antonio's ships has been destroyed in a storm and also they are the people who carry the bad news about Antonio's plight to Bassanio in Belmont. Thus we see the role of Solanio and Salerio is to fill in the gaps when personnel are required and to highlight the negative and positive qualities in characters. They play different roles at different times keeping to the ideals of love and friendship. But they are different from Graciano and Lancelot, because of their polished manners and eloquent speech. They appear to be of a higher class in the society.

MONEY AS A THEME :

With the expansion of the English Navy in the latter part of the sixteenth century, London became an important trading centre. Until then luxury goods were brought from the East as far as China to Europe over land routes. When the sea routes were opened sailing round the Cape of Good Hope, the tip of South Africa, merchandise reached London at less expense than before and London became a leading trading centre. Royal patronage was given to the foreign traders who transferred their business from Venice to London. Through trade London was becoming increasingly wealthy. However the newly acquired wealth was in the hands of a few, specially the merchants. The merchants were a new breed of people who had little to do with the traditional society.

The power of money to corrupt became a concern of the enlightened people at the time. They were in the opinion that money has the power to corrupt, deprave and shatter social relations. "The Merchant of Venice" portrays different ways money can be used: to further love and positive human relationships such as friendship, cordial relationships between master and servants etc. or to bring unhappiness and frustration leading to negative feelings among people.

The discourse between Antonio, Salarino and Solanio shows what kind of refined society there was in Venice at that time. There was wealth signified by Antonio and the colourful civilized nature signified by Salarino and Solanio.

Antonio is in a sad mood, but there was no direct reason for it. His friends are trying to find a reason for it, but fail. The important aspect is their trying to help Antonio. But from their discussion we come to know that Antonio has four ships loaded with valuable goods in transit. Ships at sea are subject to all kinds of peril such as storms, pirates, mutinies among sailors etc.

When Antonio is in this preoccupied mood, Bassanio, his good friend comes and shortly Antonio comes to know that he needs another loan in addition to many loans that he had taken from Antonio. Even though Bassanio reminds him about the loans that he had taken and his concern to pay them back, Antonio waves all that out and thinks of some way to raise the 3000 ducats Bassanio needs to go on a certain mission, which was not clear even to Antonio. Later Antonio comes to know that the loan is to go to Belmont to woo a certain lady which will secure his happiness. It will also enable him to continue his present expensive living, because Portia has unlimited source of wealth. Thus we see that money may be used to promote love and contentment there by increasing the quality of life.

The ability to give for love without any thought of personal gain is the ideal of the play. Portia too is willing to give everything to Bassanio for the sake of love. To her money is not important unless it can serve the cause of love. When she as the lawyer who won the case for Antonio was offered 3000 ducats as her fee by Bassanio, she refuses to take it saying that Antonio's release is a sufficient reward for her. In this context it should be noted that Bassanio who had been spending over and above his means and Jessica who had spent four scores of ducats at a sitting and bartered a valuable gem for a monkey were finally rewarded. This kind of behaviour will be looked down upon in the modern capitalist society, but during the Elizabethan times when money poured in limitlessly such behaviour at least by the rich was admired by the common people

THE CASKET STORY :

The Merchant Of Venice has two centres of action, Venice and Belmont. It is the change of action between these two cities which creates suspense, tension and anxieties that make the play interesting.

The casket story is based on folk lore. It is not realistic, but in a comedy whatever that takes the spectators to a dream world become acceptable. What is striking is how Shakespeare blend Venice and Belmont. If we go by the theme that generosity plays, the story of Caskets play an important role to bring out this theme. Portia in Belmont is similar to Antonio in Venice in the way they use their wealth, large hearted and generous.

The anxiety is based on two main themes. That is the trial and the casket story. The bond is the most important factor in Venice, the Casket story is the pre dominant factor in Belmont. The two cities are linked by Bassanio who owes allegiance to Venice as well as Belmont.

In the casket story where Portia is the centre of attraction, several other characters get connected. Besides Bassanio, we have Lorenzo and Jessica, Launcelot and Gratiano. All of them are given a haven in Portia's house, Gratiano takes the hand of Nerissa and finally Antonio comes to Belmont as a guest of Bassanio and Portia ending the story as a comedy, all the main characters ending up either married or happy. The appearance of a letter from the Lawyer Bellario announcing that three of Antonio's Agrosies have arrived in Venice closes the drama. If not for the casket story the play wouldn't have been so interesting, even though it could have survived.

THE TRIAL :

In a civilized society for the people to live happily there is a structure in which to move. This is set down by tradition or by law. However justice and the law are not the same thing. We may define justice as the spirit of the law. Unless that spirit is served the law is an ass. In "The Merchant of Venice" this theme is maintained throughout. Neither Duke nor Portia could deviate from the established law of Venice to abide by the conditions of a bond. It was on this basis that Shylock was demanding his pound of flesh. He says "If you deny me fie upon your law".

But the anti climax came when Portia pointed out that according to the law of Venice if a foreigner endangers the life of a citizen of Venice he is subjected to severe penalties. Thus we see that when Shylock stipulated the pound of flesh condition in the bond he had gone beyond the limits of the protection given to him by the law.

It is relevant to quote the facts presented by Shylock in justification for his seeking revenge on Antonio. Shylock says in Act I Sc. iii

"He lends out money gratis, and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice" (I. 41-42)

"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 is calls interest." (I. 45-49)

"Signor Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my money and about my usance:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
(For sufference is the badge of all our Tribe)
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog,
And spat upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own." (I. 95-102)

It is because of these provocations that Shylock schemed to catch Antonio upon the hip. Of course there are other reasons too. Antonio is a Christian and he does not approve of Christian love and generosity. The young man who ran away with his daughter and a good part of his wealth is a Christian. These aggravated the situation.

With the loss of his ships Antonio became bankrupt, one who cannot pay his debts. It is because of this and his gentlemanly nature the Duke and others pleaded with Shylock to be merciful and accept the money he has lent out and interest offered by Bassanio. His refusal

to take back even several times of the principle alienated the sympathy of the court, but the Duke was helpless, because he has to abide by the law.

It was Portia who saved the situation by presenting a legal point that the others did not see. She developed the scene until it was beyond doubt that Shylock is determined to cut a pound of flesh from a closest part to the heart of Antonio which obviously will result in his death. Then she points out to the Duke that according to the law of Venice.

"If it is proved against an Alien,
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any Citizen,
That party 'gainst the which he doth contrive'
Shall seize one half his goods, the other half
Comes to the privy coffer of the State,
And the offender's life lies in the mercy
Of the Duke only, 'gainst all other voice."

(Act iv Sc. i l. 347-54)

The duke graciously spared his life. When Shylock lamented that he has no means of subsistence without his wealth, Antonio undertook to give back to Shylock one half of the share of wealth that came to him and to retain the other half in trust for Lorenzo and Jessica, thus even in his present poor financial status to be large hearted. There was a further condition that Shylock becomes a Christian and draws up a will entitling Lorenzo and Jessica all his wealth on his death.

Now we are aware of the facts on which the trial stood and the punishment meted out. How far do you think that this punishment is reasonable. There are differences of opinion on this matter and you may present your views, backed by facts.

THE PLACE OF DISGUISE AND DECEPTION IN "The Merchant of Venice"

Deception is deceiving others or being deceived. Disguise is to make oneself as near as some one else. Both are opposite of reality. In the plots of casket story and the bond story in *The Merchant of Venice* we find deception and disguise.

Shylock who was out to get Antonio 'by the hip' for the insults cast at him at the Rialto cunningly includes the 'pound of flesh' clause in the bond and Bassanio shows his reluctance to such a clause, Shylock with false words makes them believe that it is a 'merry-bond'. Antonio gets deceived when he agrees to sign the bond. This shows how important it is to cultivate the ability to see through deception.

The casket scene is a test to see whether a person has the ability to look below the surface and find out true values. Morocco goes for gold thinking that Portia is 'gold' and Arragon gets deceived when he selects silver believing that it is what Portia should be. Both of them were fooled by the outside glitter. Bassanio won because he refuses to judge by appearances. Lorenzo perceives Christian values in a Jewess and his perception turned out to be true and they ended up happily.

Portia disguises herself and goes to Venice for a constructive purpose. She saves Antonio from Shylock's knife and his friends from heartbreak. Therefore we see that in "The Merchant of Venice" deception nearly killed Antonio and disguise saved him from that fate.

- (i) "Shylock is more sinned against than sinning." Examine the evidence for and against this opinion. What do you feel? (A/L 1998)
- (ii) Discuss Shakespere's portrayal of women in "The Merchant of Venice" (A/L 1997)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN
"The Merchant of Venice"

accomplish'd : equipped

achieved : won

A Daniel come to judgement : This is a reference to the story of Daniel told in The History of Susanna. Susanna was falsely condemned to death for adultery on false evidence of two Elders and when she was being taken for execution The Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young youth, whose name was Daniel. Daniel examined the two Elders separately and proved that their evidence was false.

address'd : prepared

advised : careful

affection : natural disposition

agitation : for cogitation, think carefully

ague : fever

alablaster : alabaster

Alcides : Hercules

Alcides... wives : Alcides (Hercules) rescued Hesione, daughter of Laomerdon, King of Troy, from the sea-monster sent by Poseidon (Neptune)

allay : moderate, to make (fear, anger) less

appropriation : special excellence

Argos : he had hundred eyes and therefore he could see everything that happens

argosy : large merchant ship

As o'er a brook : as simple as crossing a brook

aspect : appearance, expression on the face

attended : noted

bankrout : bankrupt

Bassanio Lord : This line should read as "Bassanio' Lord Love, if thy will it be." Nerissa is praying that Bassanio may be the new Lord of Belmont.

bate : lessen, reduce

beauty ... purchase'd lightest : those who buy beauty are fast, bad charactered

be bound : shall be guarantor for repayment
 beshrew : ill luck to
 Black Monday : Easter Monday, 1360. It is called Black Monday because many of the English army which was besieging Paris under Edward III were frozen to death.
 blood : desire
 bootless : vain, useless
 bottom : ship
 bondman's key : the sad noise made by a slave
 break : go bankrupt
 break up : open a letter
 cater-cousins : good friends
 ceremony : holy object
 civil Doctor : Doctor of Civil Law
 commodity : advantage, interest on money lent out
 commodity : goods that can be kept as security for a debt
 compromis'd : agreed
 conciet : thought, apprehension
 complexion of a devil : The devil is thought to be black
 complexion : natural instinct
 confess : acknowledge, accept responsibility
 coekeit : (1) thought; (2) apprehension
 constant : well-balanced
 continent : that which contains
 contrive : plot, plan to harm someone
 converted : transferred
 cope : encounter
 coin ... angel : it was worth 10 shillings
 Colochos' ... Jasons : In Colchos lay the Golden Fleece which Jasons brought in the ship Argo
 cream and mantle : covered with a thick layer of greenish matter
 crisped : curly
 cross : thwart
 dardanian : Trojan
 death : skull
 death's head : a bare skull a symbol of death
 he understands not me: he can understand only English
 death : skull

deface : cancel
 deliberate : calculate
 determine : decide
 Diana : another name for the moon
 inscription engraved on the inside of a ring
 difference : dispute
 discover : reveal
 disguise us : put on our masks
 doit : small Dutch coin, half a farthing
 eanlings : newborn lambs
 ecstasy : madness, excitement
 egal : equal
 engaged : run into debt
 envious : hateful
 election : choice
 erebus : hell
 equal : exact
 estimation : worth
 exceeding strange : very unfriendly
 excess : interest
 exhibit my tongue : show what I would likely to say
 expect : await
 fall : mischance
 fancy : love
 fashion : manner
 fast bind, fast find : when something is bound fast,
 you will find it where you left it when you arrive
 there again
 flat : sandbank
 fawning publican : publican is a term of abuse among
 the Jews.
 fear'd ; made to fear
 fearful : to be feared
 fill-horse : cart-horse
 fond : foolish
 fore-spurrer : fore-runner
 forsworn : perjured
 for this gear : for this matter

flourish : ceremonial trumpet call
 full stop: stop this round about talk and come to the point
 fulsome : fat
 gaberdine : cloak
 gag'd : pledged
 garnish : ornament
 gear : matter
 gentle : with a pun on Gentile
 gondilo : gondola
 Gramercy : God have mercy, an expression of thanks
 gratify : reward
 gree : agree
 gross : full sum
 guarded : ornamented with braid
 guiled : deceitful
 habit : guise
 hard food for Midas : whatever Midas touched turned
 into gold, but it became a problem at meal times
 Here music... caskets : some critics point out that Portia
 let out the secret through this music
 highday : holiday, gay
 How much ... continuance : how much I have ruined my-
 self by living extravagantly
 humility : kindness
 humour : whim
 humours and conceits : whims and fancies
 I am a Jew : means 'I am a villain' sarcastic expression
 imagined speed : quick as thought Tranect; ferry
 impeach : accuse
 Indian beauty : dark beauty. At this time only the fair
 skin was considered beautiful
 intermission; a gap in the play
 intergatories : list of questions put to a witness who
 has taken an oath
 intermission : pastime
 infection : incorrect word used for affection
 Janus : a two-headed Roman god
 knapp'd : chewed

Leading merchant met there twice a day to conduct their
 business
 level ... affection : guess how I like them
 likely : handsome
 lodg'd : firm fixed
 lottery : lucky draw
 love ... warranty : with your kind permission
 low peasantry ... honour : many low born dishonest people
 would be separated from true gentle folks
 regrets : greetings full of feelings
 costly : richly dressed
 make incision : a surgical term meaning cut for bleeding
 martlet : martin, a small bird
 Masque : a form of evening entertainment in Venice in
 which the participants disguised themselves wearing
 masques
 Master Launcelot : 'Master' indicates that he is no longer
 a servant but an employer
 melancholy bait : bait which causes melancholy
 mere : absolute
 misconster'd : misconstrued
 mo : more
 moiety : part
 mortifying groans : deadly sighs. It was believed that
 sighs consume heart's blood
 mortifying ... longer : wealthy man grows old quicker than
 one who has meagre means
 muddy venture of decay : the emortal body which prevents
 the ... soul from hearing the heavenly harmony
 narrow seas : the English Channel
 naughty : worthless
 neat : ox
 not vendible : not salable
 observance of civility : observe polite behaviour
 o'er-look'd : bewitched
 offend'st : harms
 old swering : any amount of swearing
 opinion : reputation

ostent : outward appearance
 over-peer the pretty traffickers : look down on little
 trading ships with admiration.
 pack : run away
 pagents : well organized processions
 palè ... drudge : silver
 parts : actions
 passion : emotion
 patens : small plates
 patch : fool
 pawn'd : pledged
 penthouse : projecting eaves
 peize : weigh down
 plots : plans
 port : standing
 portly : smart Glossary
 port : possessed, informed
 posy : inscription inside a ring
 prevented : fore-stalled
 presently : immediately
 preferr'd : promoted
 prest : ready
 proper man's picture : he looks handsome, but cannot talk
 purse : put into bags
 quaintly ordered : cleverly carried out
 quaintly : neatly
 quality : manner
 qualify : allay, moderate
 question ... uttermost : doubting I shall help to the maxi-
 mum possible extent
 rack'd : stretched
 reasons : intelligent remarks
 reason'd : converse^d
 reddest : bravest
 reed voice : fluty voice
 remorse : pity
 reproach : for approach
 Rhenish : white Rhine wine

Rialto : a stately building where the unding merchants
 met twice a day
 rib her cerecloth : cover with a cerecloth. The cerecloth
 was a waxen covering in which the bodies of great
 people were wrapped
 ripe : mature, needing attention
 roads : safe anchorages
 Round hose : baggy breeches
 sad : serious
 sand blind : near blind
 scanted : limited
 scarfed : gaily decorated
 scant : make less
 school : university
 scrubbed : scrubby
 scruple : lit: 20 grains
 season'd : garnished
 Seal'd under : agreed to be his surety
 sentences : wise sayings
 set up my rest : determined to put everything one has
 as a bet in gamble
 shadowed livery : my black skin
 shaft : arrow
 shrive : give absolution
 Sit ... grandsire : sit still like a statue
 single bond : single agreement made with one person
 alone
 skipping : lively, frivolous
 slips of prolixity : slipping into excessesive talk
 slubber : finish off hastily
 Sophy : Shah
 sonties : little saints
 sort : dispose
 soul from hearing : the heavenly harmony
 sped : done for
 spend circumstance : you waste your time by not
 telling me directly
 spet : spat

stayed : waited
 stead : help
 still : continually, always
 strond : strand, shore
 surfeit : suffer from excess
 suit is cold : a proverb: 'you have lost your labour'
 force and road of casualty: where misfortune comes
 most frequently
 swan-like end : it was believed that a swan sang only
 once and that is just before its death
 Table : palm (Gobbo is reading his own palm to find
 out whether he is likely to get a fortune)
 tenour : intention of a legal
 thrift : profit
 tombs : some texts read as 'timber'
 treason there ... love : When Bassanio said he is on the
 rack, since rack is used to make those who are accused
 of treason, Portia is playfully asking what treason
 Bassanio has committed.
 tucket : trumpet call announcing an arrival
 turkis : turquoise
 two goodfathers ... ten more : twelve jurymen to find
 you guilty
 uncheck'd : not denied
 unthrift : thriftless
 untreed : retrace
 upon more advice : on further consideration
 upon advantage : with interest on the money lent
 usance : interest, usury
 valour's excrement : a soldier's beard
 varnish'd : painted, i. e., masked
 vailing : lowering
 via : go off
 virgin hue : i. e., white
 void your rheum : spit
 void : eject
 waft : waved to

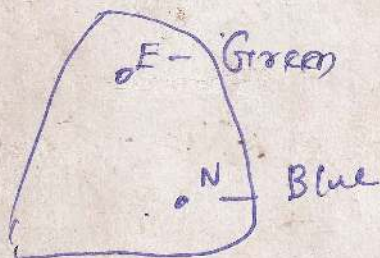
well to live : poor but honest
hovel-post : a post supporting a hovel
will : Portia's father's written document which bound
her to choose her husband by the test of the caskets
wis : I wis, assuredly without a guarentee
with purpose ... opinion : in order to get a reputation
wroth : ruin
wry-neck'd fife : called wry necked because the player
turns his head sideways when he plays the fife.
younger : gay young man

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