

The Merchant of Venice

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glover in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her.

Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical acclaim quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) and James I (ruled 1603–1625), and he was a favourite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, literary luminaries such as Ben Jonson hailed his works as timeless.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century, his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life, but the dearth of biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact and from Shakespeare's modest education that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by someone else—Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular -candidates—but the support for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars. In the absence of credible evidence to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

The Merchant of Venice was probably written in either 1596 or 1597, after Shakespeare had written such plays as Romeo and Juliet and Richard III, but before he penned the great tragedies of his later years. Its basic plot outline, with the characters of the merchant, the poor suitor, the fair lady, and the villainous Jew, is found in a number of contemporary Italian story collections, and Shakespeare borrowed several details, such as the choice of caskets that Portia inflicts on all her suitors, from pre-existing sources. The Merchant of Venice's Italian setting and marriage plot are typical of Shakespeare's earlier comedies, but the characters of Portia, Shakespeare's first great heroine, and the unforgettable villain Shylock elevate this play to a new level.

The question of whether or not Shakespeare endorses the anti-Semitism of the Christian characters in the play has been much debated. Jews in Shakespeare's England were a marginalized group, and Shakespeare's contemporaries would have been very familiar with portrayals of Jews as villains and objects of mockery. For example, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, a bloody farce about a murderous Jewish villain, was a great popular success and would have been fresh in Shakespeare's mind as he set about creating his own Jewish character. Shakespeare certainly draws on this anti-Semitic tradition in portraying Shylock, exploiting Jewish stereotypes for comic effect. But Shylock is a more complex character than the Jew in Marlowe's play, and Shakespeare makes him seem more human by showing that his hatred is born of the mistreatment he has suffered in a Christian society.

Key Facts

Full title: *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice*

Author: William Shakespeare

Type of work: Play

Genre: Comedy

Language: English

Time and place written: 1598; London, England

Date of first publication: First published in the Quarto of 1600

Publisher: I. R. for Thomas Heys

Tone: Comic, romantic, tragic

Setting (time): Sixteenth century

Setting (place): Venice and Belmont, Italy

Protagonist: There is no clear protagonist. Antonio is the merchant of the play's title, but he plays a relatively passive role. The major struggles of the play are Bassanio's quest to marry Portia and his attempt to free Antonio from Shylock, so Bassanio is the likeliest candidate.

Major conflict: Antonio defaults on a loan he borrowed from Shylock, wherein he promises to sacrifice a pound of flesh.

Rising action: Antonio's ships, the only means by which he can pay off his debt to Shylock, are reported lost at sea.

Climax: Portia, disguised as a man of law, intervenes on Antonio's behalf.

Falling action: Shylock is ordered to convert to Christianity and bequeath his possessions to Lorenzo and Jessica; Portia and Nerissa persuade their husbands to give up their rings

Themes: Self-interest versus love; the divine quality of mercy; hatred as a cyclical phenomenon

Motifs: The law; cross-dressing; filial piety

Symbols: The pound of flesh; Leah's ring; the three caskets

Foreshadowing: In the play's opening scene, Shakespeare foreshadows Antonio's grim future by suggesting both his indebtedness to a creditor and the loss of his valuable ships.

Plot Overview

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

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

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

Shylock ignores the many pleas to spare Antonio's life, and a trial is called to decide the matter. The duke of Venice, who presides over the trial, announces that he has sent for a legal expert, who turns out to be

Portia disguised as a young man of law. Portia asks Shylock to show mercy, but he remains inflexible and insists the pound of flesh is rightfully his. Bassanio offers Shylock twice the money due him, but Shylock insists on collecting the bond as it is written. Portia examines the contract and, finding it legally binding, declares that Shylock is entitled to the merchant's flesh. Shylock ecstatically praises her wisdom, but as he is on the verge of collecting his due, Portia reminds him that he must do so without causing Antonio to bleed, as the contract does not entitle him to any blood. Trapped by this logic, Shylock hastily agrees to take Bassanio's money instead, but Portia insists that Shylock take his bond as written, or nothing at all. Portia informs Shylock that he is guilty of conspiring against the life of a Venetian citizen, which means he must turn over half of his property to the state and the other half to Antonio. The duke spares Shylock's life and takes a fine instead of Shylock's property. Antonio also forgoes his half of Shylock's wealth on two conditions: first, Shylock must convert to Christianity, and second, he must will the entirety of his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica upon his death. Shylock agrees and takes his leave.

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

Character List

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The prince of Morocco - A Moorish prince who seeks Portia's hand in marriage. The prince of Morocco asks Portia to ignore his dark countenance and seeks to win her by picking one of the three caskets. Certain that

the caskets reflect Portia's beauty and stature, the prince of Morocco picks the gold chest, which proves to be incorrect.

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

Salerio - A Venetian gentleman, and friend to Antonio, Bassanio, and Lorenzo. Salerio escorts the newlyweds Jessica and Lorenzo to Belmont, and returns with Bassanio and Graziano for Antonio's trial. He is often almost indistinguishable from his companion Solanio.

Solanio - A Venetian gentleman, and frequent counterpart to Salerio.

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

Old Gobbo - Lancelot's father, also a servant in Venice.

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

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

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

Themes: they are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Self-Interest Versus Love

On the surface, the main difference between the Christian characters and Shylock appears to be that the Christian characters value human relationships over business ones, whereas Shylock is only interested in money. The Christian characters certainly view the matter this way. Merchants like Antonio lend money free of interest and put themselves at risk for those they love, whereas Shylock agonizes over the loss of his money and is reported to run through the streets crying, "O, my ducats! O, my daughter!" (II.viii.15). With these words, he apparently values his money at least as much as his daughter, suggesting that his greed outweighs his love. However, upon closer inspection, this supposed difference between Christian and Jew breaks down. When we see Shylock in Act III, scene i, he seems more hurt by the fact that his daughter sold a ring that was given to him by his dead wife before they were married than he is by the loss of the ring's monetary value. Some human relationships do indeed matter to Shylock more than money. Moreover, his insistence that he have a pound of flesh rather than any amount of money shows that his resentment is much stronger than his greed.

Just as Shylock's character seems hard to pin down, the Christian characters also present an inconsistent picture. Though Portia and Bassanio come to love one another, Bassanio seeks her hand in the first place because he is monstrously in debt and needs her money. Bassanio even asks Antonio to look at the money he lends Bassanio as an investment, though Antonio insists that he lends him the money solely out of love. In other words, Bassanio is anxious to view his relationship with Antonio as a matter of business rather than of love. Finally, Shylock eloquently argues that Jews are human beings just as Christians are, but Christians such as Antonio hate Jews simply because they are Jews. Thus, while the Christian characters may talk more about mercy, love, and charity, they are not always consistent in how they display these qualities.

The Divine Quality of Mercy

The conflict between Shylock and the Christian characters comes to a head over the issue of mercy. The other characters acknowledge that the law is on Shylock's side, but they all expect him to show mercy, which he refuses to do. When, during the trial, Shylock asks Portia what could possibly compel him to be merciful, Portia's long reply, beginning with the words, "The quality of mercy is not strained," clarifies what is at stake in the argument (IV.i.179). Human beings should be merciful because God is merciful: mercy is an attribute of God himself and therefore greater than power, majesty, or law. Portia's understanding of mercy is based on the way Christians in Shakespeare's time understood the difference between the Old and New Testaments. According to the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament, the Old Testament depicts God as requiring strict adherence to rules and exacting harsh punishments for those who stray. The New Testament, in contrast, emphasizes adherence to the spirit rather than the letter of the law, portraying a God who forgives rather than

punishes and offers salvation to those followers who forgive others. Thus, when Portia warns Shylock against pursuing the law without regard for mercy, she is promoting what Elizabethan Christians would have seen as a pro-Christian, anti-Jewish agenda.

The strictures of Renaissance drama demanded that Shylock be a villain, and, as such, patently unable to show even a drop of compassion for his enemy. A sixteenth-century audience would not expect Shylock to exercise mercy—therefore, it is up to the Christians to do so. Once she has turned Shylock's greatest weapon—the law—against him, Portia has the opportunity to give freely of the mercy for which she so beautifully advocates. Instead, she backs Shylock into a corner, where she strips him of his bond, his estate, and his dignity, forcing him to kneel and beg for mercy. Given that Antonio decides not to seize Shylock's goods as punishment for conspiring against him, we might consider Antonio to be merciful. But we may also question whether it is merciful to return to Shylock half of his goods, only to take away his religion and his profession. By forcing Shylock to convert, Antonio disables him from practicing usury, which, according to Shylock's reports, was Antonio's primary reason for berating and spitting on him in public. Antonio's compassion, then, seems to stem as much from self-interest as from concern for his fellow man. Mercy, as delivered in *The Merchant of Venice*, never manages to be as sweet, selfless, or full of grace as Portia presents it.

Hatred as a Cyclical Phenomenon

Throughout the play, Shylock claims that he is simply applying the lessons taught to him by his Christian neighbors; this claim becomes an integral part of both his character and his argument in court. In Shylock's very first appearance, as he conspires to harm Antonio, his entire plan seems to be born of the insults and injuries Antonio has inflicted upon him in the past. As the play continues, and Shylock unveils more of his reasoning, the same idea rears its head over and over—he is simply applying what years of abuse have taught him. Responding to Salerio's query of what good the pound of flesh will do him, Shylock responds, "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (III.i.60–61). Not all of Shylock's actions can be blamed on poor teachings, and one could argue that Antonio understands his own culpability in his near execution. With the trial's conclusion, Antonio demands that Shylock convert to Christianity, but inflicts no other punishment, despite the threats of fellow Christians like Graziano. Antonio does not, as he has in the past, kick or spit on Shylock. Antonio, as well as the duke, effectively ends the conflict by starving it of the injustices it needs to continue.

Motifs: they are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

The Law

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

Cross-dressing

Twice in the play, daring escapes are executed with the help of cross-dressing. Jessica escapes the tedium of Shylock's house by dressing as a page, while Portia and Nerissa rescue Antonio by posing as officers of the Venetian court. This device was not only familiar to Renaissance drama, but essential to its performance:

women were banned from the stage and their parts were performed by -prepubescent boys. Shakespeare was a great fan of the potentials of cross-dressing and used the device often, especially in his comedies. But Portia reveals that the donning of men's clothes is more than mere comedy. She says that she has studied a "thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks," implying that male authority is a kind of performance that can be imitated successfully (III.iv.77). She feels confident that she can outwit any male competitor, declaring, "I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two, / And wear my dagger with the braver grace" (III.iv.64–65). In short, by assuming the clothes of the opposite sex, Portia enables herself to assume the power and position denied to her as a woman.

Filial Piety

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

Symbols: they are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

The Three Caskets

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

The Pound of Flesh

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

characters measure their emotions with long metaphors and words, Shylock measures everything in far more prosaic and numerical quantities.

Leah's Ring

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

Study Questions

1. Discuss Shylock's dramatic function in *The Merchant of Venice*. What do critics mean when they suggest that Shylock is "too large" for the play? Does he fulfill or exceed his role?
2. In the end, how comic is *The Merchant of Venice*? Does the final act succeed in restoring comedy to the play?
3. Discuss the relationship between Jessica and Shylock. Are we meant to sympathize with the moneylender's daughter? Does Shakespeare seem ambivalent in his portrayal of Jessica?

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio. What does their friendship reveal about their characters?
2. Examine Shylock's rhetoric. Pay special attention to the quality of his language—his use of metaphor and repetition, for instance. How do his speeches reflect his character as a whole?
3. Compare and contrast Venice and Belmont. What is the significance of these distinct settings in the play?
4. Analyze the way that time passes in *The Merchant of Venice*, paying special attention to conflicts between time in Venice and Belmont. Are there any inconsistencies, and if so, how does the play handle them?
5. To what extent is Shylock defined by his Jewishness? To what extent is he defined by his profession?
6. Discuss Portia's character. How does she compare to the men around her? Is Bassanio a worthy husband for her?
7. Discuss how the trial scene reveals a conflict between justice and mercy. Is the conflict resolved? If so, how

Suggestions for Further Reading

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