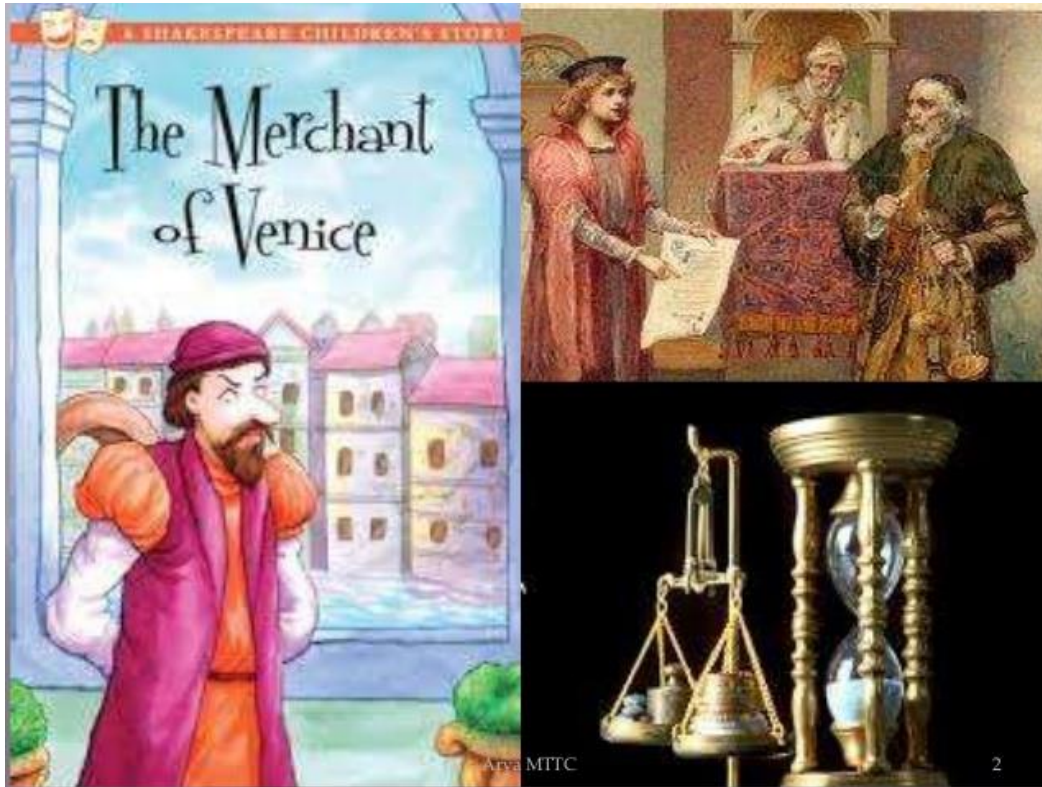


## *The Merchant of Venice* – William Shakespeare



### Introduction:

The "Merchant of Venice" is a Shakespearian comedy written between the 1596-1598. It is based on an Italian novel by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino called "Il Giannetto". From this novel Shakespeare takes the main characters and the plot.

# A Little History Lesson...

- Venice in the late-1500's
  - The richest city in Europe
  - Home to many tradesmen, foreigners, and different religious views
  - Jewish people were targeted - negatively



## SETTING

- Venice was famous as an important Mediterranean trading centre for goods from the Far East. Silks, spices, jewels and other expensive items were bought and sold there - including slaves. It had the reputation of being full of fashion, culture and sophistication. It would have been a very exotic location for an Elizabethan audience.





## Religious Intolerance

- Jewish people confined to ghetto
  - Gated “community”
- Treated with little or no respect
  - Kicked or spit on
  - Cheated
  - Forced to wear red caps
    - Can be seen in *The Merchant of Venice!*



(Shylock in a film version of *The Merchant of Venice* →)

## Venetian Women

- Not respected
- Under the rule/command of men
  - In the play:
    - Jessica and her father
    - Portia and her father
  - But not necessarily their father
    - Husbands, brothers, uncles, etc.
- No political power





## Shakespeare's England (in the mid-1500's)

- Under the rule of Queen Elizabeth I
- Jews expelled in the Middle Ages
- Nation-wide conflict between Catholics and Protestants
- Playwrights had to be careful not to offend anyone, especially the Queen!
- Similar to Venice:
  - Important European city
  - Cosmopolitan
  - Home to many foreigners



### Jews In Shakespeare's Time

• For Shakespeare, writing to an English audience about a Jewish moneylender might have seemed unusual.

• Officially, there were no Jews in 16th century England because they had been banished in 1290 under the Edict of Expulsion.

• Some studies suggest there were fewer than 200 Jews in Elizabethan England (only about 100 have been identified by historians).

• Most of these Jews were outwardly practicing Christians and many of them were probably Marranos (Jews who practiced their religion in secret).





- o During Medieval times Jews developed the reputation of being 'scheming money lenders'. However usury (lending money for interest) was one of the few jobs that Jews were allowed to undertake; Christians were forbidden to do so under Papal decree.



## Setting

- The story takes place entirely in Venice, Italy.
- Although there's no evidence that Shakespeare ever travelled abroad, he often set his plays in foreign lands, and Italy was his most-used destination.
- The Italian cities of Rome, Venice, Padua, Verona, Mantua, and Milan, all make appearances in Shakespeare plays such as: *The Tempest*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Romeo & Juliet*.



# Main Characters

**Antonio** – a merchant of Venice

**Bassanio** – Antonio's friend, in love with Portia

**Gratiano, Solanio, Salarino, Salerio** – friends of Antonio and Bassanio

**Lorenzo** – friend of Antonio and Bassanio, in love with Jessica

**Portia** – a rich heiress

**Nerissa** – Portia's waiting maid- in love with Gratiano

**Shylock** – a rich Jew, moneylender, father of Jessica

**Tubal** – a Jew; Shylock's friend

**Jessica** – daughter of Shylock, in love with Lorenzo



# The Merchant of Venice - Shakespeare

- first performed in ~1605  
Setting: Venice, Italy

THEMES:  
- Race / prejudice  
- Wealth  
- Friendship  
- Marriage  
- Justice







THE  
MERCHANT OF  
VENICE  
(1998)  
C.P.A.



# MALE CHARACTERS

- Antonio: a merchant of Venice
- Bassanio: his friend, suitor to Portia
- Solanio, Gratiano, Salerio: friends to Antonio and Bassanio
- Lorenzo: in love with Jessica
- Shylock: a rich Jew



- Tubal: a Jew, his friend
- Launcelot Gobbo: a clown, servant to Shylock
- Old Gobbo: father to Launcelot
- Leonardo: servant to Bassanio
- Balthazar and Stephano: servants to Portia

# FEMALE CHARACTERS AND OTHERS



- Portia: a rich heiress of Belmont
- Nerissa: her waiting-gentlewoman ( lady-in waiting and confidant)
- Jessica: daughter to Shylock
- The Duke of Venice, Prince of Morocco, Prince of Arragon: suitors for Portia





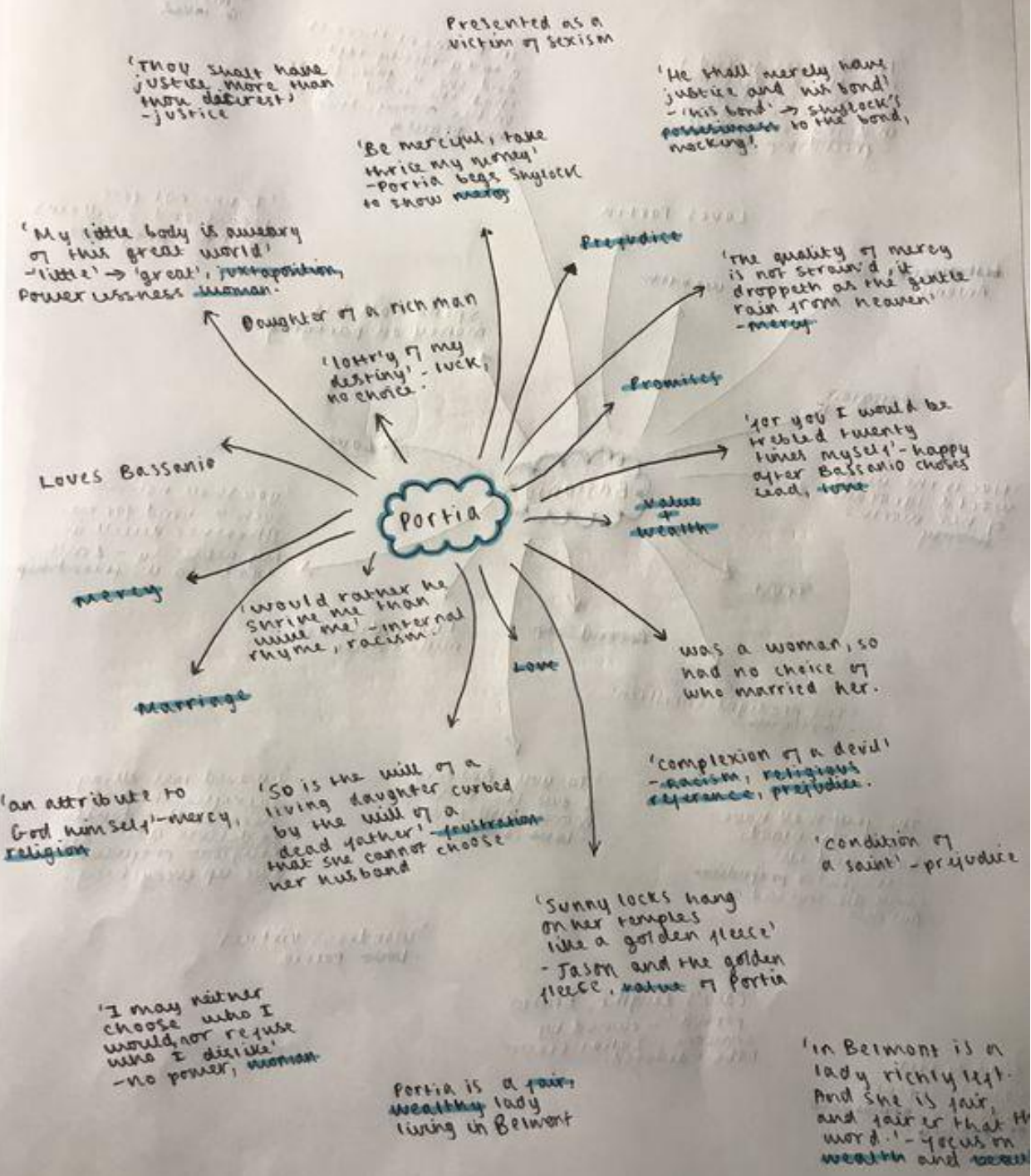
**PORTIA**      *The Merchant of Venice*

Portia, the Lady of Belmont, was sought in marriage by many of high degree, but fortune smiled on Bassanio, friend of Antonio, the Merchant of Venice. Later, disguised as a young lawyer, Portia was able to deliver Antonio from the clutches of Shylock the Jew, who sought before the Duke of Venice to enforce an infamous bond.

*Characters from Shakespeare.*

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## Character Sketches: Major Characters (4)

**1. Shylock** : Shylock is a Jewish moneylender in Venice, who detests and despises Christians. He makes his money by charging interest on his loans, and dislikes Antonio for not doing so and therefore ruining his business – particularly as Antonio sometimes pays the debts of those who cannot repay their loans in time, and therefore spoils Shylock's enrichment by taking control of their forfeitures.

He is a miser and something of a puritan, having no taste for music or other reveling, starving his servant and letting him wear out his clothes rather than replacing them. Considering Launcelot a spendthrift, he is happy to let him leave to go serve Bassanio, as this will make the latter go through his money more swiftly. Even his daughter considers him cruel. He flies into a wild passion when she flees his house, taking with her massive amounts of his money, and has her chased after as much if not more for the money than for her own sake.

He is able to justify revenge on the basis of the bad behavior of Christians. His insistence on the letter of the law will be his undoing, leaving him not only unable to kill Antonio, but losing all the extra money offered him, the return of his principal, and soon forfeiting all of his wealth and his life. He accepts to turn Christian to save his life, but is left ill by the sudden reversal in his fortune.

**2. Antonio:** He is a merchant of Venice who has invested deeply in overseas ventures, to the extent that he no longer has any ready money left.

He is highly respected in the merchants' quarter, and his credit is strong with them. . He is strongly attached to Bassanio, and for love of him risks his credit to the tune of **three**

**thousand ducats** to allow the younger man to woo his lady. He is also known for lending to friends and taking no interest.

Antonio is so certain of the return of his ships that he accepts Shylock's bond of a pound of flesh should he default on repaying the loan in time. Over the next three months, however, his ships are wrecked one by one, and he is left owing the pound of flesh to Shylock. Finding the moneylender impossible to reason with, he resolves to cease trying, and readies himself to die, hoping only for Bassanio to come and see him one last time before then.

**3. Bassanio** : He is a young gentleman of Venice who has squandered all his fortune and is therefore in dire need of a rich wife. A great friend of Antonio's, he convinces the latter to lend him the necessary money for him to marry Portia. He invites Shylock to dine with them over the matter of a loan for this, allowing Lorenzo to abduct Jessica.

He agrees to let his friend Gratiano follow him to Belmont on condition that he keep himself under control. He is greatly liked by Portia and Nerissa, as well as Portia's servants, but he insists on attempting the test of the caskets without waiting, despite Portia's entreaties. Winning by choosing humbly, he is overjoyed to have gained the lady, though his joy is soon tempered by hearing of Antonio's troubles, and he rushes from Portia to see what he can do to save him. He does not recognize his wife when she is dressed as a man, and refuses to give her (as lawyer) the ring he received from her (as herself) and had sworn to never part from until Antonio asks him to, at which point he immediately does. He half-hopes to hide the fact, but is unsuccessful. He is desperate to excuse himself, and greatly relieved when it turns out that the learned lawyer was actually his wife in disguise.

**4. Portia**: As **one of Shakespeare's most intelligent and witty heroines**, she is famous for her beauty and for her wealth, and she is deeply anguished that she must marry only the man who chooses the single casket of three which contains her portrait. A beautiful, clever, and wealthy noblewoman who lives in the country estate of Belmont, outside Venice. Portia is bound by a clause in her father's will, which obligates her to marry whoever solves the so-called riddle of the caskets, by choosing the correct chest from one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. After despairing over a parade of suitors whom she finds distasteful, Portia does get to marry her true love, Bassanio, who happily makes the correct choice. She also saves Antonio's life, during his trial with Shylock, dressed up as a lawyer named Balthazar. For centuries, Portia was admired as an ideal of feminine virtue. However, many modern critics have pointed out that Portia, though seemingly a genius and a perfect wife, regularly displays a vicious prejudice toward non-Christians and foreigners.

#### **Minor characters :**

**Gratiano** : A notoriously vulgar Venetian and friend of Bassanio. While Bassanio courts Portia, Gratiano falls in love with and eventually marries her servant, Nerissa.

**Jessica** : Shylock's daughter, who moves from merely disdaining her father to actually robbing him, eloping with a Christian Venetian, Lorenzo, and converting to Christianity.

**Lorenzo** : A Venetian and friend of Bassanio and Antonio, who is in love with Shylock's daughter Jessica. Lorenzo elopes with Jessica, taking money and precious items that she has stolen from her father.

**Nerissa** : Portia's servant and confidante, Nerissa ultimately marries Bassanio's companion, Gratiano.

**Launcelot Gobbo** : A clownish servant, who leaves Shylock in order to work for Bassanio.

**Salerio** : A Venetian nobleman, friendly with Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano, and Lorenzo.

**Solanio** : A Venetian nobleman and good friend of Salerio.



**Prince of Morocco** : A Moorish prince who comes to woo Portia at Belmont. He asks Portia not to judge him by the color of his skin, but incorrectly picks the gold casket.

**Prince of Aragon** : A Spanish nobleman who woos Portia at Belmont. He incorrectly picks the silver casket.

**Duke of Venice** : Presides over the trial of Antonio. Although the Duke attempts to persuade Shylock to show Antonio mercy, he knows that Venice's commercial interests depend on a consistent application of its laws, so he can't make an exception to help Antonio.

**Old Gobbo** : Launcelot's blind father.

**Tubal** : A Jew in Venice, and Shylock's sole friend and confidante during the course of the play.

**Doctor Bellario** : Portia's cousin and a well-respected lawyer in Padua. He never appears on stage.

**Balthazar** : The servant Portia sends to obtain her letters of introduction and costume from Bellario. Balthazar is also the name Portia takes when she impersonates a lawyer at court.

