

Course Name: B.A.L.L.B
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Topic: The Merchant of Venice
(Novel)

Novel- THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

By Shakespeare

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 Launcelot 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 Gratiano 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 Arragon 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 Gratiano 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 Gratiano 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. Gratiano 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 Gratiano 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 sketch of ANTONIO

Antonio is a generous, willing, loyal friend and an understanding devoted friend. He is willing to come to Bassanio's aid for what some might call a flimsy reason. As a businessman, he has all his money tied up in one venture, which shows questionable business wisdom. His generosity and another view of his questionable business wisdom is revealed when he agrees to act as co-signer to "secure" a loan with Bassanio that Bassanio might find in the open marketplace.

As it happens, Bassanio secures a loan with Shylock, a Jewish money lender who charges interest on loans, which is called usury, a practice with which our credit cards make us very familiar. Antonio and Shylock are on extremely unfriendly terms with each other because Antonio has publicly denounced Shylock for his money lending practices. Antonio is the opposite of Shylock because, along with his merchant enterprises, Antonio also lends money but does it without charging a fee for the loan. Shylock of course resents Antonio's treatment and has deep seated ill-will toward him.

Bassanio's loan with Shylock points out that Antonio is unrealistic and has no foresight.

(1) He publicly makes an enemy of Shylock who is not acting illegally in lending money and whose services aid even his best friend Bassanio.

(2) He presumes on good fortune and good timing and therefore agrees to impossible terms on the loan specifying a "pound of flesh" for the forfeit of the loan if not paid on time. In addition to Antonio's unrealistic attitude and lack of foresight, he also has a huge ego in that he won't humble himself to Shylock and get rational terms for the securing of Bassanio's loan.

Antonio admits to a deep sadness but offers no explanation for it. Critics suggest that it relates to his imprudent financial decision to loan money at no charge, which means that he has little capital for operating his merchandising business. This lack of capital (because it is all lent out) requires him to put all his eggs in one basket, so to speak, by having his prosperity all tied up in one ship. We know that this is so because the inciting incident is that he has no money to loan Bassanio.

His composure when facing Shylock's terms of the pound of flesh to be delivered up for the failure to make the repayment may represent Christian equanimity, as critics suggest, or it could represent the continuance of the despondency of sadness that has turned to despair at the loss of his ship.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF PORTIA

Portia is the heroine in the story *The Merchant of Venice* authored by William Shakespeare. She is a rich heiress who is also beautiful and intelligent at the same time. These traits are portrayed at several instances throughout the story. She is bound by her father's will to marry the person who chooses the right casket from three of them made of gold, silver and lead.

The readers get an idea of her beauty from Bassanio who cannot stop talking enough about it. One instance where she shows her intelligence is when Bassanio comes to try his luck in choosing the right casket. Unknown to him, she has also fallen in love with him like he has for her. However, she is not allowed to reveal this to him. Instead, she suggests that he take a day or two to think over which the right casket is. This is because he has only one chance, and if he fails in this, they will lose each other forever.

Portia's graciousness is shown through her tact and sympathy. She talks ladylike and gives all due respect to her earlier prospective suitors – the Princes of Morocco and Arragon. But, once they leave, she does not hesitate to immediately voice her opinions about them to her trusted servant Nerissa. She calls them fools and considers them to be greedy and self-centered who are more interested in the fortune that her father has left her. She understands this from the way they choose the gold and silver caskets without even caring about their plain lead counterpart.

She is also depicted as a person who is very generous. Within a few days of their marriage, Bassanio receives the news of Antonio's downfall and Shylock taking him to court. Although she finds it difficult to let her husband go, Portia knows that it is more important for Bassanio to be by his friend's side at that point of time. Not only does she ask him to leave immediately, but she also asks him to take some of her fortune with him to bail Antonio out.

Another example to show that Portia is quick witted is her performance in the courtroom where she appears as a lawyer for Antonio, Bassanio's good friend. Antonio had pledged his life to the moneylender Shylock to raise money for Bassanio to go and try his luck in winning Portia's hand. Even Bassanio did not recognize his wife in court. While Portia talks about mercy to the moneylender, she also agreed that it was only fair that Shylock took a pound of flesh from Antonio's body as his payment per the agreement. However, she challenged him to do so without shedding a single drop of blood as the agreement did not allow for Antonio to lose blood. Portia easily wins the case using the exact law terms without having any legal training or prior experience as a lawyer.

All the above instances indicate that Portia is a woman of noble character with multiple virtues.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF SHYLOCK

INTRODUCTION: Shylock is also the most important character of the play '*The Merchant Of Venice*'. He is the most effective person of the play. He is a fat man.

A MERCHANT OF VENICE: Shylock is also a merchant of Venice. He wants to take only advantages in his business by hook or crook. His main business is usury.

A GRAND FIGURE: Shylock has a grand figure in the play. He is harsh and cruel.

A RICH JEW: Shylock is a rich Jew. He lends money on high interest rate. That's why he becomes the richest moneylender of the Venice.

HIS LOVE AND HATE FOR HIS DAUGHTER: He loves his daughter Jessica too much. He brings up her very well. But he begins to hate her when she elopes with Lorenzo.

A CRUEL AND REVENGEFUL PERSON : Shylock is a cruel and revengeful person. That's why he asks Antonio to sign on the fatal bond because Antonio abuses him as a Jew.

A GREEDY PERSON: Shylock is a greedy person. He repents in handing over the key of safe when he comes to know that Jessica took all jewellery and cash from the house at the time of eloping with Lorenzo.

A MAN WRONGLY SEEN: Is he a villain? This is true that he is evil and greedy. But he is not illegal in Antonio's case. What he does with Antonio that is because of his commercial and communal jealousy. But the question is whether he can be regarded as the villain of the play. Then finally we accept that he is a villain of the play as he does some deeds that is unfair for the society.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF BASSANIO

INTRODUCTION: Bassanio is the central figure of the play. He is the friend of Antonio. Bassanio belongs to a noble family.

HIS PERSONALITY: Bassanio is a master of charming personality. He is very handsome and gentleman also as well.

EXTRAVAGANT: He is very extravagant. His friends and servants like him because of his extravagance nature. He gives freely his best clothes to his servants. He loves his life style.

A TRUE FRIEND: Bassanio is a true and sincere friend of Antonio. He has great love and respect for him. When Portia asks about Antonio, he speaks very lovingly, "The dearest friend to me". At one place in the play, Bassanio says to Antonio, "I would sacrifice myself, my wife dear to me as life and all the world to save you from this devil."

INTELLIGENT: Bassanio is an intelligent person. We can see his intelligence in selecting the right casket. At the end we can say that he is a noble man with charming personality.

THE CASKET STORY

The casket plot sets up the Merchant of Venice. As the plot begins, Bassanio wants to marry Portia. He asks Antonio for money so he can impress her. Antonio obliges and Bassanio sets out on his merry way. In the mean time, two suitors have come to seek the hand of Portia. The Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon(t) have learned of Portia's father's will. It states that the suitors must pick one of three caskets, gold, silver, or lead. If they choose right they then get to marry Portia. But if they choose wrong they must leave immediately and cannot woo another woman ever again.

Morocco chooses first. He reads the inscriptions on the caskets and he finds that the inscription on the golden casket appeals to him. The gold casket declares "who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." He figures that many men desire Portia. But, he receives a skull symbolizing he is wrong. Next the Prince of Arragon tries his luck. He reads the gold casket, but doesn't want to be grouped with the ordinary man. He instead chooses the silver casket which declares "who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." He believes he deserves Portia but he too is wrong. He receives a picture of a fool (in some productions it is a mirror) and is called a loser.

Finally, Bassanio arrives at the palace. He immediately is drawn to the lead casket which says, "He who chooseth me must hazard all he hath." Bassanio then finds a vice masked by a virtue in beauty, war, religion, and law. He then applies this to the caskets. He chooses the lead casket, which contains a picture of Portia so beautiful, that he barely recognizes her. Everyone is delighted and Portia gives Bassanio a ring symbolizing their love, which then introduces the ring plot.

THE RING PLOT

This is the last plot introduced in the play, *The Merchant of Venice*. It is one of the parts that classifies this play as a "comedy."

This plot is introduced when Portia and Nerissa give their husbands, Bassanio and Gratiano, rings to seal their love in marriage. They give strict instructions never to lose the rings, which foreshadows an event where the rings may be lost or given up.

Portia and Nerissa are later disguised as men in the court of the Duke. They save Antonio from Shylock's bond and even turn the tables on Shylock. Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio are eternally grateful for their services and offer them anything they want. Portia and Nerissa, still disguised, ask for Bassanio and Gratiano's rings. The men refuse them and Portia and Nerissa leave dissatisfied. Then, after much urging from Antonio, they give their rings up and have Gratiano run after the "doctor and assistant" to give them the rings.

Gratiano, Bassanio, and Antonio return to Belmont where they are greeted by Portia and Nerissa, who are no longer in disguise. Nerissa "notifies" that Gratiano's ring is missing and gets into a fight with him. Portia likewise gets into a fight with Bassanio. After Portia and Nerissa send Bassanio and Gratiano on a serious guilt trip, they reveal that they were the doctor and clerk and have had the rings the entire time.

This plot and the play end with everyone going inside to discuss the events that have taken place, and Gratiano stating his anticipation to go to bed with Nerissa. Fittingly, the last word in the play is "ring."

TRIAL SCENE

Antonio is brought before the Duke and the magnificoes of Venice to stand trial for failing to pay off his obligation to Shylock. The Duke is upset about the penalty, a pound of Antonio's flesh, but cannot find any lawful way of freeing Antonio from his bond. Shylock enters the court and the Duke tells him that all of the men gathered there expect him to pardon Antonio and forgive the debt.

Shylock replies that he has already sworn by his Sabbath that he will take his pound of flesh from Antonio. He is unable to provide a good reason for wanting to punish Antonio in this manner, other than to say, "So can I give no reason, nor I will not, / More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing / I bear Antonio"

Bassanio then comes forward and offers Shylock the six thousand ducats as repayment for the loan. Shylock tells him that even if there were six times as much money offered to him, he would not take it. The Duke asks Shylock, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" Shylock responds that he is doing nothing wrong, and compares his contract with Antonio to the Christian slave trade. He tells the Duke that he does not demand that the Christians should free their slaves, and therefore the Christians should not demand that he free Antonio.

The Duke threatens to dismiss the court without settling the suit brought by Shylock if Doctor Bellario fails to arrive. Salerio tells him that a messenger has just come from Bellario, and Nerissa enters dressed as a man and informs the Duke that Bellario has sent a letter to him. Shylock whets his knife on his shoe, confident that he will receive his pound of flesh.

The letter from Bellario recommends a young and educated doctor to arbitrate the case. The Duke asks where the young doctor is, and Nerissa tells him that he is waiting outside to be admitted into the court. The Duke orders him to be brought in, and Portia enters dressed as a man, pretending to be a doctor named Balthasar.

Portia tells the Duke that she has thoroughly studied the case and then asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" . Antonio and Shylock both step forward, and Portia asks Antonio if he confesses to

signing the contract. He does, and Portia then says that Shylock therefore must be merciful. She delivers a short speech on mercy, but Shylock ignores it and demands the contract be fulfilled. Portia then asks if no one has been able to repay the amount, but since Shylock has refused the money there is nothing she can do to make him take it. She comments that she must therefore side with Shylock.

Shylock, impressed that Portia is supporting his case, says, "A Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel!" Portia rules that Shylock has the right to claim a pound of flesh from next to Antonio's heart according to the bond. Antonio's bosom is laid bare and Shylock gets ready to cut. Portia asks him if he has a surgeon ready to stop the bleeding once he has taken his pound of flesh. Shylock says, "I cannot find it. 'This is not in the bond'".

Just as Shylock is about to start cutting again, Portia says that the bond does not give him permission to shed Antonio's blood. The laws of Venice are such that if any Venetian's blood is shed, all the goods and lands of the perpetrator may be confiscated by the state. Shylock realizes that he cannot cut the flesh without drawing blood, and instead agrees to take the money instead. However, Portia is not willing to back down and instead only gives him the pound of flesh, further saying that if he takes a tiny bit more or less he will be put to death himself. Shylock, unable to comply with this stipulation, decides to withdraw his case.

Portia tells Shylock to remain in the court. She says that Venice has a further law which says that if any foreigner tries to kill a Venetian, the foreigner will have half of his property go to the Venetian against whom he plotted, and the state will receive the other half. In addition, the life of the foreigner will be in the hands of the Duke, who may decide to do whatever he wants to. Shylock is forced to kneel on the ground before the court, but the Duke pardons his life before he can beg for mercy.

JESSICA LORENZO LOVE STORY

Jessica is the daughter of Shylock, the Jew. She is his only child. She is charming and beautiful, and Lorenzo loves her very much.

She does not like her father because of her cruel nature. From the beginning of the play Shylock is a lonely man. It is his wife, whom he loves dearly is dead. His daughter Jessica is not much help so it adds loneliness in his life. Jessica always stand at the window of her house keeping down the streets of Venice at the marry making of a venetian boy Lorenzo. Daughters normally are a source of solace to their fathers but Jessica was not like that. Shylock does not trust on Jessica. One day when Shylock went to Bassanio's house he hands over the keys to his daughter.

Jessica betrays his trust and robs the entire wealth. She runs away with the Christian boy and marry him converting to Christianity. This is heart breaking for the proud Shylock. She later exchange the ring of her mother for money.

She express her love to Lorenzo boldly. She is often compare with music, culture and nature. Jessica is the product of harsh and unloved environment for which she always blames her father.

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT:

1. **Antonio:** In sooth I know not why I m so sad.
It wearies me, You say it wearies you.
But how I caught it, found it or came by it,
What stuff'tis made of, Where of it is born, I m to learn.

CONTEXT: These are the opening lines of the play The Merchant Of Venice, Spoken by Antonio. The merchant speaks to his friends Salarino and Salanio. Antonio makes a confession of the mysterious melancholy which oppresses him. He is shown as a sad man at the beginning of the drama even before anything happens to him. His sadness strikes the key-note of his character.

Explanation : Antonio says that he does not know why he is so sad. Frankly speaking, this sadness has taken hold of him. You complain that you nd this sadness very depressing for you. He can assure you that it has a similar effect on his spirits. He is totally ignorant how and where he came to have this melancholy, what has given rise to it and what its nature is.

2. **Salerio:** “ Your mind is tossing on the ocean,
There where you argosies with portly sail,
Like signors and rich burglars on the flood.”

Context : These lines are spoken by Salarino in The Merchant of Venice when Antonio is seen in a melancholy mood in the opening scene.

Explanation : Salarino tries to suggest a possible reason for Antonio's melancholy. He says that Antonio's mind is worried by thoughts of his richly laden merchant ships which are voyaging on the ocean. These ships of Antonio rise above smaller vessels just as rich men rise above ordinary citizens. Smaller ships bow to and salute Antonio's ships just as humble persons bend respectfully before rich men. Salanio here describes Antonio 's ships in highly, complimentary words.

3. **Portia :** The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath.

CONTEXT: These lines are spoken by Portia, the heroine of the play of the novel. She speaks these lines in the court of Venice, where Antonio is on trial after forfeiting his bond.

EXPLANATION: Shylock, who as per the bond, is authorised to extract one pound of Antonio's flesh, is hell-bent on forcing it as authorised by the bond. All appeals for mercy , including one made by Portia says that mercy is not something which can be forced, for it must come naturally. It is a quality which drops as gentle rain from heaven. It is doubly blessed in its efficacy. It blessed him that showers mercy, and also the person who receives it. It makes both happy as well as better human beings.

4. **Portia:** “ In terms of choice I'm not solely led
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.
Besides, the lottery of my destiny
Bars me the right of voluntary choosing.”

EXPLANATION: These words are spoken by Portia to king of Morocco.

Being good looking is not the only way to my heart, you know. I have another criteria for choosing a husband. Not that it matters, because the box test takes away my free choice anyway. But if my father had not restricted me like this, forcing me to marry whoever wins his test then you'd have had as good a chance to marry me as any of the suitors I've met so far, Prince.

5. " Tell me where is fancy bred or in the heart or in the head ? How begot , How nourished?

Reply , Reply

These lines are taken from a song plays while Bassanio mulls over the caskets.

EXPLANATION: Tell me where do our desires start, In the heart or in the head ?

How are they created , How sustained ?

Answer me , answer me.

6. **PORTIA:** How all other passions fleet to the air,
As doubtful thoughts and rash embraced despair,
And shuddering fear and green eyed jealousy,
O love, be moderate; allay the ecstasy;
In measure rain they joy, scant this excess!
I feel too much by blessing, make it less
For fear I surfeit

EXPLANATION : Portia to herself

All my other emotions are vanishing into thin air , as all my doubts and desperation and fears and jealousy are all flying away. Oh, I need to calm down make my love and my joy less intense. I'm feeling this too strongly. Please make my love less or I'm going to overindulge making myself sick.