

‘The Merchant of Venice’ characters in ETNY Theater Company’s Introduction to Shakespeare.

Antonio: A Venetian merchant of considerable wealth, he makes his money from "ventures", or mercantile enterprises using his fleet of ships. Much liked by his friend Salarino, Antonio is owed money by his friend Bassanio. The title of this play is considered to be derived from this character as well as the character of Shylock.

Bassanio: The romantic lead of this play. He aims to successfully court the fair Portia. Her marriage will give him the money he needs to pay off his large debts to friend Antonio and so his courtship of Portia is also an attempt to pay off his debts.

Shylock: A successful Jewish moneylender who is much maligned over his religion and the practice of moneylenders such as himself of charging interest. He lends the 3000 ducats Bassanio needs to court Portia and hopefully, pay off his debts to Antonio. There is however a catch; if the debt is not repaid, Antonio as security will forfeit one pound of his flesh. It is Shylock who is responsible for the immortal lines, "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

Tubal: Friend of Shylock. Dispatched by Shylock to find his daughter, he tells Shylock of the loss of Antonio's ships. This lets Shylock realize that Antonio has now forfeited his debt.

Portia: The heroine of this play, Portia is a wealthy and beautiful woman who is desired by many, so much so that her father has devised an ingenious test all suitors must perform to win her hand in marriage. This consists of a suitor choosing one of three chests in which her portrait lies. Far from being merely beautiful, Portia also possesses a sharp mind, one, which saves Antonio from doom at the hands of Shylock.

Nerissa: As Portia's waiting-maid, she tends to Portia and also helps Portia save Antonio's life.

Lorenzo: A close friend of both Bassanio and Antonio, his eloping with Shylock's daughter Jessica, results in part on Shylock's merciless insistence on his pound of flesh when Antonio forfeits Bassanio's debt.

Jessica: The daughter of Shylock, her eloping with the "Christian" Lorenzo and her stealing of his property, angers Shylock greatly.

Salarino: Friend of Antonio who brings news of Antonio's ships.

The Duke of Venice: As judge over the court case between Shylock and Antonio, he has the power to pardon a death sentence. In the play, he is put in a difficult position by Shylock; he doesn't want Antonio to die, but to ignore Shylock's legal rights would be to place all of Venice in disrepute as a place to conduct business.

Lancelet : A clown and servant to Shylock, he later aids in the escape of Jessica from Shylock and works for Bassanio.