

The Merchant of Venice **Characters**

Shylock's Household

Shylock

(SHY-lock)

Jessica's father, devoutly Jewish, and a professional money-lender (a "usurer" - Christians are not allowed to charge interest, and therefore look down on it). Shylock is treated extraordinarily badly for his faith on a day-to-day basis, which has made him bitter, particularly toward Christians. He's meticulous and thoughtful in his job and his personal life, but when Jessica runs away, his world starts to fall apart. He agrees to a loan with Antonio, venting his frustration by claiming a pound of Antonio's flesh as collateral, but both men are put in danger when Antonio cannot pay him back.

Jessica

(JESS-ih-kuh)

Shylock's daughter. Jessica is interested in marrying Lorenzo and converting to Christianity - without telling her devout, highly-protective father - so she runs away with Lorenzo. Despite Shylock's best efforts at sheltering her, she's been the target of her fair share of virulent anti-semitism, and as a result she's quiet around Lorenzo's boisterous Christian friends. She's a complicated, capricious character - she knows what she's getting into by eloping with Lorenzo, but she seems to grow to regret her decision.

Launcelot

(LAWNCE-uh-lot)

Servant to Shylock, but deeply anti-semitic, Launcelot is snarky and often teases Jessica. He's all jokes all the time. He's a lazy servant, too - Shylock says he eats more than he works. He leaves Shylock to work for Bassanio.

Portia's Crew from Belmont

Portia

(PORE-shuh)

Portia is bound by her late father's will to marry whoever can solve his puzzle - but she's smart enough to twist even that fate to her advantage. Portia is self-confident and calculating - she never enters a conversation unprepared - but she's utterly ruthless in getting what she wants, no matter the cost to others. Marries Bassanio, her preferred suitor, after he solves the puzzle.

Nerissa

(nerr-IH-suh)

Portia's maid, Nerissa is regularly swept up in Portia's schemes. She ends up suddenly married to Gratiano when Portia marries Bassanio - does she love him, or is she worried about her job security if Portia marries and leaves her behind?

The Boys from Venice

Bassanio

(ba-SAN-ee-oh)

Portia's favorite suitor and Antonio's favorite guy on earth, Bassanio is hapless and bad with money. He is usually a mental leap or two behind his friends, and neither cruel enough to intentionally hurt others nor kind enough to stop his friends from their hateful behavior toward Shylock. Marries Portia after passing her late father's test.

Antonio

(an-TOE-nee-oh)

Antonio is the titular Merchant of Venice. He puts his fortunes on the line for Bassanio, whom he loves dearly. He is extravagant in his efforts to help, and signs a deal with Shylock to lend Bassanio money to woo Portia. Antonio is moody and often seems deeply depressed about his brushes with bad luck - he starts the play feeling sorry for himself (though he is cagey about the reason why), and things do not improve from there.

Lorenzo

(lor-EN-zo)

Lorenzo hopes for Jessica's hand in marriage, although he's often disparaging about her Jewish background and her father. He helps her run away from Shylock's house (with a bunch of Shylock's money in tow).

Gratiano

(grah-tee-AH-noh)

A friend of Bassanio and company, Gratiano prides himself on his quick wit, although it's always at someone else's expense. He's loud and more than a little mean-spirited. Marries Nerissa.

Venetians**Salanio**

(sah-LAWN-ee-oh)

Not the same as Salarino! Salanio is a friend of Bassanio's crew. He's more analytical and factual, less emotional than Salarino.

Salarino

(sah-la-REE-no)

Not the same as Salanio! Salarino is jokey and likes emotional metaphors. He also hangs around Bassanio's crew.

Tubal

(TOO-bull)

A friend of Shylock and a fellow money-lender. Tubal is also Jewish, and offers council to Shylock when he learns Jessica has run away.

Gobbo

(GO-bo)

Launcelot's father. Gobbo is elderly and nearly blind, and confused by Launcelot's antics.

Duke of Venice

Serves as a judge when Antonio defaults on Shylock's loan. Not an impartial judge - Venice is a pretty anti-semitic town (as you can probably tell), but he knows he's required to follow the law.

Suitors to Portia**Prince of Arragon**

(AHR-a-gone)

Thinks he's very clever and deserving of Portia's hand (this comes back to bite him).

Prince of Morocco

(moh-RAW-koh)

Fancy man who thinks he's flattering Portia by being extravagant (this comes back to bite him).