

## ***The Merchant of Venice***

### **Characters (in order of appearance)**

**Antonio:** The title character, Antonio is a wealthy but sad older merchant who claims never to have borrowed money but is willing to lend to friends, especially Bassanio, without benefit of interest.

**Salerio and Solanio:** Friends of Antonio and Bassanio, minor characters almost indistinguishable from each other who comment on the action and who inform the audience about the action that has occurred offstage.

**Bassanio:** A young man with expensive tastes and rich friends who borrows money from Antonio in order to court the rich, intelligent, and beautiful Portia.

**Gratiano:** Bassanio's friend with a bawdy and clownish demeanor. Accompanies Bassanio to Belmont to court Portia and falls in love with Portia's servant Nerissa.

**Lorenzo:** Bassanio's friend who falls in love with Shylock's daughter Jessica.

**Portia:** Widely pursued noblewoman who is as intelligent as she is rich and beautiful. Her father's will demands that her husband be selected through a test involving three caskets: one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. Portia's mind allows her to find loopholes in legal matters, thus rescuing her new husband's friend from his bond.

**Nerissa:** Portia's handmaid who falls in love with Gratiano, Bassanio's friend.

**Shylock:** The Jewish merchant of Venice who lends Antonio the money on his friend Bassanio's behalf. Clever and quick, Shylock is all at once a dark humorist, a moral absolutist, a religious bigot, an ogre, and, surprisingly, a sentimentalist. He serves as both the villain and the most tragic figure of the play.

**Prince of Morocco:** Portia's suitor and the only Black character in all of Shakespeare outside of Othello. Like Othello, he embodies many of the stereotypical Elizabethan perceptions of Moors: violent and sexual. He wrongly chooses the silver casket.

**Launcelot Gobbo:** Shylock's comic servant who leaves Shylock's service to serve Bassanio.

**Old Gobbo:** Launcelot's blind father who has not encountered his son in years.

**Jessica:** Shylock's daughter, who escapes from her father's house in order to marry Lorenzo. She converts to Christianity in order to further assimilate into the Christian society of Venice.

**Prince of Arragon:** One of Portia's suitors who greedily chooses the golden casket.

**Tubal:** Shylock's friend, the only other Jew in the play, who functions as a news bearer of Jessica's escape and of her consequent behavior.

**Balthazar and Stephano:** Servants to Portia.

**The Duke of Venice:** The reigning official of Venice who presides over the court where Shylock intends to collect on his bond.