**A Critical Study of**

**Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta***

**&**

**William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice***

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**Table of Contents**

**Biography of Christopher Marlowe 5**

**The Jew of Malta Summary 10**

# The Jew of Malta Character List 14

# Act I 22

# Act II 30

# Act III 38

# Act IV 44

# Act V 51

# Themes 58

# The Merchant of Venice 63

# Character Lists 73

# Act I 81

# Act II 88

# Act III 101

# Act IV 110

# Act V 119

# Themes 123

# Shylock and Barabas 128

**Biography of Christopher Marlowe**

Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564, the year of William Shakespeare's birth. His father worked in Canterbury, England, as a cobbler, and Christopher was one of many children to be born into their middle-class household (Bakeless 3-30). After attending the King's School on a scholarship, he won another scholarship to attend Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Marlowe completed his BA degree in four years and then stayed on at Cambridge to work towards an MA. Students who did so were granted an extended scholarship—and were expected to take Holy Orders.

During the following three years, Marlowe began to absent himself from the college for weeks on end. Although such absences were not uncommon among BA students, Marlowe's spotty attendance seems to have earned the ire of the college administration. Rumors arose that Marlowe planned to defect to the Catholic seminary of Rheims, France. Amidst such rumors, it became a matter of the Queen's Council that Marlowe should receive his degree at graduation—the Privy Council conveyed to the college that Marlowe had been in government service all along. The evidence suggests that he had been serving England as a spy in Rheims.

When Marlowe left Cambridge in 1587, it was to write for the stage. Before the end of the year, both parts of his *Tamburlaine* were produced in London. The plays basked in a decidedly popular and vernacular spirit. Renaissance scholar David Riggs notes that the chaotic stage of *Tamburlaine*, featuring a blasphemer and murderer protagonist, "challenged the limits of public behavior" (220). In any case, Marlowe's debut earned him an excellent standing among contemporary playwrights. His plays, of a quality astonishing for a man in his twenties, constantly produced crowd-pleasing spectacles. In the following six years before his early death, Marlowe continued to achieve success through such works as *Doctor Faustus*, [*The Jew of Malta*](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta), and *The Massacre at Paris*.

The last part of Marlowe's life was violent and contains some suspicious coincidences. According to scholar Lisa Hopkins, while living near London in 1592, a year before his death, Marlowe appeared so threatening and was thought so dangerous by two constables of the town of Shoreditch (the suburb in which Marlowe lived and where the theatres for which he wrote were located) that they formally appealed for protection from him. As many researchers of Marlowe's life have noted, it is puzzling to consider what a person must do in order to make the police afraid of him. In September of that same year Marlowe was involved in a fight in his native Canterbury, attacking William Corkine with a sword and dagger. This year, too, was the one in which Marlowe's good friend Thomas Watson died. There is the possibility that during this time Marlowe had a relationship with Thomas Walsingham, nephew of the Sir Thomas Walsingham, who was the head of the spies in Queen Elizabeth's service. However, the relationship is by no means proved. It is a matter of record, however, that Marlowe was staying at Walsingham's country house in Scadbury at the time he was killed.

The circumstances of Marlowe's death provide much for speculation. On May 30, 1593, when Marlowe was only twenty-nine, he was feasting in a rented private room in a Deptford house (the home of Dame Eleanor Bull, not a tavern as is often recounted) with a group of four men. He reportedly quarreled with Ingram Friser (the personal servant of Sir Thomas Walsingham), who killed Marlowe on the spot by stabbing him above the right eye. Friser claimed self-defense and was pardoned shortly thereafter, despite the mysterious circumstances. David Riggs points out that the Queen herself had ordered Marlowe's death four days before (334). Was the Friser incident merely a coincidence? And how had Marlowe earned the anger of the Queen?

Two days after Marlowe's death, a man named Richard Baines sent a document to the police accusing Marlowe of blasphemy and homosexuality. Among other things, the document recounts Marlowe's barely concealed atheism, his public denouncement of faith, and his sacrilegious speech against Jesus himself. The document also notes that Marlowe was not content merely to keep these opinions to himself: at every opportunity, he supposedly tried to win men over to his views. His allegedly heretical views were in fact already known to the government. When the famous playwright Thomas Kyd—Marlowe's former roommate—was arrested in possession of blasphemous papers, Kyd confessed that he had received the documents from Marlowe. Seen in this light, the Queen's order and Marlowe's consequent death seem to be of a piece. Harold Bloom is convinced that Marlowe was "eliminated with maximum prejudice by Walsingham's Elizabethan Secret Service" (10).

If these events are linked, the details remain obscure. Allegations abound. Men reported that Marlowe was cruel, violent, homosexual, and foul-mouthed, cursing all the way to his last breath. Although these reports cannot be discounted easily, little conclusive evidence supports any of these allegations. As J. B. Steane puts it, "as for Marlowe the man, atheist and rebel or not, we have to acknowledge that there is no single piece of evidence that is not hearsay—only that there is a good deal of it, that it is reasonably consistent, and that on the other side there is no single fact or piece of hear say known to us" (16). Who was Marlowe, really?

Further complicating our picture of Marlowe is the relationship between author and work. Marlowe's works have been interpreted as atheistic and blasphemous; they also have been understood as traditional and Christian. The two sides stand apart in their proximity to any picture of Marlowe's personal life. To be sure, an author does not necessarily write through autobiography or self-expression, or to communicate an ideological position. Yet, it is significant that the young poet, dead before his thirties, was a man who studied to take Holy Orders, who likely served his country in espionage missions, and who died violently under the taint of scandal. Such a colorful and ambiguous character cannot help but loom behind Marlowe's work. Where biography has relevance for literary interpretation, readers can profit from meeting the challenge of seeing Marlowe's plays from the perspective of his life; at the same time, one should remember that his works were intended for English audiences who did not know as much about his life as we do now.

**The Jew of Malta Summary**

The play is set on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. In the opening act, the Turkish sultan's son Selim [Calymath](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#calymath) arrives to exact Malta's tribute. The tribute has been neglected for the past ten years, so it has accumulated to a considerable sum. The Maltese governor [Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze) cannot produce the funds immediately, but he promises to pay within a month. After the Turks leave, Ferneze decides to collect the tribute from the Jews of Malta: each Jew must give up half of his estate.

The protagonist [Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas) protests strongly, so his entire estate is confiscated. Barabas plots to retrieve part of his fortune through his daughter [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall), and the two young men [Mathias](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#mathias) and [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick) each set out to win Abigall's heart.

Having uttered a false confession, Abigall gains entrance to the nunnery (formerly Barabas's mansion) and retrieves her father's hidden fortune. In the meantime, the Spanish vice-admiral [Martin del Bosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#martin-del-bosco) convinces Ferneze to break Malta's league with Turkey, promising to write the Spanish king for military aid from Spain against the Turks. Del Bosco also sells Ferneze the slaves he has in cargo, and Barabas ends up buying the Turkish slave [Ithamore](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ithamore) at the marketplace.

At the marketplace, Barabas also runs into Mathias and Lodowick severally. Each young man desires to see Abigall, and Barabas promises his favors to each. Barabas thus contrives a plot to have Mathias and Lodowick kill each other. Ithamore delivers counterfeit letters to Mathias and Lodowick, who finally confront and stab each other.

Learning of her father's scheming-and the death of her lover Mathias-Abigall decides to enter the nunnery once again. Now afraid that Abigall will betray the truth, Barabas poisons all the nuns with a porridge of rice. Abigall is the last to die. Before she dies, she manages to hand friar Barnardine a written confession of her father's crimes. The friars resolve to confront Barabas after they bury the nuns.

Meanwhile, the Turkish [Bashaws](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bashaws) have arrived. In response to Ferneze's refusal to pay, they declare war on Malta.

The friars Jacomo and Barnardine arrive at Barabas's house and insinuate that they know about the Jew's crimes. In response, Barabas proclaims that he would like to repent and become a Christian. Naturally, he will contribute the entirety of his fortune to whichever monastery he enters. The two friars, being from different monasteries, thus fight to win Barabas's allegiance, each hoping to benefit from Barabas's considerable fortune. Barabas once again has set a trap; he will be able to kill both of the friars without arousing suspicion.

As the Jew's accomplice, however, Ithamore knows plenty of incriminating information. Once he is seduced by the courtesan [Bellamira](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bellamira), Ithamore begins to blackmail Barabas with threats to confess if the Jew does not send him gold. In the last scene of the fourth act, Barabas arrives at Bellamira's house in the disguise of a French musician and poisons his blackmailers.

In the final act, Ferneze prepares to defend Malta against the Turks. Ithamore, Bellamira, and her attendant [Pilia-Borza](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#pilia-borza) enter and all play their parts in revealing Barabas's crimes, but the Jew's poison takes effect and they all fall dead.

Barabas meanwhile has been captured, but he feigns death through the ruse of a drug. He finds himself dumped outside the city walls. The Jew thus betrays Malta and leads the Turks into the city. He takes a new position as governor but finds it undesirable, so he decides to return Malta to Ferneze and contrives now to massacre the Turkish forces. The Turkish troops to succumb to the Jew's trap.

But Ferneze turns the tables on Barabas at the last moment, and Barabas dies. Ferneze takes Calymath as a prisoner in order to ensure Malta's future safety.

# The Jew of Malta Character List

## Machevil

The speaker who delivers the prologue. The narrator of the Prologue. Machevill is based on Machiavelli, but he is more of an ironic than a genuine characterization of this author. Marlowe uses Machevill to set the scene for a drama filled with irreligion, intrigue, and duplicity—traits that Elizabethans mistakenly identified as quintessentially Machiavellian. Thus, Marlowe shows his gift at dramatizing contemporary beliefs in a way that may be read as serious or satirical.

## Barabas

The protagonist of the play, father of Abigall. In the New Testament, Barabas is the murderer who is released from prison instead of Jesus. Barabas is a Jewish merchant who only cares for his daughter Abigail and his vast personal fortune. When Ferneze appropriates Barabas's estate to help the government pay Turkish tribute, Barabas is enraged and vows revenge. His clever plots lead to the deaths of many characters, including Abigail and the governor's son. The protagonist is marked as an outsider within Maltese society because of his religion and because of his Machiavellian cunning. However, in many ways Barabas is the least hypocritical character in the play. He is generally honest about what motivates his crimes, and he never attempts to justify his actions by religious doctrine. Nevertheless, as Barabas grows to delight in his own wickedness, we see how many of his murders are in fact motiveless acts driven by hate. Barabas stands out because of his differences. The fact that he is rich, Jewish, and secretive alienates him from Christian Maltese society. Initially, Barabas's only motivation is money. Gradually, however, he grows to loathe his Christian enemies and notions of vengeance begin to consume him. The protagonist goes on a killing spree and murders an entire convent of nuns, along with his daughter, his slave, two young men, two priests, a pimp, and a prostitute. It becomes apparent that Barabas kills because of desire and not because of need. Although the narrator suggests in the *Prologue* that Barabas is a Machiavellian—Machevill states that his "money was not got without my means"; in reality Barabas has little in common with the real political author. He does, however, personify all the traits that an Elizabethan audience would have understood as quintessentially Machiavellian. He is strategic, dishonest, power-hungry (at least in the sense that he desires to have power over his enemies) and irreligious. But as a dramatic amalgamation of all these different evils, Barabas is a slippery protagonist. A profound ambiguity lies at the heart of his character. His introduction as a comic glutton who "smiles to see how full his bags are crammed" has little in common with his later characterization as a vengeance-obsessed psychopath. Barabas is simultaneously a scheming manipulator who feels no pity for his hapless victims and a greedy old man who jealously guards his wealth.

Marlowe's ambiguous characterization is complicated by the fact that Barabas often earns our commiseration, if not our sympathy. In a society of religious hypocrites, the protagonist is refreshingly honest about his own motives. Although he is accused of being a traitor in Act V, scene ii, earlier scenes show that he was never accepted as a citizen of Malta from the start. He is avaricious, jealous, resentful, and controlling, but he also professes great love for his daughter Abigail. The protagonist is deeply embittered by her conversion and by Ithamore's treachery, which leaves him without an heir. Marlowe intends for our reaction to his character to be profoundly uncertain. At the play's end, Barabas declares his own fantastical notions of destroying the world and dies uttering, "I would have brought confusion on you all, / Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels." Marlowe's treatment of his character is thus deeply ironic, for we never know whether the playwright is taking stereotypes of Jews or Machiavellians seriously. Marlowe's readers must decide whether he is pandering to these stereotypes or undermining them through satire.

## Abigall

Barabas's daughter, she is in love with Mathias, Katherine's son. Abigail means "father's joy" in Hebrew. Barabas's daughter. Abigail is initially dutiful to her father and unwittingly helps him mislead Mathias and Lodowick. However, when she discovers her father's involvement in their deaths, Abigail decides to convert to Christianity to atone for her sins. Her conversion could be read as a moral climax within the play, for it suggests that the true path to salvation lies in Christian redemption. However, Abigail's rejection of her heritage in favor of joining a hypocritical Christian clergy is in many respects unconvincing. Marlowe probably intended this action to be deeply ironic, and as such it reinforces the play's essential ambiguity. Abigail is the only character who displays genuine love, loyalty, and selflessness in the play. Above all, she remains unmotivated by money and appears to have some kind of moral code (although she is willing to dissemble if it will serve her father's ends). Abigail's dedication to Barabas is proved by her vow to remain loyal to him, following her conversion to Christianity.

However, we should be wary of regarding her conversion as a moral climax within the play. Marlowe uses Abigail's conversion to make a heavily ironic point about the corruption of the Catholic clergy—why would anyone seek to join a religion with such flawed affiliates as Bernardine and Jacomo? It even remains doubtful whether Abigail is a true religious convert at all, for she seems to appropriate Christian prejudice rather than Christian virtues. Her comment, "there is no love on earth, / Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks," suggests that for all her moral worth, Barabas's daughter is as bigoted as the other Maltese. As James R. Siemon notes, Abigail undergoes a final "anagnoresis" or recognition of her own predicament that is a feature of tragic drama. She states "experience, purchased with grief, / Has made me see the difference of things." The "difference" that she refers to is a religious or racial difference. Thus, Marlowe suggests that Abigail converts to Christianity in a bid to reject her heritage, rather than through true religious belief.

However, Abigail is in many ways a romantic heroine whose relative goodness contrasts with the depravity of those around her—Jew and Christian alike. As with his other characters, Marlowe obscures Abigail's morals and motivations in order to complicate our responses to this character.

## Katherine

A lady, mother of Mathias.

## Mathias

Katherine's son and Lodowick's friend. He shares a mutual love with Abigall.

## Ferneze

The governor of Malta. Barabas's great enemy and the governor of Malta. Ferneze hides his real motives behind ideals of Christian morality. Ultimately, his role in undermining Barabas and bribing Calymath shows how he uses Machiavellian tactics to his own advantage. Barabas's great enemy. As the governor of Malta, Ferneze is presented as the merchant's moral opponent—he is Christian, law-abiding, and anti- Machiavellian. However, events in the play undermine this dichotomous characterization, suggesting that Ferneze is as morally bankrupt and Machiavellian as Barabas. In reality, the governor schemes and is dishonest about his motives. This is shown by his decision to tax the Maltese Jews in order to pay the tribute and later, when he breaks his alliance with the Turks. Essentially, Ferneze is a religious hypocrite who hides his lust for power behind ideals of Christian morality.

## Lodowick

Ferneze's son. As with Mathias, he desires to marry Abigall.

## Ithamore

A Turkish slave captured by the Spanish navy, bought by Barabas to help carry out his evil plots. Barabas's slave, whom the protagonist vows to make the heir to his estate after Abigail's conversion to Christianity. The men share a similar hatred for Christians and vow to cause them as much disruption as they can. Similarly, both are obsessed by money and the power that it affords. However, while Barabas is a criminal mastermind, Ithamore is more of a common thief and cutthroat. The slave fails his great test of loyalty when he falls for the prostitute Bellamira, bribes Barbabas, and confesses Barabas's crimes to the governor. Once again, Marlowe shows how another person close to the protagonist abandons Barabas. As with Abigail, the merchant responds to this betrayal by killing Ithamore, along with his cohorts Bellamira and Pilia-Borza. Ithamore is less a foil for Barabas than a villainous sidekick who tries to emulate his master's cunning. When the two meet, the slave states that he has no "profession." Barabas replies that he will teach him to be ruthless and indeed, many of the play's murders result from the scheming of these two characters. Despite his grisly past spent killing Christians, Ithamore is more naïve than his master. However, both share a delight in killing for its own sake. Ostensibly, the slave murders to win his master's favor and become his heir but, in reality, Ithamore's crimes are without motive. His dalliance with the prostitute Bellamira shows how susceptible Ithamore is to manipulation. He seems particularly credulous when it comes to Bellamira's scheme to bribe Barabas.

## Friar Jacomo

The friar who performs Abigall's second conversion to Christianity.

## Friar Barnardine

Friar Jacomo's friend at a different monastery.

## Abbess

The abbess of the nunnery, who performs Abigall's first conversion to Christianity.

## Calymath

The Turkish leader, son of the Sultan.

## Callapine

One of the Turkish Bashaws.

## Bashaws

Bashaw, variant of Pasha, was a title held by important Turkish officers.

## Martin del Bosco

Vice-admiral to the Catholic King of Spain, and thus an enemy of the Turkish forces.

## Bellamira

A courtesan who seduces Ithamore for his master's wealth. Bella mira means "beautiful sight" in Italian.

## Pilia-Borza

An attendant to Bellamira. Pigliaborza means "pick-pocket" in Italian.

## Knights of Malta, Officers, Two Nuns, Slaves, Turkish Duke, A Messenger, Carpenters, Servants, and an Attendant

Incidental characters. Janissaries were military men whose numbers were increasing rapidly in the late 16th century.

**The Jew of Malta Summary and Analysis of Prologue and Act 1**

**Prologue**

The play opens with a speech delivered by the soul of [Machevil](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#machevil). Although the world believes he is dead, Machevil declares that his soul flew to France and inhabited the body of the Duke of Guise. Since the Duke himself is now dead, the seemingly immortal Machevil has arrived from France "to view this land and frolic with his friends."

Although Machevil says that he has not come to "read a lecture," he puts forth several claims. He states that those who find his name odious actually admire him the most; that those who renounce his books actually read them avidly; that religion is but a "childish toy"; and that "there is no sin but ignorance." He then speaks along vague political lines, and he concludes by stating that his purpose of the day is to present "the tragedy of a Jew." Machevil claims that he has helped the Jew ([Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas)) acquire his fortune, so the Jew "favours" him.

**Act 1, Scene 1**

The curtains rise to reveal Barabas counting his riches. As a Maltese merchant, the Jew has made such a fortune that he has become weary of counting all his coins-if only everyone could pay in wedges of gold, or precious stones by the weight! Just as we begin to see the extent of his wealth, a merchant enters to announce the arrival of ships carrying Barabas's merchandise. The merchant states that the bill of customs itself surpasses the wealth of many local merchants. A second merchant enters with news of Barabas's argosy from Alexandria, consisting of rich oriental treasures.

Barabas then delivers a short monologue on his wealth. To what ends does he amass such a great fortune, together with the rich Jews abroad who form a "scattered nation"? Although wealth is honored universally, Barabas is hated for being a rich Jew. But he declares that he would prefer to be hated as such, rather than be "pitied in a Christian poverty." He associates Christianity with both material and spiritual poverty: their faith, he believes, bears only "malice, falsehood, and excessive pride." Though Kings may be Christian, Barabas renounces any desire for political power, declaring that he gathers wealth for the sake of happiness for himself and his only daughter.

Three Jews of Malta enter the scene. They report that a Turkish navy has arrived, ready for combat. Especially given that Malta and the Turks are in league under a peace treaty, the three Jews are concerned about the warlike appearance of the ships. Why have all the Jews of Malta been summoned to the senate house? While assuring his three friends that he will look into the matter, Barabas reveals his selfish and duplicitous nature through an aside: "Nay let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all, / So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth." He already suspects that the Turks have come to exact Malta's tribute (to the Ottoman Empire), and he begins to ponder how he can avoid difficulties if the Turks come his way.

**Act 1, Scene 2**

Selim [Calymath](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#calymath) enters, followed by [Callapine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#callapine) and other [Bashaws](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bashaws). Calymath demands payment from [Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze), the governor of Malta, for ten years' worth of Malta's unpaid tribute to the Ottoman Empire. Should Ferneze refuse, he most likely would have to fight off a Turkish invasion. Unable to pay the due tribute on the spot, Ferneze asks for some extra time to make a collection among the citizens. Callapine reacts belligerently, but Calymath accepts the governor's request and promises to send a messenger in a month.

The Turks leave, and the Jews of Malta arrive to see Ferneze. The governor explains the situation and says that, due to recent expenditures for wars, Malta cannot possibly pay the required tribute. He therefore asks for a contribution from each of the Jews. The Jews protest alternately that they are poor and that, as "strangers," they do not usually pay taxes for the tribute. At this point, Ferneze gives up any pretense of a request and decrees that the entirety of the tribute shall be taken among the Jews. The Jews must agree to give up half of their estates-otherwise they will be made Christian and will lose all that they have. For his resistance to the decree, Barabas has his entire estate confiscated.

Barabas protests vehemently against what he sees as the injustice of the governor. In response, Ferneze and his knights declare that Jews are "infidels" and that their "hateful lives" have caused many Christians to suffer. Indeed, if the Jews now suffer in turn, the First Knight states that it is due to their wickedness and "inherent sin." At this, Barabas again voices his outrage: "What? Bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?" Shall he be persecuted for his ancestors' transgressions, though he himself has lived righteously? Barabas then states that he would rather be killed than live without his fortune. Ferneze curtly dismisses Barabas's lament-the knights meanwhile have decided to convert Barabas's mansion into a nunnery-and all of the officials exit the scene.

The three Jews attempt to comfort Barabas, invoking the biblical sufferings of Job. But finding him unconsoled, they decide to leave the scene quietly, whereupon Barabas's daughter [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall) enters. Abigall expresses her concern over the turn of events, but Barabas reveals his foresight and cunning: he has a small fortune hidden under a plank in his house, ironically marked with a symbol of the cross. Since his house has been turned into a nunnery, Abigall must "dissemble" a conversion to the Christian faith and make a false confession to the [Abbess](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abbess). She thus will be able to access the treasure and secretly pass it to Barabas in the early hours of the morning.

**Act 1, Scene 3**

[Mathias](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#mathias) enters, ruminating over the strange turn of events surrounding Abigall. "A fair young maid, scarcely fourteen," why has the rich Jew's daughter suddenly become a nun? As Mathias ponders the question, his friend [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick) suggests that they go visit Abigall. Mathias exits with the intention to do so, unaware that Lodowick also intends to go and see the girl.

**Analysis**

The speaker of the prologue, Machevil, is presumably an anglicized reference to Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), the Italian Renaissance man best known for his political discourse in [The Prince](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-prince). The adjective Machiavellian, of course, derives from the same historical figure. Precisely, the soul of Machevil recounts how he inhabited the Duke of Guise (1550-1588), the patron saint of Rheims who infamously oversaw a massacre of French Protestants in 1572. Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* stages the events of this Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, and the play portrays the Duke of Guise as an archetypal Machiavellian villain.

The prologue suggests, to a certain extent, that the soul of Machevil will now inhabit Barabas: Machevil will "grace him as he deserves." Yet of all the characters in the play, Barabas cannot be called the most Machiavellian. In line with the general sense of the adjective, the Jew is certainly cunning, duplicitous, and unscrupulous, Machiavellian in a nonpolitical sense. But he is not Machiavellian in a strict political sense, insofar as he stands in no position (as of yet) to place political advantage over morality, or to use deceitful tactics to uphold authority. Whereas Barabas will act out of selfishness, love of money, and the desire for revenge, it is the governor Ferneze who will reveal himself to be the most Machiavellian schemer.

The governor's scheming is already clear in Act 1, Scene2. Whereas he puts on a show of politely requesting the aid of the Jews of Malta, the swiftness with which the officers seize Barabas's goods suggests that the action unfolds in a manner already planned out by Ferneze. The religious logic that the Christians use, besides, is falsely self-righteous and entirely hypocritical. Ferneze declares:

No, Jew, we take particularly thine [fortune]  
To save the ruin of a multitude:  
And better one want for a common good,  
Than many perish for a private man. (I.ii.96-100)

This echoes the priest Caiaphas's judgment of Christ (John 11:50). While model Christian readers should understand the biblical passage in an allegorical sense, it seems, Ferneze and his Knights take the passage literally in order to justify their extortion.

Barabas's outcry thus becomes particularly pointed. "What? Bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?" Not only are the authorities using religious history to justify their actions-which is in itself questionable-but they are abusing history. As members of the majority religion, these Christians selectively and unjustly interpret history so as to support their present choices, and as those in power, they can get away with it. Few moments have passed before Barabas's mansion is converted into a nunnery. The Christians thus take full advantage of Barabas and subjugate the other Jews in the name of religion, using their religion more as a pretext than as a spiritual or moral guide.

The three Jews invoke the sufferings of Job to console Barabas, but the play has already signaled the difficulty of using scripture to justify one's place in the world. Besides, the world of [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta) turns above all around wealth. It is not by chance that the curtains opens to reveal Barabas counting gold; Barabas disparages Job by ridiculing the smallness of his fortune, and he sets out to retrieve his remaining fortune through scheming. In a counterpoint to the Christians, Barabas offers his own moral justification for Abigall's false conversion: "A counterfeit profession is better/ Than unseen hypocrisy." It will be interesting to return to this scene in light of Abigall's second and true conversion to Christianity.

M. M. Mahood offers an insightful comment on the proceedings of the play thus far: "The world of The Jew of Malta is one into which ethical considerations do not enter"; that is, "intelligence alone counts. Characters are not good or bad; they have fewer or more wits about them" (46). Instead of morality, the characters are obsessed with their own advantage-financial, and in some cases, sexual. Act 1, Scene3 introduces two young men who are potential suitors to Abigall. They surely are interested in her beauty, but Lodowick's later allusion to her as a diamond shows that her wealth never lags far behind her looks. When the curtain to the first act falls, we are prepared for many battles of wits. Will the cunning Jew be able to outsmart his oppressors? Will his daughter outsmart the nuns? Will one suitor outsmart the other and win Abigall by persuading her of his superior wit?

# The Jew of Malta Summary and Analysis of Act 2

**Act 2, Scene 1**

Night has fallen. [Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas) enters with a light in hand, lamenting the events that have befallen him. Just as he prays to God to safely direct his daughter, on the model of God directing Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness, [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall) enters above with bags of gold and jewels. Faintly able to perceive her, Barabas thinks he sees a ghost. He soon realizes that the figure is Abigall, who begins to throw down bags of treasure to him. Barabas declares that he is now entirely happy, equating happiness with having his daughter, his gold, and beauty all together. Abigall warns him that the nuns will begin to wake up as midnight approaches, and she retires back into the house.

**Act 2, Scene 2**

[Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze) enters with [Martin del Bosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#martin-del-bosco), the vice-admiral of Spain who has just arrived on his ship, the *Flying Dragon*. Del Bosco carries a freight of Greek, Turkish, and Moorish slaves, which he would like to sell in Malta. Ferneze welcomes the vice-admiral but says that he does not dare buy the slaves due to the tributary league with the Turks. Upon hearing this-and with the encouragement of the Maltese First Knight-del Bosco urges Ferneze to break Malta's league with the Turks. He declares that the Spanish King has title to the island, and he promises to send for aid in fighting off the Turks. He tells Ferneze to keep the tributary money rather than give it to the Turks. With new hope, Ferneze decides to buy the slaves whom del Bosco is holding in cargo. The scene closes with Ferneze trumpeting his resolution to fight the "barbarous misbelieving" Turks, exclaiming that "Honour is bought with blood and not with gold."

**Act 2, Scene 3**

Two officers arrive at the marketplace with the newly-purchased slaves. Noticing Barabas, the First Officer mutters that the Jew would have bought all the slaves had his fortunes not been seized. As it turns out, Barabas has recovered a substantial proportion of his fortune with the help of Abigall, and he has just purchased a new mansion. In an aside, Barabas swears to take out his revenge against Ferneze as well as his son [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick). The Jew boasts of his ability to dissemble-to put on a show of gentleness and innocence while injuring others.

Lodowick enters and seeks Barabas in hopes of acquiring permission to visit Abigall. Barabas responds to Lodowick's request to "help [him] to a diamond," insinuating through a series of innuendoes that Abigall is well and available to the young man. Barabas also tells Lodowick that he now sees the light of Christianity. He praises Ferneze for converting his former mansion into a nunnery, albeit with the pointed suggestion that the nuns and friars engage in illicit sexual activities. All this time, he has been revealing his true intentions through a series of asides within hearing of the audience, saying that he hopes to kill Lodowick and set the nunnery on fire.

Accompanied by Lodowick, Barabas examines two slaves before finally settling on [Ithamore](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ithamore) (who is cheaper because he is skinnier). [Mathias](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#mathias) and [Katherine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#katherine) enter the marketplace. Barabas and Mathias engage in secret conversation such that Katherine, Mathias's mother, cannot hear. The Jew invites Mathias to come and see Abigall at his house, whereupon Mathias inquires about Barabas's conversation with Lodowick. Barabas responds that they were speaking of diamonds. He and Mathias part with unrelated talk in order to fool the anti-Judaic Katherine. All but Ithamore and Barabas exit the scene.

The Jew teaches his new slave to be cold and cunning, embarking on an extended speech to brag about his own evil and anti-Christian deeds. To this story, Ithamore in turn enthusiastically responds with the cruel deeds that he has himself committed against Christians. Barabas promises to pay Ithamore handsomely, so long as he remains faithful. The two meanwhile have arrived at Barabas's house, where Lodowick is arriving to see Abigall.

Barabas orders his daughter to entertain Lodowick to the best of her abilities, as if she were truly in love with him. The young pair enter the house, while Barabas remains outside to greet Mathias. The Jew then puts on a show of sadness, saying that although he intended his daughter for Mathias, Lodowick has been imposing himself on his daughter. Mathias draws his sword at once, ready to fight with Lodowick, but Barabas manages to calm him with the promise that he will firmly reject Lodowick.

Lodowick sees Mathias exit and inquires after him. Barabas laments that Mathias has sworn Lodowick's death, for he is in love with Abigall as well. Barabas again forces his daughter to declare her love for Lodowick, claiming that "It is no sin to deceive a Christian." Abigall leaves the scene thoroughly upset, but Barabas assures Lodowick that her tears are just what one would expect of Jewish maidens who are about to be married. Happy to be promised Abigall's hand in marriage, Lodowick departs without hampering Mathias when Mathias returns once again.

Barabas tells Mathias that if not for his intervention, Lodowick would surely have stabbed Mathias then and there. The Jew then tells Mathias that Abigall now belongs to him and that Lodowick has gone to visit Mathias's mother--being anti-Judaic, Katherine will "die with grief" upon hearing about her son's relationship with Abigall. Mathias thus exits in pursuit of Lodowick. Abigall's father expresses disappointment that she wants to marry a Christian, and she laments her father's malicious scheming, especially since she wishes no harm to come to Mathias.

Ithamore takes Abigall into the house, after which Barabas orders him to give Mathias a feigned challenge from Lodowick. The act closes with Barabas vowing that he will set the two young men against each other.

**Analysis**

Given a choice between his fortune and his daughter, which would Barabas choose? In the opening scene of the act, he associates four types of fortunes in a parallel structure: "O girl, O gold, O beauty, O my bliss!" Just as Abigall lovingly carries out her father's wishes, so too does Barabas seem to genuinely love his daughter: "Abigall, Abigall, that I had thee here too!" Whether this appearance captures the reality of his preferences is a question that will be answered in the following act.

In the meantime, Ferneze continues to reveal his hypocritical ways. Martin del Bosco's offer to assist Malta in its coming war against the Turks strikes the governor as highly desirable. After all, he will be able to keep the tribute money taken from the Jews-an easy financial gain that will appear to the public as righteous. To be sure, Ferneze may feel genuinely relieved to be associated with Christian Spain rather than the Ottoman Empire. Still, his talk of how "honour is bought with blood and not with gold" is nonsense, from his point of view. He knows that his honour as a Christian has been bought with gold, so his courageous defiance of the Turks only comes after the assurance that Spain will come to Malta's aid. Besides, it is the blood of the Spanish, more than that of the Maltese, that will spill. In exchanging one protector for another, though, Malta is likely to face new challenges and costs.

In a manner similar to his father's, Lodowick shows his deep taste for wealth. It is not without reason that he refers to Abigall as a diamond. As Barabas's daughter, after all, it is clear that Abigall will inherit a considerable fortune. Lodowick hastens to assure the Jew: "'Tis not thy wealth, but her that I esteem, / Yet crave I thy consent." Now if Abigall were ugly, Lodowick would have good reason to make such a comment. But given that the young men describe her as exceedingly pretty, Lodowick's comment seems to reveal his preoccupation with the fortune he will inherit as a son-in-law. (Note that he is trusting in her father's continued success in maintaining his fortune even under difficult circumstances on the island.) Love and the desire for wealth, then, once again are the motives that lead to action, not Lodowick's religious or ethical motives.

The lady Katherine clearly displays her anti-Judaic sentiments, but her son Mathias hardly considers religion or family as providing motives that will trump his love for Abigall, in all her beauty. Similarly, Lodowick affects none of his father's animosity towards Barabas, reflecting mainly his father's love of women and gold irrespective of religion or family vendettas Meanwhile, Barabas keeps a vendetta alive, though it remains unclear where his priorities lie among gold, family love, and revenge.

Revenge has become a powerful force in the play. Barabas notes that he has regained much of his fortune through Abigall, and he has bought a new mansion; nonetheless, he is more driven than ever to take revenge on Ferneze. To do so, he is more than willing to sacrifice Lodowick-and probably Mathias along the way as well. [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta), then, fits well with the popular tradition of revenge tragedy in English theater, typified by such works as Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, Shakespeare's Hamlet, and the Revenger's Tragedy (sometimes attributed to Thomas Middleton).

In plotting his revenge, Barabas reveals his extreme shrewdness. Like Shakespeare's Iago in *Othello*, he knows precisely how to manipulate others to do his will. When he meets Ithamore, for example, Barabas presents himself in the image of the stereotypical medieval Jew:

As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights  
And kill sick people groaning under walls;  
Sometimes I go about and poison wells. (II.iii.177-79)

Encouraged by his new master's taste for evil, Ithamore responds with an equally exaggerated-if not entirely fabricated-story of his crimes against Christians. Barabas also revels in his malicious maneuvers. In the third scene, he repeatedly states his true intentions through asides. While this serves as a dramatic device-to clarify matters for the audience-the extent and the number of asides suggest Barabas's sheer pleasure in planning his revenge.

Finally, the third scene of Act 2 marks a development in Abigall's character. She has, thus far, followed all her father's wishes, staying true to her name's literal meaning, "father's joy." (In English, though, ending the name with "gall" suggests a negative experience: 'father's gall.') Now, as two suitors are set up to compete for her, possibly to the death, she begins to assert her own opinions and desires. Must she really help her father set up Mathias and Lodowick? A tension thus arises between romantic love and familial love; she seems more concerned with this conflict at this point than with the possibility of losing her inheritance if her father's fortune is confiscated again. Another way of looking at the conflict is to see it between Abigall's love and Barabas's hate (a form of his love for revenge)

# The Jew of Malta Summary and Analysis of Act 3

**Act 3, Scene 1**

The courtesan [Bellamira](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bellamira) enters, complaining about the lack of suitors ever since Malta closed itself to prepare for the arrival of the Turkish fleet. She remarks that only [Pilia-Borza](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#pilia-borza) still comes to visit her, whereupon he enters bringing a bag of silver. He has stolen it from [Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas)'s counting house--and hopes to steal more. [Ithamore](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ithamore) enters and in one breath remarks on Bellamira's extreme beauty and on the success of his mission to set [Mathias](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#mathias) and [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick) against each other.

**Act 3, Scene 2**

Mathias and Lodowick enter, each having been provoked accordingly by Barabas. The two draw swords and fight. Barabas enters above to goad them on, then leaves the scene when the two fall dead. [Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze) and [Katherine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#katherine) arrive to find their respective sons dead. Mourning over the corpses, the two first express their desire to commit suicide, but they then decide to find out who made their sons enemies. After vowing to carry out due revenge, they exit with the bodies.

**Act 3, Scene 3**

Ithamore revels in the villainy that he has just helped Barabas commit. [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall) enters, and Ithamore gleefully recounts to her how Barabas orchestrated the death of the two young men. Abigall then asks Ithamore to summon one of the friars from the nunnery. Before leaving, Ithamore facetiously asks her whether the nuns engage in "fine sport" with the friars from time to time. All alone now, Abigall bemoans her father's "hard-hearted" revenge. In his single-minded pursuit of vengeance against Ferneze, Barabas has killed not only Lodowick, but also the entirely innocent Mathias. For Abigall, the death of Mathias strikes her almost as her own death: perceiving that there is "no love on earth," she desires to leave behind the vicissitudes of the world and become a nun. [Friar Jacomo](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#friar-jacomo) arrives and shows surprise at her change of heart, but he admits her once again as a sister. As the two head to the nunnery, Abigall swears to Barabas in an apostrophe: "never shall these lips bewray thy life!"

**Act 3, Scene 4**

Barabas enters, reading a letter from Abigall that urges him to repent of his sins. Much disturbed by the turn of events, Barabas fears that his daughter knows about his hand in the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. Ithamore enters to confirm that Abigall sent for the friar herself and voluntarily entered the nunnery. Feeling outraged and betrayed, Barabas adopts Ithamore as his only heir and hatches a plot to poison the sisters-including his daughter.

Ithamore brings a pot of rice into which the Jew mixes a rare, poisonous powder. He then orders Ithamore to take the porridge to the nunnery, promising him great wealth in return for his service. Barabas utters spiteful words towards his daughter. After Ithamore leaves, he declares that he will "pay [Ithamore] with a vengeance" as well.

**Act 3, Scene 5**

Accompanied by [Martin del Bosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#martin-del-bosco), Ferneze once again welcomes the Turkish [Bashaws](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bashaws) to Malta. Since the time has come for Malta to pay its tribute, [Callapine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#callapine) has arrived as the messenger for [Calymath](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#calymath). But Ferneze strongly refuses to pay the tribute-and for that matter shall never let any Maltese property be taken by the Turks. Callapine thus leaves with the ominous promise that Calymath will return and destroy Malta for its wrongs. After the Turks leave, Ferneze encourages his men to prepare for war.

**Act 3, Scene 6**

Friars Jacomo and Barnardine enter in great distress--all the nuns are dying! Abigall enters to make a confession to [Friar Barnardine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#friar-barnardine). She admits that she is greatly tormented by her offence against Mathias and Lodowick, as planned by her father. She has written down the details. The friar is greatly vexed, but he assures Abigall that confessions may never be revealed. She passes away. Friar Barnardine expresses regret that she has died a virgin. Friar Jacomo returns to announce the death of all the nuns, and the two set off to bury them. Afterward, Barnardine says, he will confront the Jew about what Abigall has said.

**Analysis**

The plot of [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta) cannot be described sufficiently by using the simple terms of introduction, climax, denouement. The plot consists of several sub-plots woven together, one rising as another falls. Most of them converge here in the third act: Bellamira enters to hint at a story of bribery to come; the tension between Mathias and Lowodick is definitely resolved; Ferneze and Katherine embark on their own quest for revenge; the Turks promise to return with a full army; the nunnery is bereft of nuns; Abigall is no longer the heir of Barabas.

One focal point of the third act is the nunnery. It is where Abigall learns some good things about Christianity, despite the negative insinuations that the nuns and friars engage in illicit sexual relations. Barabas suggests it, and when asking Abigall about the nunnery, Ithamore speaks along the same lines. Note that the allegations can be given credence as acted onstage. When the nuns are dying, for example, Friar Jacomo rushes out to visit "fair Maria" in her lodgings-the actor could speak the line to suggest a lascivious relationship between the two. One also should remember the curious words of Friar Barnardine's upon Abigall's death: "Ay, and [she dies] a virgin, too, that grieves me most." If nuns are supposed to be chaste, why would Barnardine feel grief over Abigall's virginity, unless he thought she would have had opportunities for sex in the nunnery? A more charitable interpretation, however, is that after Abigall has revealed her thwarted love for Mathias, Barnardine feels grief that Abigall never was able to marry him.

Why does Abigall decide to convert to Christianity once again, this time gladly and voluntarily? She explains to Friar Jacomo:

But now experience, purchased with grief,  
Has made me see the difference of things.  
My sinful soul, alas, hath paced too long  
The fatal labyrinth of misbelief,  
Far from the Son that gives eternal life! (III.iii.64-68)

The traditional pun on "Son" and "sun" suggests that Abigall believes that she now sees the true light of the Lord's way. This turn of events may seem entirely unexpected, but Abigall claims that experiencing Christianity from within the nunnery has given her a new appreciation for the religion. Still, her first answer was that she converted out of sad experience and personal grief, rather than faith and rational reflection. The sincere confession by the Jew's daughter seems somewhat contrived, though it is not uncommon for conversions to be attributed to reflections on experience.

In fact, in a play full of malicious and hypocritical characters, Abigall may be the morally strongest. She earnestly follows what she perceives as the correct path of life, all the while staying faithful to her father. Until the end, she keeps her promise: "never shall these lips bewray [Barabas's] life." She keeps this promise: it is through writing that she informs Barnardine of her father's crimes--and she does so only under the strict secrecy of confession.

In contrast to Abigall, Barabas has remained entirely unsympathetic. He expresses some regret over her second conversion, as a Jewish father might, but he soon resolves to poison her along with the rest of the nuns, fearing that she has betrayed him--which, after all, to some degree, she has. The gift of poisoned porridge is a gift of death (compare Genesis, where Jacob bribes Esau with porridge in exchange for the latter's birthright). Barabas goes on a killing spree far in excess of what even the usual criminal might do in response to a bad situation. He even turns against Ithamore, who has offered to kill himself if that is what his master desires, without any clear reason for vengeance. It is as though, once he is betrayed by the political leaders of Malta, he sees betrayal everywhere.

**The Jew of Malta Summary and Analysis of Act 4**

**Act 4, Scene 1**

[Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas) and [Ithamore](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ithamore) gloat over their success in poisoning the nuns. The Jew expresses particular satisfaction over his daughter's death. [Friar Jacomo](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#friar-jacomo) and Barnardine enter and, after a series of interrupted exchanges, intimate that they know of Barabas's hand in the deaths of [Mathias](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#mathias) and [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick). Barabas realizes that his daughter has confessed. He immediately puts on a show for the two friars: dissembling great sufferance under the burden of his many sins, he expresses a desire to convert to Christianity himself. He ostentatiously adds that he still possesses a large fortune, pointing out that this fortune would be donated to the monastery into which he enters.

At this point, the two friars start bickering over which monastery Barabas should choose. Once Barabas tells friar Jacomo to visit him at one o'clock that night, the two friars break into a fight. Barabas pulls them apart and asks Barnardine to leave with Ithamore. In his usual duplicitous manner, he has promised his favors to the friars while plotting to murder both of them. One, after all, converted his daughter to Christianity, and the other knows enough to have him condemned to death.

Ithamore returns after leading Barnardine into the house, noting that the friar has fallen asleep with his clothes on. The master and slave tie a noose around the friar's neck and strangle him on the spot. They then prop up his body against his staff and wait for Jacomo. When the friar arrives at the promised hour, he finds Barnardine standing silently in his path. Friar Jacomo decides to force his way past his former friend and strikes him with his staff, whereupon Barabas and Ithamore jump out of hiding. The two accuse Jacomo of murder and lead him off to be tried by the law.

**Act 4, Scene 2**

[Pilia-Borza](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#pilia-borza) enters, telling [Bellamira](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bellamira) that he took her letter to Ithamore. Ithamore enters and delivers a monologue recounting Jacomo's calm behavior at the gallows. As he wonders aloud why Bellamira has summoned him, he arrives in front of her house. Bellamira welcomes him with sweet words and a kiss, and he decides that he should steal some money from Barabas to make himself presentable. He discusses the possibility with her and Pilia-Borza, then agrees to write a blackmail letter to Barabas for three hundred crowns. While Pilia-Borza delivers it, Bellamira pretends to think little of the gold and continues to play the seductress. Ithamore would be glad to marry her; he bursts into uncharacteristic high poetry. Pilia returns with the money, which inspires Ithamore immediately to write a second letter for five hundred crowns more, plus one hundred for Pilia.

**Act 4, Scene 3**

Barabas enters reading over Ithamore's first letter. As he expresses his outrage, Pilia-Borza enters carrying the second letter demanding five hundred crowns. Barabas invites Pilia-Borza to dinner in hopes of poisoning him, but the latter will hear nothing till he sees the money. The Jew finally gives in, wincing at the sight of so much gold leaving his pocket-but puts on a show for Pilia-Borza, lamenting his betrayal by Ithamore more than its financial consequences. Alone again, Barabas genuinely feels the hurt of the betrayal but focuses on the money and the possible consequences of being found out. He resolves to visit Ithamore in disguise, hoping to rid himself of the blackmailers.

**Act 4, Scene 4**

Bellamira and Ithamore drink wine while exchanging amorous words. Ithamore boasts of the evil deeds that he has committed with Barabas, upon which Bellamira and Pilia-Borza decide to betray him to the governor, after blackmailing him further. The Jew himself enters the scene, dressed as a French musician. Barabas presents the three blackmailers with poisoned flowers to smell, and Pilia-Borza pays him two crowns to play the lute. Ithamore asks him if he knows the Jew named Barabas, and Ithamore proceeds to rail against his master with false claims about his eating and dressing habits. Barabas then leaves the scene under the excuse that he feels ill--perhaps disgusted by the filthy lies that Ithamore has been telling about him.

As the scene ends, the three agree to send a third letter demanding one thousand crowns. Ithamore defends their blackmail with an anti-Judaic justification, speaking the last line of the act: "To undo a Jew is charity, and not sin."

**Analysis**

When the friars visit Barabas's house, their express purpose is to urge him to repent of his sins, but they have very little leverage over the Jew Barabas. Since his murder of Mathias and Lodowick was revealed to [Friar Barnardine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#friar-barnardine) in a confession, the friars may never speak of the matter in public, so even if they wanted to blackmail him, they could not do so without losing their own standing. Even addressing the matter to Barabas may transgress the sacred rules. Their presence does not really concern Barabas, who has already embarked on a killing spree to conceal his crimes. He may also be rather paranoid by now. Still, he has the cunning to solve the problem by finding an excuse to turns the friars against each other.

The friars could hardly be happier with his offer of his fortune. At the first mention of it, they seem to forget their spiritual values and instead try to draw him to one monastery or the other on material grounds: for example, one must go barefoot in one of the monasteries, as the other friar charges. Only moments ago, they were preaching to Barabas to repent, so their quick turn of motivation to money emphasizes their hypocrisy. As for Barabas, in his usual cunning manner he plays both ends against the middle, pondering the best way to murder them.

As with the case of Mathias and Lodowick, his plot is realized almost effortlessly. The first murder is of a sleeping Barnardine. Then, blinded by his desire for gold, Jacomo strikes the already-dead Barnardine and involuntarily completes the perfect murder. Again Ithamore has a central role in this plot.

Ironically, Barabas invokes the particulars of the law to have the friar tried:

The law shall touch you, we'll but lead you, we.  
'Las, I could weep at your calamity.  
Take in the staff too, for that must be shown;  
Law wills that each particular be known. (IV i 205-9)

The trope of a Jew enforcing the laws of the Christian commonwealth with the intention of causing a tragic consequence is repeated with Shylock in Shakespeare's The [*Merchant of Venice*](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice).

Forces of avarice and desire come in multiple degrees in [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta). Whereas almost all of the characters are obsessed with gold, Ithamore finds a formidable rival to the lustrous metal. At first sight of Bellamira, he falls head over heels in love. Even before the courtesan prompts him, Ithamore resolves to steal Barabas's gold. Also, Ithamore gives Barabas a taste of his own poison through blackmail, and the slave is in turn being manipulated by Bellamira and PiliaBorza. (Bellamira's phrase "'Tis not thy money but thyself I weigh" echoes Lodowick's earlier words concerning [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall).) The two conspirators resolve to notify the proper authorities only after they have made their fortune.

These recourses to political authority are ironic in that [Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze) is no model citizen. He represents the corruption of the island, and it is his corruption that set the drama in motion from the beginning. Neither the church nor the state, at least as they are embodied in hypocritical representatives, has sufficient moral authority to enforce the laws. Nevertheless, justice (like everything else in the play) is swift. It is hard to believe that Friar Jacomo is so dense as to believe that he killed Friar Barnardine with his staff, but he apparently accepts the judgment of the Jew and his slave to the degree that he goes willingly to the gallows and the afterlife. The state apparently accepts such testimony and then goes straight to the execution.

As for Barabas, he twice pays the amount exacted by Ithamore. At this point, it is not clear that the Jew has all his wits about him. Ithamore's blackmail carries little force, because if Ithamore were to confess the truth as he threatens, he also would probably be jailed or executed, and Barabas's fortune probably would be seized once again by Ferneze and his officers. This threat is therefore more or less empty, yet Barabas complies. Barabas might be stuck, however, now that others are in on the news.

Why does Barabas comply with the blackmail? Is he weary, paranoid, or simply careless? Or is the money amount too small to be concerned with? He can afford to pay now, without revealing his plot of killing Ithamore until later. Barabas certainly has money enough to buy time. Having purchased some time for strategic reflection, he arrives in disguise at Bellamira's house in the last scene of the act, with consequences that will become clear in the final act.

# The Jew of Malta Summary and Analysis of Act 5

**Act 5, Scene 1**

[Ferneze](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ferneze) enters with knights and [Martin Del Bosco](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#martin-del-bosco), fortifying Malta against the Turkish invasion to come. (The Spanish navy is nowhere to be seen.) [Bellamira](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bellamira) enters with [Pilia-Borza](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#pilia-borza) and informs Ferneze that it was [Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas) who killed [Lodowick](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#lodowick). Bellamira also declares that Barabas strangled a friar and poisoned the nuns, including his own daughter. Ferneze asks for proof of her accusations, upon which Bellamira betrays [Ithamore](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#ithamore). Officers soon return with the accused master and slave.

Ithamore readily confesses the truth, revealing all of his own and Barabas's crimes. Barabas calls for the law and attempts to divert Ferneze's attention by pointing out that Bellamira is a courtesan and Pilia-Borza is a thief-all in vain. As he is carried off by the officers, Barabas says he hopes "the poisoned flowers will work anon"; the flowers that Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza smelled earlier were sprinkled with poison.

The lady [Katherine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#katherine) enters and discusses the turn of events with Ferneze, whereupon an officer announces the deaths of all four: the accusers and the accused. Barabas's poison has finally taken effect--but Barabas's death was unexpected. Martin del Bosco remarks on the strangeness of Barabas's death, but Ferneze dismisses it as the justice of heaven and orders that the Jew's body be tossed over the city walls.

Alone outside the walls, Barabas quickly rises; he had merely taken a "sleepy drink" to feign death. While awaiting the arrival of the Turks, Barabas vows for vengeance-let them take even his fortune, so long as he sees the governor "whipped to death"! [Calymath](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#calymath) enters and notices the Jew. As a spy, Barabas informs the Turks how to gain entrance to the city, himself volunteering to lead five hundred men to open the city gates. Calymath then promises to make Barabas the governor, should his plan succeed.

**Act 5, Scene 2**

Calymath gloats over his easy victory and pronounces Barabas the new governor of Malta on the spot. Leaving the Jew with a number of Turkish, Calymath leaves to roam the town with his [Bashaws](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#bashaws). Barabas dismisses Ferneze and his officers and starts a monologue: although he is now governor, all of Malta hates him. Now his life is in constant danger. Besides, what good is authority without friends or profit? Barabas thus resolves to make the best of the situation. He summons Ferneze and describes his plan to recover Malta from the Turkish forces. In response to Ferneze's disbelief, the Jew demands what he can expect in return for his service to Malta, and Ferneze duly promises a great fortune. Not trusting Ferneze, Barabas sends Ferneze to visit the citizens personally to raise the money. With this agreement, Barabas releases him and makes provisions to surprise the Turks, declaring: "he from whom my most advantage comes, / Shall be my friend. / This is the life we Jews are us'd to lead; / And reason too, for Christians do the like."

**Act 5, Scene 3**

Calymath has ordered that the damage on the island be repaired. He roams about, admiring the geographical security of the island. A messenger enters with an invitation from Barabas, who offers to host a banquet for the Turks before they leave. He has even prepared a special pearl as a present. In response to Calymath's hesitation to dine within Malta, the messenger indicates that the banquet will take place in a monastery right outside the town. Calymath finally accepts, and then retires to his tent to meditate before evening.

**Act 5, Scene 4**

Ferneze enters with his knights, giving out orders for the evening. None of the knights is to come forward until he hears a musket discharged. The knights swear their allegiance to Ferneze and leave the scene.

**Act 5, Scene 5**

Barabas supervises the carpenters as they finish up some construction at the monastery. He pays them and offers them wine from his cellar as they leave. The messenger then enters to confirm Calymath's presence for the festivities. Immediately afterwards, Ferneze arrives with the hundred thousand pounds that he has collected, but Barabas refuses to take the gold on the spot. The Jew then explains the contraption he has built, whereby Calymath's army will be instantly obliterated. As for getting rid of Calymath himself and his attendants, Ferneze need only cut a single rope at the right moment. Ferneze hides himself as he sees the Turks coming, and Barabas is left alone to boast about his "kingly kind of trade, to purchase towns / By treachery and sell 'em by deceit.

Calymath arrives with kind words, and Barabas invites him to ascend the stairs-whereupon Ferneze jumps out of hiding and cuts the rope, revealing a cauldron into which Barabas falls. Meanwhile the First Knight has sounded a charge within. All look on as Barabas struggles helplessly in the pit, crying for help. Finally resolved to death, the Jew openly admits his past crimes and dies amidst a string of curses.

Calymath attempts to leave with the idea that he will persuade Turkey to give up its claim on Malta, but Ferneze points out that all his soldiers have been massacred by Barabas's contraption--Spain is the protector once again. The curtain falls with Ferneze's declaration that he will take Calymath as prisoner, followed by Ferneze's praise to heaven.

**Analysis**

After Ithamore corroborates the accusations of Bellamira and Pilia-Borza, Ferneze exclaims: "Away with him! His sight is death to me." Barabas cries out in response: "Let me have the law, / For none of this can prejudice my life." At first glance, one may accuse the Jew of a type of legalism. He calls for the law only when it is useful to him, thus adhering to its rules rather than its spirit. Yet, one wonders why the law would be useful to Barabas. Only a while ago, in the previous act, [Friar Jacomo](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#friar-jacomo) was executed swiftly and under the law respecting murder. There is no reason to think that Barabas would be exonerated, should a fair trial even take place.

Perhaps Barabas is scared that Ferneze will prematurely send him to his death. The governor's impetuous exclamation certainly does not bode well for the Jew. By calling for the law, then, Barabas is again bargaining for time, and he needs only a few extra moments; once the poison from the flowers works its effect, he might become safe under the law due to the lack of witnesses. But the witnesses have already spoken, so he needs time at least to take a "sleepy drink" to increase his chances of escaping the gallows. This device allows Barabas to survive, which serves the plot: he ends up outside the city to become the spy who leads the Turks into Malta.

The Turks having conquered the city, Calymath keeps his promise and makes Barabas the governor. But this does not seem so good to the Jew. As a corrupt governor, after all, he will be forced to lead the life of a tyrant:

But Malta hates me, and, in hating me,   
My life's in danger; and what boots it thee,   
Poor Barabas, to be the governor,  
When as thy life shall be at their command?" (V.ii.30-33)

This line of thought reflects a view of the dangers of leadership dating at least to Plato's Republic (566d-567d). Though he may have power and wealth, the tyrant will lead a fundamentally unhappy life. Barabas therefore attempts to make best of the situation by serving as something of a double agent, plotting to return Malta to Ferneze.

Barabas takes considerable pleasure in the intricate plot to obliterate the Turkish forces. For the first time in the play, however, the plot fails miserably: the tables are turned, and Barabas falls into the deep pit designed for Calymath. Is this, as Ferneze suggests, the work of heaven? Perhaps, but several points distinguish Barabas's last plot. To begin with, he has built a large and conspicuous physical contraption-in opposition to his previous subtle scheming in the shadows. Barabas becomes so excited with the contraption itself that he declines to take the payment until later. He also unnecessarily explains the details to Ferneze who, he should know very well by experience, cannot be trusted. Finally, so sure of his success, he hands over the crucial device of execution to Ferneze. The execution of his plan, as it were, becomes his own execution: he mirrors the falling motion seen at the gallows when he falls into a cauldron-which also is a magnified version of the pot of porridge he used to murder [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall) and the nuns.

In Greek theater, the gods would have punished Barabas for his hubris. In [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta), Barabas finally tastes his own poison, receiving poetic justice. He has become so proud and involved in his own plot of revenge that he almost forgets his place in the world as a successful merchant. The money he raises via Ferneze almost amounts to protection money. When Barabas refuses to take Ferneze's payment on the spot, though, he has involuntarily condemned himself-exactly in the manner of the friars Jacomo and Barnardine, when they forgot their spiritual paths and ran after Barabas's wealth.

Finally at the end of his rope in the cauldron, Barabas utters his one and only confession. But the confession does not bask in religiosity. In accordance with his character, he ends his life with a curse of frustration: if only he could have "brought confusion on you all"!

Despite all the havoc he has wreaked, Barabas serves a crucial role in the safety of Malta all the way to his death. His money buys Malta a month's time, during which Martin del Bosco minimizes damage to the city by helping the Turks to an easy victory; finally, he liberates Ferneze and allows Malta to assert its independence once and for all. Yet, it is not at all clear that the ending should be considered "happy." The governor Ferneze has after all revealed himself to be a hypocrite and traitor, no less Machiavellian than Barabas-in contrast to the invading Turks, who have acted with relative courtesy. T. S. Eliot famously called The Jew of Malta a "tragic farce." It is perhaps a farce because the tragic elements remain conspicuously unnoticed by the surviving characters, and a tragedy because the farcical elements ultimately lead to death.

# The Jew of Malta Themes

## Love and Avarice

There is only so much wealth on Malta-and everyone wants it. Much of the play's action therefore revolves around [Barabas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#barabas)'s fortune.The love of gold permeates the play, infusing a blinding desire in almost every character, especially Barabas, Ferneze, Lodowick, Ithamore,and Bellamira not to mention the two friars. The Turkish Bashaw [Callapine](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#callapine) puts the matter succinctly: "The wind that bloweth all the world besides: / Desire of Gold." Barabas's fortune is not limited to gold; in addition to his stores of precious metals and stones, [Abigall](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta/study-guide/character-list#abigall) herself is an important object of desire. Marrying her also would give special access to Barabas's fortune. Lodowick and Barabas accordingly tend to equate the love of Abigall with the love of gold.

## Revenge

Revenge plays were common in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater (1588-1625), and [The Jew of Malta](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-jew-of-malta) is among them. No offense is greater to Barabas, the Jewish merchant, than the confiscation of his fortune. He therefore sets out to take his vengeance against the governor Ferneze. In the process he kills many innocent individuals-including his own daughter. At the play develops, Barabas seems to take more and more pleasure from the execution of his schemes. The desire for revenge thus spirals rapidly out of control.

## Hypocrisy

Barabas is a self-proclaimed opportunist and schemer. He revels in his own crimes. Ferneze and the friars, on the other hand, pretend to represent the way of the law and the Lord. But it rapidly becomes clear that the so-called authorities in the play are no less Machiavellian or corrupt than Barabas. The friars almost certainly indulge their desires for gold and sex. As for Ferneze and the officers, they often wield their power to justify their selfish ends, even abusing the name of religion for the sake of profit.

## Anti-Judaism

In the first act, Ferneze and his officers repeatedly invoke the Bible to express anti-Judaic sentiments, thereby attempting to justify their seizure of Barabas's estate. Given that they are portrayed as hypocritical, it is unclear whether their justifications express deep-seated anti-Judaism. Later in the play, Barabas projects himself into the fantasy stereotype of the much-despised medieval Jew. This projection results once again in an ambiguous reading of the play, in that an anti-Judaic characterization is self-proclaimed by a Jew-all the while being implicitly denied, since his claims about himself are clearly exaggerated.

## Anti-Christianity

While the anti-Judaic language is explicit in the play, Marlowe's likely criticism of Christianity is largely implicit. The criticisms themselves sometimes are strong. By portraying the injustices committed by Christians and the hypocrisy of the friars, the play suggests a deep flaw in a religion that does not produce better people. Even so, it is unclear whether all of Christianity or just Catholicism is taken to task in each case. Nevertheless, this criticism comes across so harshly that Thomas Heywood felt the need to add an apologetic prologue and epilogue when the play was revived in 1633 and performed at a royal court that had become increasingly sensitive to Christian strife.

## Betrayal

One of Tennessee Williams's characters in Camino Real famously says: "We have to distrust each other. It is our only defense against betrayal." Such a lesson could serve many characters well in The Jew of Malta. One encounters issues of trust and efforts of scheming at every turn of the play, and thus there are plenty of opportunities for betrayal, which becomes common. Barabas largely serves out the betrayals, and he himself is betrayed in various forms at least three times. In this world, trust leads to betrayal; is this a problem of personal ethics, religion, or human nature?

## Insiders and Outsiders

A good deal of the play can be seen as a struggle between what is inside and outside, or what is familiar and unfamiliar. While the Jews of Malta are well-accustomed to the land, they consider themselves to be "strangers"-and they are treated as such by Ferneze. The larger framework of the play hinges on the arrival of an outside force that will disrupt Malta's internal peace. When the Turks do manage to invade the island temporarily, it is only with the help of Barabas, who has been thrown outside the city walls. As it turns out, even the Spanish forces never arrive to live in Malta, and the island comes to regain its independence.

# The Merchant of Venice

The [Merchant of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice) was first printed in 1600 in quarto, of which nineteen copies survive. This was followed by a 1619 printing, and later an inclusion in the First Folio in 1623. The play was written shortly after Christopher Marlowe's immensely popular Jew of Malta (1589), a play wherein a Jew named Barabas plays a greatly exaggerated villain. The portrayal of Shakespeare's Jew was and remained comic until the late 1700s at which time he was first played as a true villain. In 1814 [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock)'s role was depicted as a character to be pitied, and in 1879 he was first portrayed as a tragic character. Subsequent interpretations have varied greatly over the years, but since World War II he has most often been conceived of as tragic.

The Merchant of Venice has been described as a great commentary on the nature of racial and religious interactions. The title itself is misleading, and is often misconstrued as a reference to Shylock, the Jew. However, in reality it describes the merchant [Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio). This ambiguity and misinterpretation has not surprisingly led scholars to continue hotly debating whether Shakespeare meant to be anti-Semitic or critical of anti-Semitism. His depiction of Shylock, the Jewish moneylender, causes the audience to both hate and pity the man, and has left critics wondering what Shakespeare was really trying to achieve.

The choice of Venice can hardly have been arbitrary. The Venice of Shakespeare's day was renowned for its wealth and diversity of cultures, for it was a cosmopolitan market where Eastern goods made their way into the West. Since Shakespeare's interactions with Jews in England would have been limited, if at all, Venice provided him with the example of tolerance and heterogeneity that he needed.

It is interesting to note that the Christians are portrayed as being an incredibly tight, commonly bound group. Antonio rushes to grant [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio) a loan, even though it will bankrupt him. A similar example occurs later when [Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) asks Bassanio for a favor, which is granted before Bassanio even knows exactly what Graziano is asking for. However, this central community of Christians, with all of its virtue and decency, is immediately subverted by the prodigal loss of the money by Bassanio. While it may be virtuous for Antonio to give all he has to his friend, it is clear to the audience that it is foolish for him to give to a friend who will gamble it away.

In addition, the Christian's generosity and friendship is further undermined by the racism so apparent in their actions. Antonio is proud of the fact that he kicks and spits upon Shylock, while [Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia) is overjoyed when the black [Prince of Morocco](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-morocco) fails to choose the correct casket, saying, "Let all of his complexion choose me so" (2.7.79). The Christian ideals are not only undermined by this racism, this inherent distaste for anyone different from themselves, but also by their hypocrisy with respect to slavery. When the Christians exhort Shylock to release Antonio, he asks them why Antonio should be treated differently from their slaves, considering that he was bought by Shylock via the contract. Shakespeare thus plants doubt as to whether the Christians' kindness to each other is in fact as great a virtue as it would at first appear.

The nature of the religious differences has a profound impact on the way the Christians and the Jews live their lives. For Shylock, absolute adherence to the law is necessary, as evidenced by his reliance on contracts. In addition, money and possessions are things which he feels he must defend. Rather than try to increase his wealth, he struggles merely to maintain it. This economic conservatism contrasts starkly with the aristocratic, gambling nature of Bassanio and the others. The characteristic generosity of the Christians is a very aristocratic trait, based on an ideology which forces gentlemen to ignore practical monetary concerns. Thus Bassanio can truly say, "all the wealth I had ran in my veins" (3.2.253-254).

Perhaps the moment of strongest contrast between Shylock and the Christians' ideals concerns the contract of a pound of flesh. Shylock directly links money and flesh as being equal, something which any Christian would consider taboo. Antonio is unable to see this link, thinking instead that the contract is some form of game for Shylock. He makes the crucial mistake of believing that the contract cannot be for real, and that Shylock must somehow have grown "kind."

There is a division between the Christian portrayal of Shylock and the words and actions of Shylock himself which cannot be overlooked. The Christians are convinced that he can only think of money, whereas Shylock actually presents a very different, even sentimental outlook. [Solanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#solanio) claims that Shylock ran through the street crying out for his daughter and ducats in the same breath, yet there is no evidence of this when Shylock himself appears. Later, when his daughter, [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica), exchanges a turquoise ring for a monkey, Shylock is not upset about the monetary loss of the ring, but rather the sentimental value it held for him.

Most of Shakespeare's comedies return to the first city in which they are set. However, this type of ending is uniquely absent in The Merchant of Venice. The final scene moves away from the abandonment of Shylock in Venice, shifting instead to Belmont. Belmont, however, is not nearly as idyllic as it appears throughout the play. Indeed, it represents wealth derived from inheritance, built on the merchandising of Venice, and is therefore a paradise founded on the despised trade it claims to hate. Ending the play in Belmont serves to remind the audience that the play can be viewed as anything but a comedy, and that in fact it is in many ways a tragedy.

# Merchant of Venice Summary

The [Merchant of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice) opens with [Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio), a Christian merchant, in a depressed state. His friends try to cheer him up, but nothing works to make him feel better. Finally his friend [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio), an aristocrat who has lost all of his money, comes and asks Antonio to loan him some money.

Antonio, who has tied up all of his money is seafaring ventures, is unable to give Bassanio a direct loan. Instead he offers to use his good credit to get a loan for Bassanio. Bassanio finds [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock), a Jewish moneylender, and convinces him to give a loan of three thousand ducats as long as Antonio will sign the contract. In a rather unusual twist, instead of charging the Christian men interest, Shylock agrees to waive it as long as Antonio promises him a pound of his flesh as collateral. Antonio, thinking this is a "merry sport," accepts the condition of the bond (contract) and signs it.

Bassanio takes the money and prepares to go visit [Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia), a wealthy heiress living in Belmont. She is unmarried because her father has decreed that all suitors must first select one of three caskets in order to marry her. The caskets, one made of gold, one of silver, and one of base lead, all contain different messages. Only one of these caskets contains a picture of Portia. The suitor who picks that casket will be granted permission to marry her.

Prior to Bassanio's arrival the [Prince of Morocco](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-morocco) tries his luck in choosing among the caskets. He picks the gold casket because it contains an inscription reading "what every man desires." Instead of Portia's picture, he finds a skull which symbolizes the fact that gold hides corruption. As part of losing the suit, he is further sworn to never propose marriage to any other woman, and must return to Morocco immediately. The next suitor, the [Prince of Aragon](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-aragon), selects the silver casket which bears an inscription stating that it will give a man what he deserves. Inside is a picture of an idiot, indicating that his self-centered approach was foolish. He too leaves in shame.

Back in Venice, [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica), the daughter of Shylock, has fallen in love with [Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo). They plan to escape one night when Shylock is invited to eat at Bassanio's house. After Shylock leaves Lorenzo goes to his house with two friends. Jessica appears at a window dressed as a boy and tosses a chest of money and jewels down to them. She then emerges from the house and runs away with Lorenzo.

Shylock, upon discovering that his daughter has run away with a lot of his money, blames Antonio for helping her escape. At the same time there are rumors developing in Venice that many of Antonio's ships, with which he expected to repay Shylock for the loan, have sunk or been lost at sea. Shylock begins to revel in the news that Antonio is losing everything because he wants to exact his pound of flesh in revenge for the many insults Antonio has dealt him throughout the years.

Bassanio arrives in Belmont and meets Portia. She remembers him as the dashing soldier with whom she fell in love several years earlier. Portia begs Bassanio to wait before choosing among the caskets, but he demands the right to start immediately. Without even properly reading the inscriptions, Bassanio selects the lead one because he considers it a threatening casket. Portia is overjoyed when he finds her portrait inside. She gives him a ring to seal their engagement and they prepare to get married the next day. [Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano), who has accompanied Bassanio to Belmont, tells him that he and [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#nerissa) (Portia's friend) wish to be married as well.

A messenger arrives and hands Bassanio a letter from Antonio in which he informs Bassanio that he has lost all his money and must forfeit a pound of flesh to Shylock. Bassanio immediately tells Portia what has happened. She orders him to take six thousand ducats and return to Venice where he can pay Shylock and cancel the contract. After Bassanio and Graziano have left, Nerissa and Portia depart for Venice disguised as men.

Shylock has Antonio arrested and brought before the [Duke of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#duke-of-venice), who presides over a court of justice. The Duke pleads with Shylock to forgive the contract and let Antonio go free. When he refuses, the Duke asks him how he expects any mercy if he is unable to offer it. The Duke then tells the gathered men that he is waiting for a doctor of the law to arrive.

Nerissa enters the court and hands a letter to the Duke which notifies him that a Doctor Bellario has sent an educated young doctor in his place. Portia arrives disguised as the Doctor [Balthasar](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#balthasar). She informs the Duke that she has studied the case and will preside over it. She first asks Shylock for the contract and looks it over. Bassanio offers to pay Shylock the six thousand ducats, but he refuses to accept the money, preferring instead the revenge of killing Antonio. Unable to find any loopholes, Portia grants Shylock his pound of flesh. Shylock, overjoyed at winning his case, holds a knife ready to cut into Antonio's breast.

Portia stops him by asking if he has a surgeon present to suppress the flow of blood. Shylock tells her that the bond said nothing about providing a doctor. She informs him that he may have his pound of flesh, but that if he sheds a single drop of blood then Venice can take away his lands and wealth according to the law. Shylock, clearly unable to comply with this law, asks instead that he be given the six thousand ducats. Portia refuses his request, explaining that she has already ruled according to the contract, and that it must be carried out.

Portia then starts to read the contract literally, reaffirming that Shylock must take exactly one pound of flesh, no more and no less, or he will violate the contract and die. Shylock tells the court that he wishes to completely drop his case and forgive Antonio the entire three thousand ducats. Portia again refuses his request, explaining that the law in Venice states that if any foreigner conspires against the life of a Venetian, half his wealth is to be given to the man against whom he conspired, and half is taken as a fine by the state. In addition, the Duke is granted the power of life and death over him.

When Shylock is pardoned by the Duke, he informs the court that he would prefer death rather than lose everything he owns. Antonio asks the court to return the fine of half of Shylock's wealth provided Shylock converts to Christianity. In addition, Antonio declares he will keep his share in a trust for Jessica and Lorenzo. Portia agrees to this, and also makes Shylock promise to give all his money to Lorenzo upon his death.

After the trial Bassanio thanks "Dr. Balthasar" (Portia) for "his" good work and offers "him" anything "he" desires. Portia asks him for the ring she had given him earlier as a token of their love. He is upset about giving it to her since he thinks she is "Balthasar." However, after Antonio points out that he nearly lost his life for Bassanio, Bassanio pulls off the ring and hands it to her.

Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont dressed normally. Lorenzo and Jessica have been living there, enjoying the comfortable life Belmont offers. Soon after the two women arrive, Bassanio and Graziano also return from Venice. The happy reunion is destroyed when Portia asks Bassanio about the ring (which he gave away). She forgives him only after Antonio vouches for Bassanio's fidelity.

Portia then gives Antonio the ring and has him hand it to Bassanio. He is shocked to see it is the same ring he gave "Balthasar". Portia finally tells him the truth about Balthasar. The play ends with three happy couples: namely Lorenzo and Jessica, Nerissa and Graziano, as well as Portia and Bassanio. However, Antonio and Shylock remain outcasts, separated from the happy ending.

# Merchant of Venice Character List

## Antonio

As Christian merchant of Venice, he agrees to vouch for a loan to Bassanio from Shylock by putting a pound of his flesh up as collateral. The merchant whose love for his friend Bassanio prompts him to sign Shylock’s contract and almost lose his life. Antonio is something of a mercurial figure, often inexplicably melancholy and, as Shylock points out, possessed of an incorrigible dislike of Jews. Nonetheless, Antonio is beloved of his friends and proves merciful to Shylock, albeit with conditions. Although the play’s title refers to him, Antonio is a rather lackluster character. He emerges in Act I, scene I as a hopeless depressive, someone who cannot name the source of his melancholy and who, throughout the course of the play, devolves into a self-pitying lump, unable to muster the energy required to defend himself against execution. Antonio never names the cause of his melancholy, but the evidence seems to point to his being in love, despite his denial of this idea in Act I, scene I. The most likely object of his affection is Bassanio, who takes full advantage of the merchant’s boundless feelings for him. Antonio has risked the entirety of his fortune on overseas trading ventures, yet he agrees to guarantee the potentially lethal loan Bassanio secures from Shylock. In the context of his unrequited and presumably unconsummated relationship with Bassanio, Antonio’s willingness to offer up a pound of his own flesh seems particularly important, signifying a union that grotesquely alludes to the rites of marriage, where two partners become “one flesh.”

Further evidence of the nature of Antonio’s feelings for Bassanio appears later in the play, when Antonio’s proclamations resonate with the hyperbole and self-satisfaction of a doomed lover’s declaration: “Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not” (III.iii.35–36). Antonio ends the play as happily as he can, restored to wealth even if not delivered into love. Without a mate, he is indeed the “tainted wether”—or castrated ram—of the flock, and he will likely return to his favorite pastime of moping about the streets of Venice (IV.i.113). After all, he has effectively disabled himself from pursuing his other hobby—abusing Shylock—by insisting that the Jew convert to Christianity. Although a sixteenth-century audience might have seen this demand as merciful, as Shylock is saving himself from eternal damnation by converting, we are less likely to be convinced. Not only does Antonio’s reputation as an anti-Semite precede him, but the only instance in the play when he breaks out of his doldrums is his “storm” against Shylock (I.iii.132). In this context, Antonio proves that the dominant threads of his character are melancholy and cruelty.

## Bassanio

He is the friend of Antonio who borrows three thousand ducats from him. He is also the suitor to Portia who chooses the correct casket and marries her. A gentleman of Venice, and a kinsman and dear friend to Antonio. Bassanio’s love for the wealthy Portia leads him to borrow money from Shylock with Antonio as his guarantor. An ineffectual businessman, Bassanio proves himself a worthy suitor, correctly identifying the casket that contains Portia’s portrait.

## Leonardo

Bassanio's servant.

## Lorenzo

He is a friend of Bassanio and Antonio, the lover of Jessica. A friend of Bassanio and Antonio, Lorenzo is in love with Shylock’s daughter, Jessica. He schemes to help Jessica escape from her father’s house, and he eventually elopes with her to Belmont.

## Graziano

He is a friend of Bassanio and Antonio, he accompanies Bassanio to Belmont and marries Nerissa.

## Salerio

He is a friend of Bassanio and Antonio.

## Solanio

He is a friend of Bassanio and Antonio.

## Shylock

He is a Jewish moneylender in Venice. He demands a pound of flesh from Antonio, but is forced to convert to Christianity by the end of the play. He loses his daughter Jessica and most of his wealth. A Jewish moneylender in Venice. Angered by his mistreatment at the hands of Venice’s Christians, particularly Antonio, Shylock schemes to eke out his revenge by ruthlessly demanding as payment a pound of Antonio’s flesh. Although seen by the rest of the play’s characters as an inhuman monster, Shylock at times diverges from stereotype and reveals himself to be quite human. These contradictions, and his eloquent expressions of hatred, have earned Shylock a place as one of Shakespeare’s most memorable characters. Although critics tend to agree that Shylock is *The Merchant of Venice’*s most noteworthy figure, no consensus has been reached on whether to read him as a bloodthirsty bogeyman, a clownish Jewish stereotype, or a tragic figure whose sense of decency has been fractured by the persecution he endures. Certainly, Shylock is the play’s antagonist, and he is menacing enough to seriously imperil the happiness of Venice’s businessmen and young lovers alike. Shylock is also, however, a creation of circumstance; even in his single-minded pursuit of a pound of flesh, his frequent mentions of the cruelty he has endured at Christian hands make it hard for us to label him a natural born monster. In one of Shakespeare’s most famous monologues, for example, Shylock argues that Jews are humans and calls his quest for vengeance the product of lessons taught to him by the cruelty of Venetian citizens. On the other hand, Shylock’s coldly calculated attempt to revenge the wrongs done to him by murdering his persecutor, Antonio, prevents us from viewing him in a primarily positive light. Shakespeare gives us unmistakably human moments, but he often steers us against Shylock as well, painting him as a miserly, cruel, and prosaic figure.

## Jessica

Shylock's daughter who runs away with Lorenzo. Although she is Shylock’s daughter, Jessica hates life in her father’s house, and elopes with the young Christian gentleman, Lorenzo. The fate of her soul is often in doubt: the play’s characters wonder if her marriage can overcome the fact that she was born a Jew, and we wonder if her sale of a ring given to her father by her mother is excessively callous.

## Tubal

A Jew.

## Lancelot

He is a clown, first Shylock's servant and later Bassanio's, he also plays tricks on his father Gobbo. Bassanio’s servant. A comical, clownish figure who is especially adept at making puns, Launcelot leaves Shylock’s service in order to work for Bassanio.

## Gobbo

He is the father of Lancelot.

## Portia

He is a wealthy Christian heiress who must marry the man who chooses the correct casket with her picture in it. She later marries Bassanio and also plays the Doctor Balthasar who saves Antonio's life. A wealthy heiress from Belmont. Portia’s beauty is matched only by her intelligence. Bound by a clause in her father’s will that forces her to marry whichever suitor chooses correctly among three caskets, Portia is nonetheless able to marry her true love, Bassanio. Far and away the most clever of the play’s characters, it is Portia, in the disguise of a young law clerk, who saves Antonio from Shylock’s knife. Quick-witted, wealthy, and beautiful, Portia embodies the virtues that are typical of Shakespeare’s heroines—it is no surprise that she emerges as the antidote to Shylock’s malice. At the beginning of the play, however, we do not see Portia’s potential for initiative and resourcefulness, as she is a near prisoner, feeling herself absolutely bound to follow her father’s dying wishes. This opening appearance, however, proves to be a revealing introduction to Portia, who emerges as that rarest of combinations—a free spirit who abides rigidly by rules. Rather than ignoring the stipulations of her father’s will, she watches a stream of suitors pass her by, happy to see these particular suitors go, but sad that she has no choice in the matter. When Bassanio arrives, however, Portia proves herself to be highly resourceful, begging the man she loves to stay a while before picking a chest, and finding loopholes in the will’s provision that we never thought possible. Also, in her defeat of Shylock Portia prevails by applying a more rigid standard than Shylock himself, agreeing that his contract very much entitles him to his pound of flesh, but adding that it does not allow for any loss of blood. Anybody can break the rules, but Portia’s effectiveness comes from her ability to make the law work for her.

Portia rejects the stuffiness that rigid adherence to the law might otherwise suggest. In her courtroom appearance, she vigorously applies the law, but still flouts convention by appearing disguised as a man. After depriving Bassanio of his ring, she stops the prank before it goes too far, but still takes it far enough to berate Bassanio and Gratiano for their callousness, and she even insinuates that she has been unfaithful.

## Nerissa

She is the attendant or waiting-gentlewoman to Portia who also plays the clerk at the court. Portia’s lady-in-waiting and confidante. She marries Gratiano and escorts Portia on Portia’s trip to Venice by disguising herself as her law clerk.

## Balthasar

A servant of Portia.

## Stefano

A servant of Portia.

## Prince of Morocco

A suitor to Portia who fails to win her by incorrectly choosing the gold casket.

## Prince of Aragon

A suitor to Portia who fails to win her by incorrectly choosing the silver casket.

# Merchant of Venice Summary and Analysis of Act 1

### Act I, Scene One

[Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio), a merchant, is in a melancholic state of mind and unable to find a reason for his depression. His friends [Salerio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#salerio) and [Solanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#solanio) attempt to cheer him up by telling him that he is only worried about his ships returning safely to port. Antonio, however, denies that he is worried about his ships and remains depressed. His two friends leave after [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio), [Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) and [Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo) arrive. Graziano and Lorenzo remark that Antonio does not look well before exiting, leaving Bassanio alone with Antonio.

Bassanio informs Antonio that he has been prodigal with his money and that he currently has accumulated substantial debts. Bassanio reveals that he has come up with a plan to pay off his obligations by marrying [Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia), a wealthy heiress in Belmont. However, in order to woo Portia, Bassanio needs to borrow enough money so that he can act like a true nobleman. Antonio tells him that all his money is invested in ships at sea, but offers to borrow money for him.

### Act I, Scene Two

Portia, the wealthy heiress, discusses her many suitors with her noblewoman [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#nerissa). She points out the faults that each of them has, often stereotyping each suitor according to the country from which he has arrived. Nerissa, a gentlewoman who works for Portia, asks her if she remembers a soldier who stayed at Belmont several years before. Portia recalls the man, and says, "Yes, yes, it was Bassanio" (1.2.97). Portia's serving man then arrives with news that four of her suitors are leaving, but another, the [Prince of Morocco](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-morocco), has arrived.

### Act I, Scene Three

Bassanio in engaged in conversation with [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock), a Jew who makes his living as a moneylender. Bassanio has asked him for a loan of three thousand ducats, a very large sum at the time, for a period of three months. He further tells Shylock that Antonio is to "be bound," meaning that Antonio will be responsible for repaying the loan.

Shylock knows Antonio's reputation well, and agrees to consider the contract. He asks Bassanio if he may speak with Antonio first, and Bassanio invites Shylock to dinner. Shylock responds that he will never eat with a Christian.

Antonio arrives at that moment and Bassanio takes him aside. Shylock addresses the audience and informs them that he despises Antonio. He bears an old grudge against Antonio which is not explained, but Shylock is further upset that Antonio lends out money without charging interest, thereby lowering the amount he is able to charge for lending out his own money. Shylock turns to Antonio and tells him why interest is allowed in the Hebrew faith by quoting a biblical passage in which Jacob receives all the striped lambs from his father-in-law. Antonio asks him if the passage was inserted into the bible to defend interest charges. He states, "Was this inserted to make interest good, / Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?" (1.3.90-91). Shylock replies that, "I cannot tell. I make it breed as fast" (1.3.92).

Antonio is upset that Shylock is considering charging him interest on the loan, and asks Shylock to loan the money without any interest. Shylock tells him that, "I would be friends with you, and have your love" (1.3.133). He offers to seal the bond, "in a merry sport" (1.3.141) without charging interest, but as collateral for the loan demands a pound of Antonio's flesh. Antonio thinks Shylock is only joking about the pound of flesh, and is happy to seal the contract. He remarks that, "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" (1.3.174).

### Analysis

The [Merchant of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice), like so many of Shakespeare's plays, opens with a depressed and melancholy character. The depression of Antonio at the beginning, for which he can give no explanation, is much like Antipholus of Syracuse in The [Comedy of Errors](https://www.gradesaver.com/comedy-of-errors). Portia, the wealthy Belmont heiress, is likewise a depressed and unhappy character in the opening scenes. The reasons for their melancholy, although never directly expressed, are due to their self-absorption. And as with Antipholus in The Comedy of Errors, it is only by taking a huge risk (or both) that they will be able to overcome their depression. For Portia, this risk taking can be seen in her love for Bassanio, which will require her to risk her entire inheritance in order for her to win him. For Antonio, the risk is even greater; namely a pound of flesh, representing his very life.

Bassanio represents the gambler who cannot lose. He is the sort of character that will risk everything, and having lost everything, will risk what he does not have. Thus Bassanio tells us, "In my schooldays, when I had lost one shaft, / I shot his fellow in the selfsame flight / The selfsame way, with more advised watch, / To find the other forth; and by adventuring both, / I oft found both" (1.1.140-144). He has often been compared to Jason in the Quest for the Golden Fleece, namely a risk-taker.

Portia as a character is an odd mixture of various traits. She is first presented as the ruler of Belmont, clearly in charge of both herself and those around her. However, we soon discover that she is not in charge, indeed it is "the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father" (1.2.21). Portia's reliance on the wishes of her dead father therefore contradicts the image of her as Belmont's ruler. Indeed, like many of the women in Shakespeare's plays, she will be unable to alter the plot around her as long as she is a woman. It is only later in the play, by dressing as [Balthasar](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#balthasar), a man, that she will finally be able to really command events and manipulate the play.

It is necessary to focus on the conflict between the Christians and the Jews throughout this play. Although the twentieth century has altered the way western civilization portrays the Jew in The Merchant of Venice, the compelling character of Shylock still disturbs and entices his audience. Shylock has historically been portrayed as a comic character, and in Shakespeare's day would have dressed quite differently from the other characters in order to distinguish himself from the Christians. The image of Shylock changed rapidly over the years, first making him a villain in the 1700s, a man to be pitied in 1814, and finally a tragic character in 1879.

Although Shylock is accused of representing much of what the Christians hate, it is through his conflict with Antonio in particular that Shakespeare pokes holes in the accusations of the Christian men. The most common error is to assume that the merchant referred to in the title is in fact Shylock himself. This is not the case, since Shylock is only a moneylender. Indeed, the merchant indicated is Antonio. This confusion surrounding Antonio and Shylock is purposeful, for it shows the audience how the Christians are in many ways as awful as the Jews they mock. It also sets the stage for misinterpretation. For example, Shylock states, "Antonio is a good man" (1.3.11), referring to the fact that Antonio is "good" for the money which Bassanio wishes to borrow. Bassanio takes this statement at face value, and agrees that Antonio is a nice man.

The seriousness of the Christian misunderstanding can be seen when Shylock makes the bond with Antonio:

"This kindness will I show.

Go with me to a notary, seal me there

Your single bond, and, in a merry sport,

If you repay me not on such a day,

In such place, such sum or sums as are

Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit

Be nominated for an equal pound

Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken

In what part of your body pleaseth me.

Now Antonio repeats the same mistake made by Bassanio, thinking that Shylock is being "kind" when he agrees to loan the money without interest. Antonio states "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" (1.3.174). Antonio is so convinced that he will be able to repay his debts that Shylock's request for a pound of his flesh as collateral strikes him as a joke, and therefore is not taken at all seriously.

Shylock's willingness to waive the interest payment brings to light an entirely new set of conflicts within the play. Shakespeare draws on Francis Bacon's statement, "It is against nature, for money to beget money," when he portrays the Christians as unselfish givers of all they have. Shylock defends his taking of interest by quoting the passage where Jacob is given the striped lambs. Antonio immediately rejects this as nonsense, asking, "Was this inserted to make interest good, / Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?" (1.3.90-91). Shylock replies that, "I cannot tell. I make it breed as fast" (1.3.92).

This scene further focuses our attention on the use of sheep imagery in connection to money and breeding. Here Shakespeare plays on the words "use", "usury", and "ewes", all of which will be punned throughout the play. All the sheep imagery is on Shylock's side throughout, for he is fleecing the Christians, breeding the ewes. He therefore mentions Jacob as his defense for taking interest, and we can note later that Shylock's wife is named Leah, the same name that Jacob's first wife had. Shylock is also able to make his money breed like sheep through the charging of interest. On the other hand, the Christians have Jason and the Golden Fleece. This image is used in connection with Bassanio, the risk-taker, who risks everything to gain everything. The same image will figure later with Antonio, who is represented as a castrated sheep. Thus the concept is reinforced that Antonio does not make his money breed because he refuses to charge interest.

# Merchant of Venice Summary and Analysis of Act 2

### Act II, Scene One

[The Prince](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-prince) of Morocco meets with [Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia) and tells her that he is often considered very handsome on account of his black skin. She tells him that unfortunately she does not have the right to choose the man who will marry her. Instead, her father created three caskets from among which each suitor must choose. Portia warns the Prince that if he chooses the wrong casket, he must swear to never propose marriage to a woman afterwards. The [Prince of Morocco](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-morocco) agrees to this condition and joins Portia for dinner before attempting to choose.

### Act II, Scene Two

[Lancelot](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lancelot), referred to as a clown, is the servant to [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock). He tells the audience that he is thinking about running away from his master, whom he describes as a devil. However, he cannot make up his mind about whether to run away or not because his conscience makes him guilty when he thinks about leaving Shylock.

Lancelot's father, and old man named [Gobbo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#gobbo), arrives with a basket. He is nearly completely blind and cannot see Lancelot clearly. Gobbo asks his son which way leads to the Jew's house, meaning Shylock's house. He mentions that he is searching for his son Lancelot. Lancelot decides to have some fun with his father, and so he pretends to know a "Master Lancelot" (a term for a gentleman's son, not a servant). He informs Gobbo that "Master Lancelot" is deceased.

Gobbo is clearly upset by this, and Lancelot kneels down in front of him and asks his father for his blessing. Gobbo at first does not believe that Lancelot is really his son, but then he feels his head and recognizes him.

Lancelot tells his father that he is wasting away serving Shylock and that he will turn into a Jew himself if he stays there much longer. Gobbo has brought a present for Shylock, but Lancelot instead convinces his father to give it to [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio), whom Lancelot hopes to have as his new master. Bassanio, coming onto stage at that moment, accepts the gift of doves and tells Lancelot that he may leave Shylock and join his service. He then orders one of the men to get Lancelot a new uniform to wear, and sends Lancelot away.

[Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) arrives and tells Bassanio that he wants to join him on the trip to Belmont, where Bassanio plans to go and woo Portia. Bassanio feels that Graziano is too loud and rude and asks him if he will be able to act more appropriately. Graziano says that he can, and that he will "put on a sober habit" (2.2.171). Bassanio then agrees to take him to Belmont.

### Act II, Scene Three

### [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica), the daughter of Shylock, meets with Lancelot and tells him that she will miss him after he leaves to go work for Bassanio. She hands him a letter to take to [Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo), who is supposed to be a guest of Bassanio's that night. After Lancelot leaves, Jessica remarks,

"Alack, what heinous sin is it in me

To be ashamed to be my father's child!

But though I am a daughter to his blood,

I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,

If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,

Become a Christian and thy loving wife.

Jessica thus informs the audience that she is in love with Lorenzo, a Christian. She intends to meet him soon and run away from her father's house in order to marry Lorenzo.

### Act II, Scene Four

Lorenzo, Graziano, [Salerio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#salerio) and [Solanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#solanio) are preparing for a masque that night. Lancelot arrives with the letter from Jessica and hands it to Lorenzo. Lorenzo reads it and tells Lancelot to inform Jessica that he will not fail her. Lancelot leaves to bring the news to Jessica, and also to invite Shylock to Bassanio's house for dinner. After the other two men leave, Lorenzo shows Graziano the letter from Jessica. He tells his friend that he and Jessica plan to steal away from her father's house that night, along with a great deal of her father's gold and jewels.

### Act II, Scene Five

Shylock informs Lancelot that he will have to judge for himself whether Bassanio is a better master. He then calls Jessica, hands her the keys to the house, and tells her that he must leave for dinner that evening. Lancelot tells Shylock that there will likely be a masque that night. At this news, Shylock orders Jessica to lock up the house and not look out the windows. He says, "Let not the sound of shallow fopp'ry enter / My sober house" (2.5.34-35).

As Shylock gets ready to depart, Lancelot privately tells Jessica that Lorenzo will come for her that night. She is grateful for the message, and after Shylock leaves she comments that, "I have a father, you a daughter lost" (2.5.55).

### Act II, Scene Six

Salerio and Graziano are part of the masques partying through the street of Venice. They stop and wait for Lorenzo, who has asked them to meet him at a certain spot. Lorenzo arrives and thanks them for their patience. He then calls out to Jessica, who appears in the window of Shylock's house dressed as a man. She throws out a casket to Lorenzo filled with much of her father's gold and jewels. Jessica then goes back inside and steals even more ducats (golden coins) before joining the men on the street.

Everyone departs except for Bassanio, who unexpectedly meets [Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio). Antonio tells him to get to the ship heading for Belmont, because the wind has started blowing the right way and the ship is ready to depart.

### Act II, Scene Seven

The Prince of Morocco is brought into a room containing three caskets, gold, silver and lead. Portia tells him to make his choice. The Prince reads the inscriptions on all the caskets. Gold reads: "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" (2.7.5). The silver casket has, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" (2.7.7). Finally, the dull lead casket bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.9).

Portia tells the Prince that the correct casket, or the one that will allow him to marry her, contains a miniature picture of her likeness. The Prince looks over all the inscriptions a second time, and decides that lead is too threatening and not worth risking anything for. He also spurns the silver, which he feels is too base a metal to hold such a beautiful woman as Portia. The Prince therefore chooses gold.

Portia hands him the key, and he opens the casket to reveal a golden skull. The skull holds a written scroll that poetically indicates that he chose superficially. The Prince departs after a hasty farewell. Portia watches him go, and remarks, "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. / Let all of his complexion choose me so" (2.7.78-79).

### Act II, Scene Eight

Salerio and Solanio meet in the street and discuss the hasty departure of Bassanio and Graziano for Belmont. They further tell the audience that Shylock returned home and discovered his daughter had run away with Lorenzo. Shylock then woke up the [Duke of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#duke-of-venice) and tried to stop Bassanio's ship, which had already set sail. Antonio assured Shylock that Jessica was not on board the ship, but rather had been seen in a gondola with Lorenzo. However, Shylock continues to blame Antonio for the loss of his daughter and his money.

Solanio informs Salerio that Shylock was later seen in the streets crying,

"My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!

Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats!

Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!

A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,"]

Solanio is worried about Antonio, whom he says had better repay his bond with Shylock on time, because Shylock is furious about losing his daughter and his money and blames Antonio for it. Salerio indicates that a Frenchman mentioned a Venetian vessel had sunk in the English Channel the day before. Both men hope that it is not Antonio's ship.

### Act II, Scene Nine

The [Prince of Aragon](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#prince-of-aragon) arrives in Belmont and decides to choose from among the three caskets. Portia takes him into the room and makes him recite the oath never to reveal which casket he chooses, and further to promise never to marry should he choose the incorrect casket. The Prince of Aragon agrees and starts to read the inscriptions.

He rejects lead because of the ominous warning, and thinks that gold refers to the foolish populace. Instead he chooses silver which indicates he will receive what he deserves. The Prince takes the key and opens the casket to reveal a "blinking idiot" (2.9.53). The scroll indicates that those who are self-loving deserve to be called idiots, and would not make good husbands for Portia. The Prince is upset by his choice, but is forced to leave.

Portia is happy that the Prince has chosen the wrong casket. Her messenger comes into the room at that moment and informs her that a young Venetian has just arrived. Portia goes to see who it is, while [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#nerissa) secretly wishes that it might be Bassanio.

### Analysis

The virtue of marriage is very important for Shakespeare, who often ends his comedies with multiple marriages to signify a happy solution to many of the problems the characters have faced. Marriage is thus a way of achieving inclusion for Shakespeare, and it is notable that the characters which remain unmarried are often isolated and removed from the society, specifically Antonio and Shylock within this play. Marriage also represents a way to overcome difficulties; for Bassanio it will remove his debt, for Portia it will free her from her father's will and for Jessica is will allow her to escape her father.

Given this view of marriage, the choice of the caskets presents a horrifying risk for many of the participants, namely the threat that if they choose wrong casket they must swear to never propose marriage to a woman afterwards. In a sense, the failure to marry is as good as being castrated. In fact, Shakespeare creates this very analogy throughout The [Merchant of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice) and ties it to the ability to make money breed. Thus in the first act Shylock mentions that he makes his money breed as fast as ewes and lambs. Antonio will further this metaphor in the final act, when he remarks that he is like a castrated lamb, and thus unable to breed. For the suitors to Portia, then, swearing to never wed puts them on the same level as Antonio. By agreeing to not marry, they themselves become castrated.

Lancelot the clown is one of the more interesting characters. His treatment of his father is awful, considering that his father is mostly blind and has brought a present to his son. The entire scene mimics the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, though. The bible tells how Jacob tricked his father into giving him the inheritance by wearing wool so his father would think he was Esau. Lancelot does the same thing, by bending down and making his father "know" him by feeling his head.

Shylock's character starts to emerge very strongly within this act. We see him now not only as a moneylender demanding interest, but also as a villain. He shows a marked aversion to fun, demanding that Jessica lock the door and close the windows when he finds out there will be a masque that night. However, contrary to his statement in the first act, Shylock leaves his house to enjoy a dinner with Bassanio. Much of this act therefore develops the negative aspects of Shylock character.

However, the Christian faults are also exposed within this act. The faithlessness of Jessica has been an issue of discussion for many centuries, with the debate raging over whether she is justified in leaving her father. The crucial difficulty is that she does not merely run away, but she insists on stealing large amounts of her father's jewels and gold. Thus when Graziano remarks, "Now, by my hood, a gentile, and no Jew" (2.6.51), we can only see it as ironic. Ironic because she is stealing her father's money, so he is essentially implying Christians are thieves.

Jessica's actions also leave unanswered the question of why she is locked up in her father's home. The answer to this comes from an understanding of the relationship between money and breeding. Whereas in the beginning Antonio is impotent in the sense that his money does not breed, Shylock is not. Shylock further has the advantage of having a daughter. Since the Jewish lineage is passed down via the maternal line, Jessica represents a way for Shylock's family line to continue. Thus, hoarding Jessica and his gold is Shylock's way of guaranteeing his successful breeding. In fact, Solanio makes this connection between daughter and money abundantly clear when he tells us that Shylock ran through the street of Venice crying:

"My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!

Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats!

Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!

A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,"

Thus for Shylock the simultaneous loss of his daughter and his money is in a sense the loss of his fertility.

Not only does her conversion to Christianity destroy Shylock's family line, it also makes him impotent in a metaphorical sense. Jessica takes two stones with her, which represent the "testicles" of Shylock, since stone was often used to mean testicle. Thus after her theft, Shylock joins Antonio in impotence, having lost his ability to breed. Indeed, the escape of Jessica marks the turning point of Shylock's fortunes, which will lead to his eventual destruction.

It is important that Jessica escapes not dressed as herself, but as a man. In fact, there is a never a scene on the Venetian streets in which a woman is present. The only way a woman can walk through the street of Venice is to dress as a man, a fact that will reinforced when Portia pretends to be [Balthasar](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#balthasar) and dresses as a man before entering Venice. This is one of the primary differences between the worlds of Venice and Belmont.

The three caskets each bear inscriptions that tell us about the personalities of the characters who pick them. Gold reads: "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" (2.7.5). The silver casket has, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" (2.7.7). Finally, the dull lead casket bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.9). The Prince of Morocco first chooses gold and gets a death skull. The Prince of Aragon receives the picture of an idiot. This is symbolic, for he is an old man and hence is an idiot for thinking himself deserving of a young woman.

One of the most debated lines is when Portia sends the Prince of Morocco away by saying, "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. / Let all of his complexion choose me so" (2.7.78-79). This provincial comment stands in contrast with her upbringing and nobility. However, what soon becomes clear is that Portia is a very narrow character in her sense of friends. She chooses Bassanio over the more cosmopolitan suitors because he represents her Christian and Venetian world. Bassanio wins her because of the same thing, namely he alone of the suitors possesses the local characteristics necessary to interpret which casket to choose.

Unlike Portia and Bassanio, Jessica never has to be chosen by a casket. Instead, she tosses her casket out of the window for Lorenzo to catch. Thus her relationship, unlike that of Portia and Bassanio, has no test to make sure it is a good relationship. This lack of a test will create problems later, foreshadowed by Shakespeare when Lorenzo and Jessica compare themselves to many famous failed romances.

The Merchant of Venice is largely a play about interpretation. The suitors to Portia are condemned to sterility because they misread the caskets. Shylock's interpretation of the contract in Act 1.3 takes the "pound of flesh" seriously and literally, whereas Antonio thinks Shylock is being "kind." Later in the final scene, the outcome of the play - whether it becomes a comedic ending or a tragic one, will rest on Portia's interpretation of the law. Thus the play creates its drama and its plot through the constant interpretation of events and words.

# Merchant of Venice Summary and Analysis of Act 3

### Act III, Scene One

[Solanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#solanio) and [Salerio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#salerio) discuss the rumor that [Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio) has lost yet a second ship. [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock) enters and complains that both Solanio and Salerio had something to do with his daughter's flight. They do not deny it, but instead ask Shylock if he has heard about Antonio's losses.

Shylock tells them that Antonio should "look to his bond" and make sure he repays the money, or else Shylock is planning on taking his pound of flesh. Shylock is furious with Antonio, whom he blames for the loss of [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica), and also bears an older grudge against the man. He then delivers his famous soliloquy, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions..." (3.1.49-50). The speech concludes with Shylock saying that he will be revenged for all the times he has been treated badly by Christians.

One of Antonio's servants arrives and bids Solanio and Salerio to go to Antonio's house. They leave, and [Tubal](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#tubal), another Jew, arrives to speak with Shylock. Tubal has been in Genoa, where he tried to locate Jessica. He tells Shylock that Jessica had been in the city, and had spent over eighty ducats while there. She had also traded a turquoise ring for a monkey, a ring which Shylock regrets losing because he had received it from his wife Leah. However, Tubal also brings Shylock news that Antonio has lost yet a third ship, and is almost certain to go bankrupt in the near future. Shylock is excited by this news, since he has decided that he would rather exact revenge on Antonio than receive his three thousand ducats back.

### Act III, Scene Two

[Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia) tells [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio) that she wants him to wait a month or two before choosing from the caskets so that she may be guaranteed his company for a while longer. Bassanio tells her that he is desperate to choose, and feels like he is being tortured the longer he waits. Portia finally agrees to take him into the room with the caskets.

Portia orders music to be played for Bassanio, and one of her servants starts to sing a song in which the rhymes all rhyme with lead. Bassanio speaks directly to the audience and tells them that too many things are gilded and coated with ornaments. He therefore decides to do away with gold, comparing it to Midas' greed. The silver casket he also ignores, saying it resembles money and is therefore too common. He thus chooses the lead casket and finds Portia's picture inside.

Bassanio is overjoyed by the picture and remarks that it is a beautiful "counterfeit". He then takes the scroll and reads it: "You that choose not by the view / Chance as fair and choose as true" (3.2.131-132). Bassanio goes over to Portia with the note, and she offers him everything she owns, including herself. Portia then hands Bassanio a ring as a token of her love and commitment and tells him never to lose it. He promises, telling her that if he ever stops wearing the ring it will be because he is dead.

[Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) then informs them that he would like to be married as well. He tells Bassanio and Portia that he and [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#nerissa) (the chambermaid to Portia) are in love. Bassanio is thrilled for his friend and agrees to let them get married as well.

Jessica, [Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo) and Salerio arrive at Belmont. Bassanio is happy to see all of them, but Salerio then hands him a letter from Antonio. Bassanio turns pale at the news that Antonio has lost his fortune and his ships, and he asks Salerio if it is true that all of Antonio's ventures have failed. Salerio tells him it is true, and that Shylock is so excited about getting his pound of flesh that even if Antonio could repay him he would likely refuse it.

Portia asks what amount of money Antonio owes to Shylock, and then orders Bassanio to return to Venice and offer Shylock six thousand ducats to destroy the contract. She informs Bassanio and Graziano that she and Nerissa will live like widows in their absence. They all agree to get married first and then go straight to Venice to rescue Antonio.

### Act III, Scene Three

Shylock has come to watch Antonio be taken away by a jailer. Antonio pleads with Shylock to listen to him, but Shylock says, "I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond," (3.3.4) and refuses to listen to any of the pleas for mercy. After Shylock departs, Antonio tells Solanio that Shylock hates him because he used to loan money to men who were in debt to Shylock, thus preventing Shylock from collecting the forfeiture. Antonio is prepared to pay his "bloody creditor" the next day in court, but prays that Bassanio will arrive in time to watch him die.

### Act III, Scene Four

Portia and Nerissa, worried about their new husbands, tell Lorenzo that they are going to stay at a local monastery for a few days in order to pray. After Lorenzo and Jessica leave, Portia sends her servant [Balthasar](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#balthasar) to her cousin Doctor Bellario with instructions that Balthasar should bring anything Bellario gives him to Venice. Portia then informs Nerissa that they are going to dress up as men and go to Venice in order to help their husbands.

### Act III, Scene Five

[Lancelot](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lancelot) and Jessica are in an argument over whether she can be saved by God since she was born a Jew. Lancelot tells her that since both her parents are Jews, she is damned. She protests that she can be saved once she becomes a Christian because her husband Lorenzo is a Christian. Lancelot then makes a joke, and says that Lorenzo is a bad man because by converting all the Jews he is raising the price of pork (since Jews do not eat pork, but Christians do). Lorenzo then arrives and orders Lancelot to go inside and prepare the table for dinner. He and Jessica praise Portia for being such a wonderful hostess before entering the house to get their dinner.

### Analysis

By far the most interpreted and critiqued section of this act is Shylock's famous speech:

"Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooked by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? 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? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

This passage has been interpreted in many ways, from comedic to villainous to tragic. In the twentieth century, it has almost always taken on a tragic character as a result of WWII. Shylock speaks the lines to defend his resolution to take a pound of Antonio's flesh. However, the passage is difficult to interpret because of Shylock's position in the society. As a Jew, he could not have been on the street screaming for revenge, since this would only lead to more persecution. Thus, one interpretation has taken the lines to be comic, in the sense of using comedy as a mask to hide fear. Like a child who makes jokes out of insecurity, Shylock tries to defend his right to exact the pound of flesh.

Bassanio's choosing from the caskets has also generated controversy. Portia first begs Bassanio to wait at least a month, hoping to spend time with him before he chooses among the caskets. When he refuses to wait, she plays music for him. Some scholars have noted that each of the rhymes of the song rhyme with lead, thus providing a subconscious hint. What is interesting is that Bassanio differs from the other suitors in not reading the inscriptions. Thus he is forced to choose with his eyes alone, saying, "Therefore, thou gaudy gold, / hard food for Midas, I will none of thee. / Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge / Tween man and man" (3.2.100-103). He refers to the fact that gold denotes greed, and thus is worthless as it was for Midas who could not even eat his food because it turned to gold on him. Silver represents money, or coins, passing between men and therefore Bassanio rejects it as well. The lead casket symbolizes his penchant for risk-taking, and indeed the scroll reads as much, "must hazard all he has." Bassanio is an insider, a risk-taker who likes the threat that lead poses, and a man who espouses the Christian ideal of "the last shall be first."

The fact that Bassanio is able to choose the casket without reading the inscription is in some sense born out by the scroll. The scroll says, "You that choose not by the view / Chance as fair and choose as true" (3.2.131-132). However, there is a converse to Bassanio's risk-taking, namely Portia. Portia takes her own risk each time suitor chooses, and is forced to give Bassanio all that she has. "Myself and what is mine is now to you and what is yours converted" (3.2.166). She does not have a choice in this matter, since it is ordained by her dead father's will.

Portia further gives Bassanio a ring, making him promise to wear it forever. This is an inversion of the marriage ceremony, and is her way of testing Bassanio's fidelity and love. In Shakespeare's time it was more often the women who were accused of infidelity, tricking their husbands. Portia cleverly reverses this by making Bassanio swear to keep the faith with her.

The imagery of sheep emerges again in this act, this time in a Christian setting rather than a Jewish one. Graziano says, "We are the Jasons; we have won the fleece" (3.2.240). This Christian take on the sheep imagery is interesting because it is so different from Shylock's interpretation. Rather than make money breed, the Christians prefer to risk everything in search of gaining everything.

Bassanio requires this interpretation, he is after all a gentleman, and therefore considers monetary issues to be beneath him. This is in opposition even to Antonio, who still regards money as a necessity. Bassanio prefers instead to rely on his breeding for success. He tells Portia, "I freely told you all the wealth I had / Ran in my veins: I was a gentleman;" (3.2.253-254).

There has been a great deal of scholarly interest in the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio. Antonio's comments and undeniable willingness to support Bassanio have led many to conclude that there is a homoerotic undercurrent to their relationship. Indeed, Antonio's desire at the end is not to keep his life but rather that, "Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not" (3.3.35-36). Although it may stretch the plot to argue for a homosexual relationship between the two men, what cannot be disregarded is the way in which Portia carefully removes Antonio from the plot at the end. This will be seen later in the play, where she is the one to free him from the contract, and is later the person to inform him about his ships. Thus any relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is trumped by the marriage with Portia, who will further draw Bassanio to her by playing a ring trick on him (see acts four and five).

The fact that women never explicitly appear in Venice is reinforced in this act as well. Portia and Nerissa must first pretend to go to a monastery in order to escape from Belmont, where Lorenzo and Jessica are staying. Portia also contrives to dress them as men in order to go to Venice. She further uses her kinship with Doctor Bellario to give her credibility and allow her to control the actions in the upcoming scenes. However, what can never be denied is the fact that Portia still relies on a man for her credibility, and requires a man's dress in order to alter events in the play.

# Merchant of Venice Summary and Analysis of Act 4

### Act IV, Scene One

[Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio) is brought before the Duke of Venice to stand trial for failing to pay off his obligation to [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#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" (4.1.58-60).

[Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#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?" (4.1.87). 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](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#salerio) tells him that a messenger has just come from Bellario, and [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia) enters dressed as a man, pretending to be a doctor named [Balthasar](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#balthasar).

Portia tells the Duke that she has thoroughly studied the case and then asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.169). 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!" (4.1.218). 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. 'Tis not in the bond" (4.1.257).

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.

Shylock instead asks the Duke to kill him, saying, "Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that. / You take my house when you do take the prop / That doth sustain my house; you take my life /When you do take the means whereby I live" (4.1.369-373). Antonio intervenes on Shylock's behalf, and asks the Duke to allow Shylock to keep half of his wealth. He further offers to take care of the half he was awarded as a form of inheritance for [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica) and [Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo). The only requirements Antonio puts on his offer are that Shylock must convert and become a Christian, and further that he must give everything he owns to Lorenzo upon his death.

Shylock, wretched and having lost everything he owns, tells the court that he is content to accept these conditions. The Duke leaves and tells Antonio to thank the young doctor who has saved his life. Bassanio and [Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) go to Portia and thank her profusely, and Bassanio offers the young doctor anything he wants. Portia decides to test her husband's trustworthiness, and asks him for the engagement ring, the ring which she made him vow never to part with. He refuses, and Portia and Nerissa leave. However, at Antonio's urging, Bassanio takes off the ring and gives it to Graziano, telling him to take it to Portia and invite her to dinner that night at Antonio's.

### Act IV, Scene Two

Portia gives Nerissa the deed by which Shylock will pass his inheritance to Lorenzo. She tells Nerissa to take it to Shylock's house and make him sign it. At the moment Graziano catches up with the two women and gives the ring to Portia. She is surprised that Bassanio parted with it after all, and Nerissa decides to test Graziano in the same way. Nerissa takes the deed and asks Graziano to show her the way to Shylock's house.

### Analysis

Shylock's reasons for wanting to kill Antonio come across as very arbitrary and obscure. He compares his desire to kill Antonio with "Some men there are love not a gaping pig, / Some that are mad if they behold a cat" (4.1.46-47). He follows this with the statement, "So can I give no reason, nor I will not, / More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing / I bear Antonio" (4.1.58-60). This inability on Shylock’s part to give a concrete answer as to why he wants to kill Antonio can only be explained by understanding the doubling between Shylock and Antonio.

This doubling of Shylock and Antonio takes place through the way they use money and family. Antonio starts the play unable to make his money breed because he takes no interest. He further has no wife or children and therefore emerges as an impotent character. Antonio reveals in Act Four what sort of person he represents: "I am a tainted wether of the flock" (4.1.113). The "wether" is a castrated male sheep, thus directly stating the fact that Antonio is unable to breed. Shylock starts the play on the opposite extreme, able to make his money breed with interest and his family breed through Jessica. However, it is Antonio who convinces him to not take interest on this particular bond, and it is later Antonio whom Shylock accuses of allowing Jessica to escape. Thus for Shylock, Antonio represents the man who made him impotent as well. His hatred towards Antonio can thereby be explained. It is further irony that in this act Antonio makes Shylock convert to Christianity, thus removing even that distinction between the two men. In essence, the destroyed Shylock at the end of the play is very similar to the melancholy Antonio in the beginning.

Portia adds to this sense of doubling when she arrives in the court. She asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.169). Indeed, given the confusion so many people have with the title, it is often this very question which is asked. Scholars have tried to attribute her question to blind justice, arguing that Portia does not want to show any favorites. However, on an Elizabethan stage she would be able to recognize Shylock immediately from his distinctive dress.

The essence of doubling is reinforced even more with the double exclusion of the two men at the end of the play. Antonio, having received half of Shylock's wealth, essentially takes over for Shylock by using Shylock's money. Scholars have debated about the nature of the "merry bond" between Shylock and Antonio. Some have suggested Shylock meant to circumcise Antonio, others think he meant to make Antonio take over his place. The fact that Shylock accepts a Christian condition of taking no interest is supposedly offset by the fact that if Shylock wins, Antonio must act Jewish.

Another interesting interpretation deals with why Antonio must stand trial at all. In the Bible Paul said that Jewishness is an internal condition, not external. This implies that Shylock is Jewish not because he was born that way, but because he acts that way. Thus Antonio's mistreatment of Shylock violates this explanation of Jewishness by despising Shylock because of his external features. It is this sin for which Antonio is judged.

Throughout this play there is also the concept of the scapegoat. The scapegoat was used as a way of purging a town of its sins by heaping them onto the unfortunate animal instead. The town would drive one goat out of town and sacrifice another.

The [Merchant of Venice](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice), with Shylock clearly driven out of society and Antonio representing the goat about to be sacrificed.

One of the great ironies of this play is where Shylock calls Portia, "A Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel!" (4.1.218). Daniel was the biblical judge of Susanna, a woman accused of in chastity by the Elders. The story is famous because Daniel rules in Susanna's favor, thus rescuing her. In addition to freeing her, he then further convicts the Elders. Shylock's mistake is that he is premature in calling Portia a Daniel, because he is the one who represents the Elders, and Antonio signifies Susanna. This inversion comes only a few lines later, when Portia not only frees Antonio, but convicts Shylock of attempted murder.

The relationship between Antonio and Bassanio comes to the forefront in this section. Antonio can literally be seen as a lover of Bassanio, willing to die for him (4.1.260-274). This creates the conflict between Portia and Antonio, a conflict she is willing to test by demanding that Bassanio give her his ring. The fact that Bassanio parts with the ring for Antonio's sake, as does Graziano, implies that Bassanio chooses Antonio over Portia. This of course is unacceptable, as is seen in the next act where Portia severally chastises Bassanio for loving a man more than he loves her.

The rings have a further meaning though. They are given by Bassanio and Graziano as a token of respect and friendship to people they deem to be men. Thus the ultimate symbolism is that the rings are given to friends who are also their wives. This fusion of friendship and marriage is an unusual one, and serves to strengthen the relationship between the couples.

# Merchant of Venice Summary and Analysis of Act 5

### Act V, Scene One

[Lorenzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lorenzo) and [Jessica](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#jessica), still at Belmont, sit outside and enjoy the night. They compare the night to the stories of [Troilus and Cressida](https://www.gradesaver.com/troilus-and-cressida), Pyramus and Thisbe, and Dido and Aeneus, and then extend the analogy to their own love affair. They are interrupted by [Stefano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#stefano), who tells them that [Portia](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#portia) is returning home with [Nerissa](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#nerissa). [Lancelot](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#lancelot) then arrives and informs Lorenzo that [Bassanio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#bassanio) will also be back by morning. Both Lorenzo and Jessica return to the house and listen to music.

Portia and Nerissa, dressed as themselves again, return home and enter the building. Lorenzo recognizes Portia's voice and comes to greet her. She orders the servants to pretend as if she had never left, and asks Lorenzo and Jessica to do the same.

Soon thereafter Bassanio, [Graziano](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#graziano) and [Antonio](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#antonio) arrive.

Nerissa demands that Graziano show her the ring he gave away to Portia's "clerk" in Venice. They start to argue over it, with Graziano defending his action as a form of kindness for Antonio. Portia overhears them and pretends to "discover" what happened. She then demands that Bassanio show her his ring, which he of course cannot do. Portia and Nerissa then berate their husbands for giving away the rings, and even tell them that they would prefer to sleep with the doctor and his clerk rather than with their unfaithful husbands.

Antonio offers his assurance that neither Bassanio nor Graziano will ever give away their wives' gifts again. Portia thanks him and asks him to give Bassanio another ring to keep. Bassanio looks at the ring and recognizes it as being the same ring he gave away. Portia then tells him that the doctor came back to Belmont and slept with her. Bassanio is amazed and does not know how to respond.

Portia finally clears up the confusion by informing Bassanio that she and Nerissa were the doctor and the clerk. She further has good news for Antonio, namely a letter that indicates that three of his ships arrived in port safely. Nerissa then hands Lorenzo the deed from [Shylock](https://www.gradesaver.com/merchant-of-venice/study-guide/character-list#shylock) in which he inherits everything after Shylock dies. The play ends with Graziano promising to forever keep Nerissa's ring safe.

### Analysis

One of the most ridiculous moments in this act involves Lorenzo and Jessica, who compare their love with the three disastrous love stories. They invoke Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Dido and Aeneus as their models. This is ironic in the highest degree because all the invoked lovers are failures. For example, Pyramus and Thisbe commit suicide, and Dido kills herself when Aeneus leaves her. This hearkens back to the ease with which Jessica handed over the casket in the previous acts. Their love never underwent any form of test, either with the casket, or with the rings, which Jessica apparently trades for a monkey (3.1). Thus they in a sense condemn their love to failure like those of the failed lovers. Much of this scene involves Portia and Nerissa teaching their husbands the value of the marriage. The gifts of the rings serve to represent the sanctity and holy promise of the marriage. Thus, for Bassanio and Graziano to give away the rings is a violation of their marriage contract, a sign that they love Antonio more than their wives. Since this cannot be allowed, Portia uses her ring trick to force Bassanio to give up Antonio. The joke that Portia creates is when she says, "I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow" (5.1.232), thus implying that Bassanio needs to realize the ring is given to him alone, and that giving it away violates the relationship implicit in their marriage contract.

The twinning and oppositeness of Antonio and Shylock was remarked on earlier in the analysis. This same twinning and oppositeness exists between Belmont and Venice. Belmont represents music and leisure, Venice signifies money and laws. However, as Belmont is of course built upon the money from Venice, it depends on gold and inheritance. This is seen most clearly when the deed from Shylock is handed to Lorenzo, which is similar to the way Portia derives her wealth in Belmont from a dead father's will. However, the luxury of Belmont is not necessarily considered positive. Venice produces merchants such as Antonio, whereas Belmont produces Lorenzo, a lazy beggar.

The three pairs of lovers represent the comic ending. But what should be a happy ending is violated and broken by Antonio and Shylock. Both men remain outsiders at the end of the play, alone and removed from the happy luxury of Belmont. Both outsiders also have been immasculated by the end. Shylock via the loss of his money and his daughter, Antonio by losing Bassanio to Portia. The lowest level of Antonio's defeat is when Portia hands him his money and ships at the end, essentially telling him to return to Venice and forget about Bassanio.

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

### Self-Interest Versus Love

On the surface, the main difference between the Christian characters and Shylock appears to be that the Christian characters value human relationships over business ones, whereas Shylock is only interested in money. The Christian characters certainly view the matter this way. Merchants like Antonio lend money free of interest and put themselves at risk for those they love, whereas Shylock agonizes over the loss of his money and is reported to run through the streets crying, “O, my ducats! O, my daughter!” (II.viii.15). With these words, he apparently values his money at least as much as his daughter, suggesting that his greed outweighs his love. However, upon closer inspection, this supposed difference between Christian and Jew breaks down. When we see Shylock in Act III, scene I, he seems more hurt by the fact that his daughter sold a ring that was given to him by his dead wife before they were married than he is by the loss of the ring’s monetary value. Some human relationships do indeed matter to Shylock more than money. Moreover, his insistence that he have a pound of flesh rather than any amount of money shows that his resentment is much stronger than his greed.

Just as Shylock’s character seems hard to pin down, the Christian characters also present an inconsistent picture. Though Portia and Bassanio come to love one another, Bassanio seeks her hand in the first place because he is monstrously in debt and needs her money. Bassanio even asks Antonio to look at the money he lends Bassanio as an investment, though Antonio insists that he lends him the money solely out of love. In other words, Bassanio is anxious to view his relationship with Antonio as a matter of business rather than of love. Finally, Shylock eloquently argues that Jews are human beings just as Christians are, but Christians such as Antonio hate Jews simply because they are Jews. Thus, while the Christian characters may talk more about mercy, love, and charity, they are not always consistent in how they display these qualities.

### The Divine Quality of Mercy

The conflict between Shylock and the Christian characters comes to a head over the issue of mercy. The other characters acknowledge that the law is on Shylock’s side, but they all expect him to show mercy, which he refuses to do. When, during the trial, Shylock asks Portia what could possibly compel him to be merciful, Portia’s long reply, beginning with the words, “The quality of mercy is not strained,” clarifies what is at stake in the argument (IV.i.179). Human beings should be merciful because God is merciful: mercy is an attribute of God himself and therefore greater than power, majesty, or law. Portia’s understanding of mercy is based on the way Christians in Shakespeare’s time understood the difference between the Old and New Testaments. According to the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament, the Old Testament depicts God as requiring strict adherence to rules and exacting harsh punishments for those who stray. The New Testament, in contrast, emphasizes adherence to the spirit rather than the letter of the law, portraying a God who forgives rather than punishes and offers salvation to those followers who forgive others. Thus, when Portia warns Shylock against pursuing the law without regard for mercy, she is promoting what Elizabethan Christians would have seen as a pro-Christian, anti-Jewish agenda.

The strictures of Renaissance drama demanded that Shylock be a villain, and, as such, patently unable to show even a drop of compassion for his enemy. A sixteenth-century audience would not expect Shylock to exercise mercy—therefore, it is up to the Christians to do so. Once she has turned Shylock’s greatest weapon—the law—against him, Portia has the opportunity to give freely of the mercy for which she so beautifully advocates. Instead, she backs Shylock into a corner, where she strips him of his bond, his estate, and his dignity, forcing him to kneel and beg for mercy. Given that Antonio decides not to seize Shylock’s goods as punishment for conspiring against him, we might consider Antonio to be merciful. But we may also question whether it is merciful to return to Shylock half of his goods, only to take away his religion and his profession. By forcing Shylock to convert, Antonio disables him from practicing usury, which, according to Shylock’s reports, was Antonio’s primary reason for berating and spitting on him in public. Antonio’s compassion, then, seems to stem as much from self-interest as from concern for his fellow man. Mercy, as delivered in *The Merchant of Venice,* never manages to be as sweet, selfless, or full of grace as Portia presents it.

### Hatred as a Cyclical Phenomenon

Throughout the play, Shylock claims that he is simply applying the lessons taught to him by his Christian neighbors; this claim becomes an integral part of both his character and his argument in court. In Shylock’s very first appearance, as he conspires to harm Antonio, his entire plan seems to be born of the insults and injuries Antonio has inflicted upon him in the past. As the play continues, and Shylock unveils more of his reasoning, the same idea rears its head over and over—he is simply applying what years of abuse have taught him. Responding to Salarino’s query of what good the pound of flesh will do him, Shylock responds, “The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction” (III.i.60–61). Not all of Shylock’s actions can be blamed on poor teachings, and one could argue that Antonio understands his own culpability in his near execution. With the trial’s conclusion, Antonio demands that Shylock convert to Christianity, but inflicts no other punishment, despite the threats of fellow Christians like Gratiano. Antonio does not, as he has in the past, kick or spit on Shylock. Antonio, as well as the duke, effectively ends the conflict by starving it of the injustices it needs to continue.

**Shylock and Barabas: A Study in Character**

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SHYLOCK AND BARABAS: A STUDY IN HARACTER.

Shylock and Barabas, though generally regarded as types of the same race, as representatives of the same faith, are in truth very different beings, and the worlds in which they move lie very far apart. In all English literature there is perhaps no character less human and more repulsive than Barabas, while Shylock is thoroughly human and quite had our sympathy. The one is a devil in the guise of man, the other a man with just enough of the devil in him to make him appear terrible. In the rage of Shylock we hear the cry of anguish coming from the depth of a human soul; the mutterings of Barabas are to us as unintelligible as the snarling of a wild beast. Barabas is absurd and unreal; Shylock is plausible and tangible. The few points of re semblance between them are only of an accidental nature. Both are labeled with the name Jew, both are rich, and both are outraged by their neighbors. Each is forsaken by his own child, each seeks to revenge the wrong done him, and each falls in the end a victim to his own stratagems. But here all comparisons end. Between the souls of these two beings there is not the slightest affinity. Barabas is the greatest egoist in literature. "Ego mihimet sum simper proximus " is his watchword in life (J., I., I., 193).1 He loves no one but himself. Though he associates with the Jews of Malta, and takes interest in the affairs of their community (J., L, I., 108, 117-137, 148, 149), still, when they come to him for advice, he deceives them with fair words (J., I., ii., 161-164), sends them away under the impression that he will protect them (J., I., I., 176-179), but, in the end, looks only to his own affairs (J., I., I., 181 194). He has " no charge, nor many children, but one sole daughter," Abigail, whom he pretends to love as much as Agamemnon loved Iphigenia (J., L, I., 139-141). Affected by her father's misfortune, she is ready to run to the Senate House, there to reprehend all the officers of the state, and rend their hearts till they redress the wrong done to her aged Barabas (J., I., ii., 228-235). Though scarce fourteen (ibid., 374), there is nothing she will not attempt for him (ibid., 274-276). And yet, merely to revenge himself on the Governor of Malta, Barabas causes the death of the unoffending Don Mathias (J., III., iii., 47), on whose life depended the happiness of his only daughter, his devoted Abigail (ibid., 52). In his slave, Ithamore, Barabas finds a reliable accomplice. " My trusty servant " he calls him, my second self" (J., III., iv., 15). Between them the same relation is established that held Fagin and Sikes together: Barabas plans, and Ithamore executes (J., II., iii., 373). But even this faithful accomplice is deceived by him. " Be true and secret," says Barabas to his slave, " thou shalt want no gold " (ibid., 219), and yet he keeps him in rags (J., IV., iv., 42 45). Anxious to have Ithamore carry out his plans, Bara bas promises him all sorts of compensations. He tells him that he regards him no longer as a servant, but as a friend, that he will adopt him on the spot as his heir. All will be his when he is dead, and while he lives he allows him to use one-half, spend as much as himself (J., III., iv., 91, 118, 119). " My purse, my coffer, and myself is thine ! " (ibid., 91-93), he assures him. Nay, Barabas pretends even to be willing to deliver the keys to him (ibid., 46). But all this is sheer cunning. Ithamore remains the same poor, shabby slave that he was, and he is never " richer than in hope" (ibid., 52, 53). From egotism there is but one step to misanthropy, and we are not shocked in the least to hear Barabas brutally ex claim: " For as I live, perish may all the world " (J., V., v., 2)!

Shylock and Barabas: A Study in Character. 339 Shylock, on the other hand, if not generous, is at least not mean. The honor of his people is as dear to him as his own, and to hear his nation scorned is as painful to him as to have his bargains thwarted or his friends cooled (M., I., iii., 43; III., I. 48). He loves his daughter even after she deceived him. And although in the first moments of excitement and anger he wishes his daughter were dead at his foot, and the jewels in her ears, hearsed at his foot and the ducats in her coffin (M., III., I., 76, 77), still, after his wrath has subsided, he sorrows for her, and pities her lot as a Christian's wife (M., IV., I., 290-293). Even Launcelot, his servant, who believes every Jew damned (M., III., v., 5), says that if he were to be ruled by his conscience, he would stay by the Jew his master (M., IL, ii., 19, 20). His statement to Bassanio that the Jew had done him wrong (ibid., 120, 121) is on the face of it a fiction, invented on the spur of the moment to excuse himself for leaving the service of Shylock. Launcelot's real reason for entering the service of Bassanio was to get "rare new liveries" (ibid., 100). And Bassanio himself, though he dislikes Shylock, doubts, nevertheless, if there is any preferment in leaving Shylock's services for his own (ibid., 133-135). Barabas is a miser, "who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed " (J., Prologue, 31). He loves gold even for its glitter. The mere idea of possession fills his heart with delight and exultation. He sings over his money bags as the lark does over her young (J., IL, I., 59-62). Gliding about the place where his treasures are hidden, he exclaims: " For whilst I live, here lives my soul's sole hope, And when I die, here shall my spirit walk." (J., II., I., 29, 30.) His ways of living, as described by Ithamore, are typical of the miser. " He lives upon pickled grasshoppers and mush rooms " (J., IV., vi., 64, 65). " He never put on a clean shirt since he was circumcised " (ibid., 68, 69). " The hat he wears, Judas left under the elder when he hanged himself " (ibid., 71, 72). And as to his treasured wealth, " he hides and buries it up, as partridges do their eggs, under the hen.” (ibid., 64, 65).

This description, it is true, is somewhat exaggerated, and in one instance positively false. An egoist like Barabas would scarcely forego his personal com forts, and we do in fact find that Ithamore rather relished the food he got in the house of Barabas (J., III., iv., 49, 50, 89, 90, 107). We also find that the house of Barabas was as great and fair as the governor's (J., II., iii., 13, 14). We might, therefore, believe Barabas when he says that the governor does not feed so well as he (J., IV., vi., 66-70), yet there is no doubt that he is a miser. His own tongue betrays him. He must have a servant, he says, "that is sickly and but for sparing victuals " (J., II., iii., 125, 126). And this servant he cheats of his clothes? Nay, robs him of his wages (J., III., iv., 115). His whole life is ruled by the single desire of heaping up infinite riches. The accumulation of wealth is his only happiness in life (J., II., I., 44). It is true that in pleading with the authorities of Malta he speaks of his wealth as the comfort of his age and the hope of his children (J., I., I., 150). In reality, however, he regards his riches more as a means of frightening his enemies than as a means of comfort (J., II., I., 47, 48). And if he does not grieve over small losses (J., II., iii., 246-248), it is because

" things past recovery are hardly cured with exclamations " (J., I., ii., 236, 237). In short, he is, as he himself says, " a covetous wretch, that would for lucre's sake have sold his soul " (J., IV., I., 56, 57). Shylock cannot be charged with niggardliness. He is frugal, thrifty, but not miserly. He does not fret over his money bags, nor does he hide his treasures in secret places. His daughter, Jessica, has free access to his ducats and his diamonds (M., II., vi., 33, 49, 50). He trusts the keys to her (M., II., v., 12), and she is as free with his money (M., II., iii., 4) as if she were sole mistress of the house, with no one to bring her to account for her spending. Sometimes he even leaves the house in charge of his servant (M., I., iii., 170, 171). He does not waste his money on " rare new liveries" for his servants, but he does not lead them in rags, either. His habits, it is true, are of a sober kind (M., IL, v., 35), and his domestic life is rather monotonous (M., II., iii., 3), but this is not due to parsimony. It springs from religious scruples. He regards his wealth not only as a means whereby to live, but also as a sign of his thriftiness, and it is as such that he holds it dear. He is not engrossed in merely accumulating wealth. His religion plays an important part in his life as well. The synagogue is his second home (M., III., I., 112, 113). Shylock is a man that abides by the law, and is conscious of his integrity. "What judgment shall I dread," he ex claims, " doing no wrong " (M., IV., I., 89) ? He does not seem to think that it is wicked to crave for vengeance. If it is, he reasons, then the whole world is steeped in crime. Shall a Christian take revenge of a Jew who wrongs him, and shall a Jew not be allowed to deal with the Christian in the same manner (M., III., I., 56-61 ) ? In his whole career, he thinks, there is nothing for which he might be blamed. If he thrived on interest, it was not his fault. Just as it was right for Jacob, when Laban withheld from him any other compensation, to contrive that the sheep should " fall party colored lambs," so might he also be justified in thriving on interest when his Christian neighbors have shut all other avenues of commerce before him (M., I., iii.. 66-91). Among all his enemies, not one knows to tell anything of him which might prejudice us against his uprightness, not one can throw the least suspicion on his character. Antonio, his bitterest enemy, charges him with "envy," "fury," "tyranny," and "rage" (M., IV., I., 10-13), but not with violating the law. Bassanio calls him "unfeeling man" (ibid., 63); Gratiano, "harsh Jew, of wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous desires" (ibid., 123, 128). Salerio describes him as "keen and greedy to confound a man" (M., III., ii., 278). It is only in his absence that the Duke of Venice speaks of him as " a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch, incapable of pity, void and empty of any dram of mercy" (M., IV., I., 4-6), but in his presence he declares that the world thinks, and he himself believes, that Shylock " but leads the fashion of malice " (ibid., 17, 18). Among all these bitter enemies, no one impugns his honesty, no one doubts his integrity, no one disputes his right to his acquired wealth. Barabas, on the other hand, is a confirmed criminal, and is himself aware of the extent and awfulness of his villainy (J., V., v., 51, 52). Nay, he even prides himself on it, and boasts of his murders as of some great achievements. No sooner has he learned the name of his newly bought slave than he reveals to him his own past life, in all its heinousness. In a calm tone, as if telling of charitable deeds, he relates to him the most atrocious crimes of his life. He "kills sick people groaning under walls," he says; sometimes he poisons wells. In his youth he used his medical skill to enrich the priests with burials. After that, in the capacity of an engineer, he slew friend and enemy" with his stratagems. Then he became a usurer, and filled the jails with bankrupts, made some one mad every moon, and occasionally caused some one to hang himself for grief (J., II., iii., 177-202). That a man of so cunning and suspicious a nature should so frankly embosom himself to a stranger does at first appear strange and inexplicable. But the history of famous criminals has proven that it is the propensity of him who sheds human blood to seek the friendship and intimacy of his fellow-man, even at the risk of discovery. Besides, there must have been something in the appearance of Ithamore to assure Barabas that he had no reason to fear. And the end bears this out very well. For Ithamore soon learns to admire his master. " Why, was there ever such villainy," he exclaims, "so neatly plotted and so well per formed " (J., III., iii., 1, 2)? And Barabas, likewise, being confirmed in his opinion that his slave was his compeer, says : “Make count of me as of thy fellow; we are villains both " (J., IL, iii., 216, 217)! In their capacity for hatred, as in other traits of character, Shylock and Barabas differ very much from one another, Shylock hates only a particular class of people, and his hatred is tempered with reason and human feeling. Barabas breathes hatred against the whole world, and his hatred is wild and savage in its cruelty. Shylock dislikes Bassanio, because his "thrifty" mind cannot tolerate one that squanders his "borrowed purse." And he hates Antonio for reasons that are even less objectionable. Antonio has stained him with shame (M., I., iii., 134) and injured him in a thou sand different ways, thwarted his bargains, and scorned his nation, and all for the use of that which is his own (ibid., 108). Barabas, on the other hand, though harmed by no one, cares not if the enemy conquers and kills all his fellow citizens if only he, his daughter, and his wealth be spared (J., I., I., 156, 157). Shylock, if he cannot forget, can nevertheless endure an injury. He has an infinite amount of patience. After all the harm that Antonio has done him, he only bears a grudge against him. He makes no effort to revenge himself. He suffers insults with a "patient shrug," and soothes his vexed spirit with the hope that, if he can catch him once on the hip, he will "feed fat the ancient grudge” (M., I., iii. 41, 42). But he does not resort to wicked and unlawful means. He does not plot mischief. And it is an illusion, under which even artists like Sir Henry Irving labor, to suppose that Shylock had planned his revenge on Antonio from the moment that he asked him to go to the notary and sign for him his single bond.1 Shylock, first of all, is too simple a nature for that. He is cautious, prudent, at times even skeptical (M., IL, v., 12, 13, 16, 17, 36), but he is not cunning. If he were, he would not have refused Bassanio in vitiation so rudely, at the moment when they were about to close a bargain (M., I., iii. 29-33). If he had any cunning in him, he would not have told the friends of Antonio that he was bent upon having the due and forfeit of his bond (M., III. I., 37-46). He would not have asked Tuba! To "bespeak" an officer a fortnight before the bond expired (ibid. 108, 109); he would rather have preferred secrecy, and concealed his intentions from Antonio, so as not to give him a chance to escape at the last moment. But apart from this, we can hardly understand how Shy lock could count on revenge at that far-off date. Did not Antonio say, in the presence of Shylock, that a month before the bond expired he expected the return of nine times the value of the bond (M., I., iii. 151-154)? And was it impossible for Antonio to get a loan in time of need? Was it not by mere accident that everything turned against Antonio? How, then, could Shylock count on revenge, when everything depended on chance? It is difficult to say, with any degree of certainty, what Shylock's intention was at first. He might, perhaps, have desired to put Antonio under a great obligation, so as not to be molested by him in the future. But it is very clear that, later on, Shylock wanted to rid the Venetian market of Antonio. He wanted to frighten him and drive him out of Venice. "For, were he out of Venice," says Shylock to his friend,” I can make what merchandise I will” (M., III. I., no, in). Only at the last moment, when he fails in this, and Antonio remains in Venice in spite of his dreadful threats, hoping that Shylock would relent in the end and yield to the intercession of the Duke and the magnificoes, only when it appears to him that Antonio and his friends were trying to make a " soft and dull-eyed fool " of him, only then does his sense of revenge grow keen and fierce and in human. But we are perhaps wrong in designating Shylock's course of action as inhuman, since Antonio himself calls it only "rigorous" (M., IV. I., 8), and Portia, in the capacity of lawyer, considers it to be of a " strange nature, . . . yet in such rule that the Venetian law cannot impugn" him for it (ibid., 172-174). We must not expect Shylock to be ahead of his time. We cannot demand that he be more human than his fellow-citizens. As soon as we yield to the poet's fancy, and allow ourselves to be transported by him into a strange age, when so virtuous a father as Portia's (M., I., ii., 24) hands his daughter over to the caprice of fortune, and so good and kind a gentleman as Antonio (M., IL, viii., 35) spits upon and spurns his fellow-citizen for no reason but that he differs from him in faith, and the highest authorities of the state consider it legal to pledge one's flesh, nay, one's life, for a loan of money; as soon as we grant this to be the normal state of society, we have no right to judge the actions of the characters by the standard of morality of our own time. In the Venice of Shakespeare Shylock is quite human. Different, however, is the case of Barabas. For his actions we can find no excuse. There is nothing in his surroundings to palliate his crimes. They all originate from his own wicked nature. Unlike Shylock, he does not allow a grudge of his to grow "ancient." Though deprived of but a small part of his fortune (J., L, ii. 226), he seeks for immediate revenge. His cunning knows no bounds. His whole life is one long chain of treacherous schemes. All who come in contact with him are made his dupes. Even his best friends are victims of his deceit. His brethren in faith, his partner in crimes? Nay, his own child? All alike pay the penalty for having once enjoyed his confidence. His brethren are misled by him (J., I., I., 143-194), his daughter is poisoned through him, and his slave would have been killed by him, even if he had remained faithful (J., III. iv. 116). Barabas only waited for the moment when he should no longer have any use for him. Barabas's flattery out flatters Satan's, and his art of ingratiating himself into the good wishes of everybody, not excepting his enemies, is remarkable. Though he uses every one that comes in his way as an instrument of his pleasure, he plays the part of benefactor. He asks his daughter to regain his hidden treasures, not for his sake, but for her -own (J., I., ii., 297). He entreats Ithamore to carry out his murderous schemes against his daughter, not because he fears discovery, as is really the case, but because he is anxious to make Ithamore his sole heir, now that his daughter, he legality of the bond is emphasized over and over again in the following twenty passages in the " Merchant of Venice:" II., viii., 8; III., L, 37-46; ii., 280,285; iii., 8, 26; IV., I., 9-10,39,83, 89, 100-103,142, 172-174, 193, 198-200, 201, 226-228, 242-244, 294-295, 297-298. He has turned Christian (J., III., iv., 61-64; IV., I., 18, 19).. He can fawn like a spaniel when he pleases. When he grins he bites, yet are his looks as innocent and harmless as a lamb's. "I learned in Florence," he says, " how to kiss my hand, heave up my shoulders when they call me dog, and duck as low as any barefoot friar" (J., IL, iii., 20-25). His cruel heart knows no feeling of friendship, and he cares not if his friend perish along with his enemy, as long as his enemy perish (ibid., 192). He has no scruples of any kind. Remorse never troubles his heart. Even at the gates of death he gasps out hatred and vengeance against the world, instead of regret and repentance (J., V., v., 81-93). If anything reveals character, it is one's attitude toward inferiors and dependents. And in this respect Shylock and Barabas are great contrasts. Barabas lacks all dignity. He dines with his slave (J., III., iv., 50), and jokes at his slave (J., IL, iii., 113-119), and allows his slave to joke at him (J., III., iv., 59, 60). He makes a bosom friend of Ithamore, calls him by all kinds of endearing names? his friend, his " second self." He even permits him to lay hands on Abigail (J., IL, iii., 366, 367). But, on the other hand, he always keeps him under watch, trusts him with nothing save poison or a letter of challenge, and is extremely frightened when Ithamore leaves his service (J., IV., v., 42-67). With Shylock it is just the contrary. He would disdain to shake hands with his servant. He possesses too much pride and self-respect to permit Launcelot to take liberties with him, and is worth when the latter allows himself to call Jessica by name without being bidden (M., IL, v., 7), or to talk to her in privacy (M., IL, iii. 8, 9; IL, v., 43). Still, he often leaves the house in guard of Launcelot (M., L, iii. 170, 171), employs him in his business (M., IL, v., 46)”, and, when parting with his services, has a kind word for him (ibid. 45: “The patch is kind enough "), and even speaks well of him to his new master (M., IL, ii. 132? 135). Shylock complains of Launcelot that he is " snail-slow in profit." lie must, therefore, have employed him in business, and not in their moral character alone, but in their intellectual attainments as well, in their culture and education, in their philosophy of life and their religious beliefs, these two men are most unlike each other. Shylock is a man of moderate intellectual attainments. He has great moral force, but his learning is scanty. His will is stupendously strong (M., IV. I., 235-237), but his sympathies are narrow. He is the type of the average Jew of the Middle Ages, with all his faults and merits. Persecuted by his neighbors, he withdraws into himself for intellectual nourishment, and ignores everything that is not Jewish. He recognizes no classics, knows nothing of mythology, and cares not for profane sciences. The Bible and the later rabbinical literature satisfy his mental cravings. He supports his arguments with illustrations taken from these sources (M., I., iii. 66-85) and his conversation is pregnant with illustrations from the same. (M., I., iii. 36 has reference not to Luke xviii. 10-14, but to the Sayings of the Fathers; ibid. I., iii. 29, 30, has reference to Matt. viii. 32.) The pleasures of life do not appeal to him. The amusements of his Christian neighbors are to him “shallow foppery" (M., II. v., 34). His house is as sober as his life is chaste. Life to him is a big market place, where each one must strive to be thrifty. Thriftiness is the motif to the human drama (M., I., iii. 45, 85, 171; IL, v., 46, 47, 54). He is superstitious about dreams, and believes that they affect our lives in some way (M., IL, v., 17, 18) ; but otherwise his is the same healthy religious belief which made the Jew of the Middle Ages proof against all the trials of spirit and flesh. Barabas, on the other hand, is a highly cultivated man. He is a physician and an engineer (J., II. iii. 184, 189) has traveled much and read much (ibid. 191; IL, ii. 23; III. iv. 70). He curses in a most vigorous way (ibid. 56; I., ii. 162-164), and his jokes are of the coarsest kind (J., II. iii. 116). His experience is as varied as his knowledge is extensive. He regards life as one heap of booty, of which everyone must grasp as much as he can. He seems to believe in a first cause (J., I., ii. 164), but in nothing more. Lie affiliates himself with the Jew, and would in no way convert himself to Christianity (J., I., 117-121), but his Judaism is not worth much. The articles of faith which he follows are his own, and of such a nature that Machiavelli himself would cry out against them: First be thou void of these affections, Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear, Be moved at nothing, see thou pity none. (J., IL, iii. 172-174.) In extremity we ought to make bar of no policy. (J., I., ii. 272, 273.) "If you get anything by wrong, maintain it bravely by firm policy. (J., V., iii. 36, 37). For he that lives in authority and neither gets him friends nor fills his bags, Lives like the ass that speaketh of. That labors with the load of bread and wine/ And leaves it off to snap on thistle tops. (Ibid. 39-43- ) Man for his conscience lives in beggary. (J., I., I., 122, 123.) Religion hides many mischiefs from suspicion. (J., I., ii. 281, 282.) It's no sin to deceive a Christian. (J-, IL, iii-, 3I20) In short, Barabas is a prodigy of crime, a beast in the shape of man, a fiction, and a lie. Shylock is a human being, with hands, organs, dimensions, etc., as all of us are. He is real, and we can understand him and sympathize with him.