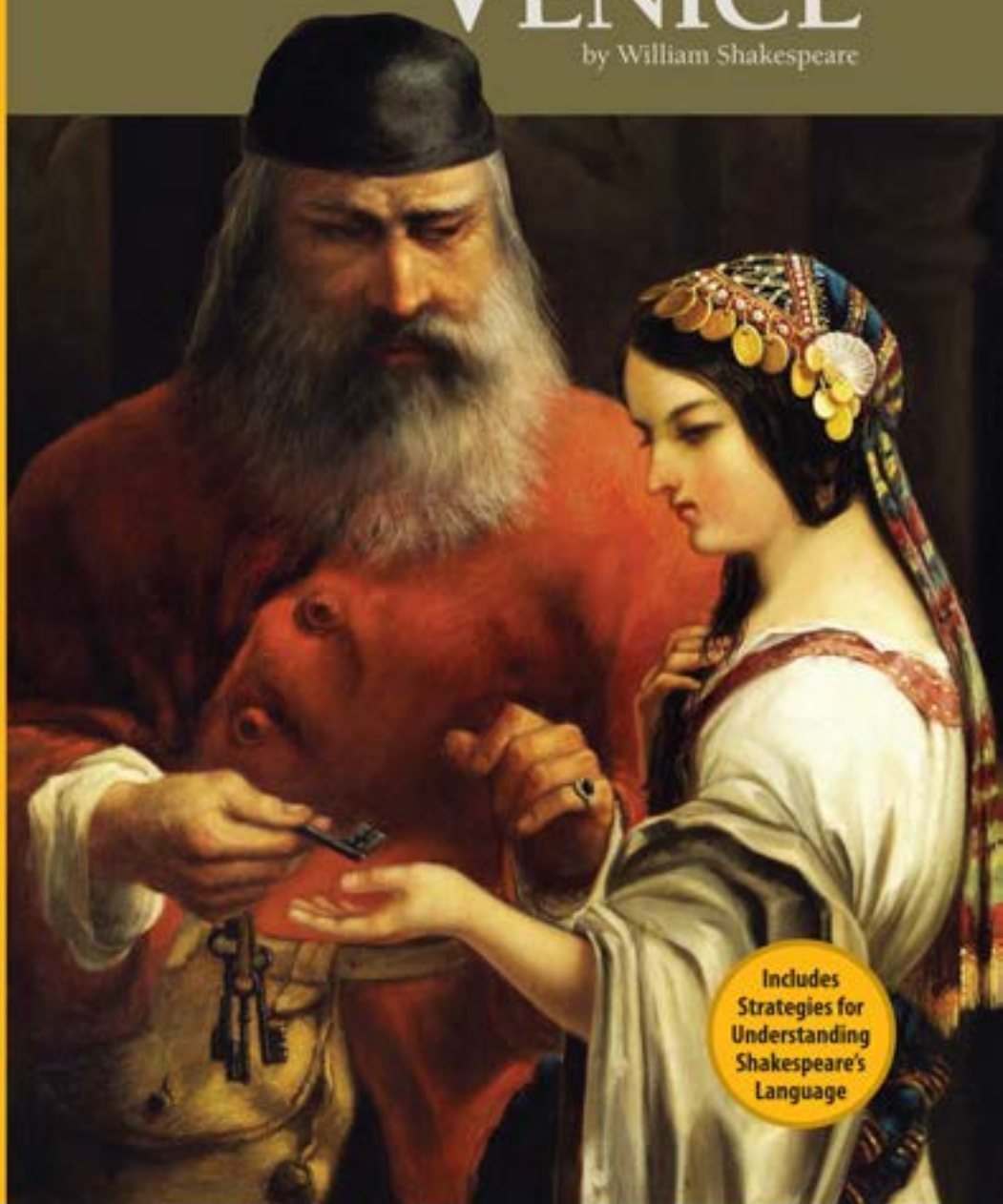


# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

by William Shakespeare



Includes  
Strategies for  
Understanding  
Shakespeare's  
Language

PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



William Shakespeare



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# CONTENTS

STRATEGIES FOR UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE . . . . .	4
READING POINTERS FOR SHARPER INSIGHTS . . . . .	9
DRAMATIS PERSONAE . . . . .	10
ACT I	
SCENE I . . . . .	11
SCENE II . . . . .	16
SCENE III . . . . .	19
ACT II	
SCENE I . . . . .	25
SCENE II . . . . .	26
SCENE III . . . . .	31
SCENE IV . . . . .	32
SCENE V . . . . .	33
SCENE VI . . . . .	35
SCENE VII . . . . .	37
SCENE VIII . . . . .	39
SCENE IX . . . . .	41
ACT III	
SCENE I . . . . .	45
SCENE II . . . . .	48
SCENE III . . . . .	56
SCENE IV . . . . .	57
SCENE V . . . . .	60
ACT IV	
SCENE I . . . . .	63
SCENE II . . . . .	75
ACT V	
SCENE I . . . . .	77
GLOSSARY . . . . .	86
VOCABULARY . . . . .	90

# STRATEGIES

## Strategies for Understanding Shakespeare's Language

1. When reading verse, note the appropriate phrasing and intonation.

DO NOT PAUSE AT THE END OF A LINE unless there is a mark of punctuation. Shakespearean verse has a rhythm of its own, and once a reader gets used to it, the rhythm becomes very natural to speak in and read. Beginning readers often find it helpful to read a short pause at a comma and a long pause for a period, colon, semicolon, dash, or question mark.

Here's an example from *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene i:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd, (*short pause*)  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: (*long pause*) it is twice blest; (*long pause*)  
It blesseth him that gives, (*short pause*) and him that takes; (*long pause*)  
'Tis mightiest in the mighties; (*long pause*) it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown; (*long pause*)

2. Read from punctuation mark to punctuation mark for meaning.

In addition to helping you read aloud, punctuation marks define units of thought. Try to understand each unit as you read, keeping in mind that periods, colons, semicolons, and question marks signal the end of a thought.

Here's an example from *The Taming of the Shrew*: Act I, Scene i:

LUC. Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move,  
And with her breath she did perfume the air;  
Sacred, and sweet, was all I saw in her.

TRA. Nay, then, 'tis time to stir him from his  
trance.

I pray, awake, sir: if you love the maid,  
Bend thoughts and wits to achieve her.

The first unit of thought is from "Tranio" to "air":  
He saw her lips move, and her breath perfumed the air.

The second thought ("Sacred, and sweet...") re-emphasizes the first.

Tranio replies that Lucentio needs to awaken from his trance and try to win "the maid." These two sentences can be considered one unit of thought.

3. In an **inverted sentence**, the verb comes before the subject. Some lines will be easier to understand if you put the subject first and reword the sentence. For example, look at the line below:

“*Never was seen so black a day as this:*” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act IV, Scene v)

You can change its inverted pattern so it is more easily understood:

“*A day as black as this was never seen.*”

4. An **ellipsis** occurs when a word or phrase is left out. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Benvolio asks Romeo’s father and mother if they know the problem that is bothering their son. Romeo’s father answers:

“*I neither know it nor can learn of him*” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene i)

This sentence can easily be understood to mean,

“*I neither know [the cause of] it,  
nor can [I] learn [about it from] him.*”

5. As you read longer speeches, keep track of the subject, verb, and object—who did *what* to *whom*.

In the clauses below, note the subject, verbs, and objects:

Ross: The king hath happily received, Macbeth,  
The news of thy success: and when he reads  
Thy personal venture in the rebel’s fight... (*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene iii)

1<sup>st</sup> clause: *The king hath happily received, Macbeth, / The news of thy success:*

SUBJECT – The king

VERB – has received

OBJECT – the news [of Macbeth’s success]

2<sup>nd</sup> clause: *and when he reads / thy personal venture in the rebel’s fight,*

SUBJECT – he [the king]

VERB – reads

OBJECT – [about] your venture

In addition to following the subject, verb, and object of a clause, you also need to track pronoun references. In the following soliloquy, Romeo, who is madly in love with Juliet, secretly observes her as she steps out on her balcony. To help you keep track of the pronoun references, we’ve made margin notes. (Note that the feminine pronoun sometimes refers to Juliet, but sometimes does not.)

# READING POINTERS

## Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

Take note of the following when reading *The Merchant of Venice*:

1. One of the significant aspects of this play, as in all of Shakespeare's plays, is the poetic beauty of the language in the extended metaphors, similes, puns, etc. Shakespeare's language, especially his use of metaphors often expresses an insightful comment on the human condition, which makes them valuable.
2. Although there were not many Jews in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, anti-semitism, which had always been present in medieval England, rose to a fever pitch when Queen Elizabeth's physician, Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jew, was hanged for plotting with the Spanish to kill her.

The depiction of Shylock, the stereotypical Jewish villain—characterized by an excessive love of money and the desire to injure a Christian through trickery—pandered to this anti-semitism. But note how Shakespeare develops Shylock. Of all the characters in the play, he is, by far, the most fully developed and has the greatest emotional range.

Finally, note that Shylock is an outsider. For the Elizabethans, who believed that the social order was ordained by God, the outsider was a threat to the harmony of society. Shakespeare echoes that opinion, but he does give Shylock some of the most moving lines in the play.

3. Although usury was legal in England at this time, it was frowned upon and looked down on by most of Elizabethan society. There were restrictions against money-lending in the Church, and Shylock would, therefore, have been despised, not only because he was a Jewish outsider, but also because he lent money and charged interest on it. Audiences would have held a societal prejudice against his character prior to seeing the play.
4. Note the development of these concepts in *The Merchant of Venice*:
  - Justice: Should justice be tempered with mercy, or should it be above emotion and implemented exactly as the laws decreed?
  - Friendship: How important is it? What is its role in this play?
  - Love: What characterizes true love?

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ANTONIO, *a merchant of Venice*

SALERIO, }  
SALANIO, } *friends, to Antonio and Bassanio\**

BASSANIO, *his friend, suitor to Portia*

LORENZO, *in love with Jessica*

GRATIANO, *friend to Antonio and Bassanio*

PORTIA, *a rich heiress*

NERISSA, *her waiting-maid*

SHYLOCK, *a rich Jew*

THE PRINCE OF MOROCCO, *suitor to Portia*

LAUNCELOT GOBBO, *a clown, servant to Shylock*

GOBBO, *father to Launcelot*

LEONARDO, *servant to Bassanio*

JESSICA, *daughter to Shylock*

THE PRINCE OF ARRAGON, *suitor to Portia*

TUBAL, *a Jew, his friend*

BALTHASAR, *servant to Portia*

THE DUKE OF VENICE

STEPHANO, *servant to Portia*

*Nobles of Venice, Officers of the Court of Justice, jailer, servants, and other Attendants, messenger.*

*\*Note: Numerous spelling variations exist for Antonio's friends.*



# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

## ACT I

### [SCENE I] [Venice]

*Enter Antonio, Salerio, and Solanio.*

ANTONIO: In sooth,<sup>1</sup> I know not why I am so sad;  
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;  
But how I caught it,<sup>2</sup> found it, or came by it,  
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,  
5 I am to learn;  
And such a want-wit<sup>3</sup> sadness makes of me,  
That I have much ado to know myself.

SALERIO: Your mind is tossing on the ocean;  
There, where your argosies, with portly sail,—  
10 Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,  
Or, as it were, the pageants of the sea,—  
Do overpeer the petty traffickers,  
That curt'sy to them, do them reverence,  
As they fly by them with their woven wings.

15 SOLANIO: Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,  
The better part of my affections would  
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still  
Plucking the grass, to know where sits the wind;  
Peering in maps, for ports, and piers, and roads:  
20 And every object that might make me fear  
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt  
Would make me sad.

SALERIO: My wind, cooling my broth,  
Would blow me to an ague, when I thought  
25 What harm a wind too great might do at sea.  
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run,  
But I should think of shallows and of flats;  
And see my wealthy Andrew<sup>†</sup> dock'd in sand,

<sup>1</sup>truthfully

<sup>2</sup>the sadness

<sup>3</sup>a foolish or  
witless person

<sup>†</sup>Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.



30 Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs,<sup>†</sup>  
 To kiss her burial. Should I go to church,  
 And see the holy edifice of stone,  
 And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,  
 Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side,  
 Would scatter all her spices on the stream,  
 35 Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,  
 And, in a word, but even now worth this,  
 And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought  
 To think on this; and shall I lack the thought  
 That such a thing, bechanc'd, would make me sad?  
 40 But tell not me; I know, Antonio  
 Is sad to think upon his merchandise.

ANTONIO: Believe me, no; I thank my fortune for it,  
 My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,  
 Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate  
 45 Upon the fortune of this present year:  
 Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.

SALANIO: Why, then you are in love.

ANTONIO: Fie, fie!

SALANIO: Not in love neither? Then let us say, you are sad,  
 50 Because you are not merry: and 'twere as easy  
 For you to laugh, and leap, and say you are merry,  
 Because you are not sad. Now, by two-headed Janus,<sup>†</sup>  
 Nature hath fram'd strange fellows in her time:  
 Some that will evermore peep through their eyes,  
 55 And laugh, like parrots, at a bag-piper;  
 And other of such vinegar aspect,  
 That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile,  
 Though Nestor<sup>†</sup> swear the jest be laughable.

*Enter Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano.*

Here comes Bassanio, your most noble kinsman,  
 60 Gratiano, and Lorenzo: Fare you well;  
 We leave you now with better company.

SALERIO: I would have stay'd till I had made you merry,  
 If worthier friends had not prevented me.

ANTONIO: Your worth is very dear in my regard.  
 65 I take it, your own business calls on you,  
 And you embrace the occasion to depart.

SALERIO: Good morrow, my good lords.

BASSANIO: Good signiors both, when shall we laugh? say,

70 when?

You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?

SALERIO: We'll make our leisures to attend on yours.

*Exeunt Salerio, and Solanio.*

LORENZO: My Lord Bassanio, since you have found Antonio,

We two will leave you; but at dinner-time,

75 I pray you have in mind where we must meet.

BASSANIO: I will not fail you.

GRATIANO: You look not well, Signior Antonio;

You have too much respect upon the world:

They lose it that do buy it with much care:

80 Believe me, you are marvellously chang'd.

ANTONIO: I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;

A stage, where every man must play a part,

And mine a sad one.

GRATIANO: Let me play the fool!

85 With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come;

And let my liver rather heat with wine,

Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.

Why should a man whose blood is warm within

Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?

90 Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice

By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,—

I love thee, and it is my love that speaks;—

There are a sort of men, whose visages

Do cream and mantle like a standing pond;

95 And do a wilful stillness entertain,

With purpose to be dress'd in an opinion

Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;

As who should say, I am Sir Oracle,

And, when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!

100 O, my Antonio, I do know of these,

That therefore only are reputed wise,

For saying nothing; who, I am very sure,

If they should speak, would almost damn those ears

Which, hearing them, would call their brothers, fools.

105 I'll tell thee more of this another time:

But fish not with this melancholy bait,

For this fool-gudgeon, this opinion.

Come, good Lorenzo:— Fare ye well, awhile:

I'll end my exhortation after dinner.

110 LORENZO:

Well, we will leave you



## Glossary

### Act I, Scene I

**Andrew** – the name of Antonio's ship

"...her high-top...ribs..." – Most likely, the ship is lying in the sand on its side with the tallest sail lower than the side.

**Janus** – the Roman god of doors and entrances who had two faces each looking in opposite directions from the other, symbolizing beginnings and endings

**Nestor** – an advisor to the Greeks noted for his solemnity and gravity

"...neat's tongue...vendible." – "...a dried calf's tongue and a woman who can't find a husband"

"showing...grant continuance" – "spending more money than I can afford to, thereby appearing wealthier than I am"

**Jasons** – In Greek mythology, Jason searched for the valuable Golden Fleece.

### Act I, Scene II

"That he hath a neighbourly...for another." – The Scottish lord received a box on the ears from the English suitor, and the French suitor promised to repay that blow to the Englishman.

**Sibylla** – Sibyllas were prophetesses; the Greek writer Heraclitus wrote of the Sibyl who could see a thousand years into the future with God's assistance.

**Diana** – In Roman mythology, Diana was the virgin goddess of childbirth, as well as of hunting.

"I had rather...wive me." – Portia would prefer to have the fifth man hear her confession and grant absolution, rather than marry him.

### Act I, Scene III

**Rialto** – the business center of Venice

**Nazarite** – an individual of Jewish faith who vows to live a life of purity in an effort to show his or her devotion to God; possibly, it is also a reference to Jesus.

### Act II, Scene I

**Phoebus' fire** – In Greek mythology, Phoebus, also known as

## Vocabulary

### Act I, Scene I

**ague** – an illness that causes fever and shaking; a fit  
**argosies** – large merchant ships  
**chaff** – wasted remains; straw  
**ere** – before  
**gag'd** – [*gaged*] pledged; bound to  
**gear** – an affair, event  
**gudgeon** – an easily caught fish  
**portly** – filled; fat  
**presages** – foretells  
**prodigal** – extremely wasteful  
**signiors** – rich, powerful men; a term of respect

### Act I, Scene II

**appropriation** – an assumption  
**prove** – ascertain; find it so  
**Rhenish** – a type of German wine  
**superfluity** – excessiveness; having too much  
**surfeit** – overindulgence  
**vilely** – detestably, disgustingly, horridly

### Act I, Scene III

**eanlings** – lambs, kids  
**fulsome** – lustful  
**imputation** – negative comments, incriminations  
**publican** – a tax collector  
**squander'd** – [*squandered*] scattered

### Act II, Scene I

**livery** – a uniform, clothing  
**valiant** – brave

### Act II, Scene II

**allay** – to relieve  
**anon** – immediately  
**cater-cousins** – not great friends  
**cudgel** – a club  
**demurely** – shyly  
**ergo** – therefore  
**frutify** – certify