

# Literature assignment: the merchant of venice



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

I shall first begin my essay by concentrating upon the conflicts between friendship and love in *The Merchant of Venice*. Looking at I. i. , conflict has already begun between the 2 realms of friendship and love as signified by Antonio's sadness. He is upset that Bassanio has transferred his affections for him to a woman, Portia. Bassanio is a gallant. He does not work, but gains money from his family inheritance. However he states that he has spent too much of it away, and explains his "plots and purposes" (I. i. 133) to get his money back. He explains that he needs Antonio's help to achieve them.

Unwittingly however, he drags Antonio down into a conflict between Antonio and Shylock later on in the story. Another conflict has also been pointed out within this scene, which is the conflict between love and money. Bassanio explains to Antonio that the route to riches for him has already been found. Portia, a lady in Belmont has been "richly left", having inherited a large sum of money from her dead father. She is thus a magnet for poor noblemen, such as Bassanio, for Renaissance law states that the husband is the ruler of the wife. Therefore when a man marries a wealthy woman, her money passes into his control.

Because many men will be after Portia, Bassanio believes that he will need the help of Antonio's money to impress her. Strangely, Bassanio is supposed to be the play's romantic hero. Shakespeare, however, makes it clear that Bassanio's chief aim in marrying Portia is to obtain her wealth because his "chief care" is to pay off his "great debts". (I. i. 127-128) Although there is some mention of romance here (Sometimes from her eyes/I did receive fair speechless messages), notice, when Bassanio describes Portia as beautiful, how quickly he turns to compare Portia to the Golden Fleece.

The Golden Fleece was a precious treasure in Greek mythology, and Like Jason sailing to Colchis in search of it, Bassanio sails to Belmont in search of Portia. One cannot help noticing that Bassanio's fight for Portia is nothing more than pure romance. I. iii brings to us the first sign of conflict between Antonio and Shylock, foreshadowing the horrendous event that is to happen later. Bassanio attempts to secure the money he needs from Shylock, a usurer, or a moneylender that charges high rates of interest. Notice the evident religious conflict here.

Shylock is enjoying the power he now holds over Antonio and Bassanio, for he knows that they are relying on him now, and no matter how rude he is, they still need him. When Bassanio offers to let Shylock dine with them, he refuses, and in the process says that Christian manners are obscene and repugnant. Shylock bears an ancient grudge against Antonio, not only because of religious differences, but also because of money, for the fact that Antonio disapproves of usury and has lent money to people without charging interest, thus reducing the amount of business that Shylock can obtain.

Antonio also faces conflict within himself. He is much against the policy of usury, but yet still has to listen to the insulting of his religion as Shylock "quotes scripture" for his own use, as Shylock uses Genesis to defend himself. Antonio is unable to rebut him, for he needs money. Money also shows itself in another form as the Golden and silver casket in Morocco and Arragon's choice of the caskets. A form of conflict is shown between the will of Portia's dead father and that of the suitors. Notice how Morocco reacts when he finds that there is a skull.

His once proud speeches become “ O Hell” in an instant. It is some form of conflict that money inevitably brings about, for with the upbringing and wealth that these suitors have been exposed to all their lives, money signifies everything, and in this conflict which involves money, the suitors lose horribly, for they are forbidden ever to marry again. Notice, again, how money brings about the conflict between father and daughter in Act III. Shylock has found out that Jessica has eloped with Lorenzo and has escaped with a huge fortune in her hands.

Money here actually brings about a conflict that destroys the love between Jessica and Shylock. Shylock actually wishes that his “ daughter were dead at my feet/and the ducats in her ear”. It is not as if Shylock is an unfeeling man, as is frequently portrayed amongst the Elizabethan audience.

Shakespeare shows that he still has love and kindness within him, for his sorrow is emphasised when he realizes that Jessica has sold his love for his wife away for a mere monkey. Again, this emphasises the conflict between love and money.

As Shylock said, he would not have given it away for a wilderness of monkeys, but yet the love and sentimental value of the ring has been sold away, for 1 monkey which again puts some monetary value into love. This is also why Shylock’s love for Jessica is destroyed here, for money and greed have overpowered him, and also because Jessica has commodified his love for another. With this, I conclude that money is and will always be the foremost factor that initiates conflict and violence, not only in the theatrical world of Shakespeare, but in our own real worlds as well.